

**OVERCOMING DEPENDENCE ON THE CASTE HINDUS:
A STUDY OF SELECTED DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**

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By

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that P. Mohana Rao worked under my supervision for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and fulfilled the conditions laid down in this regard. His dissertation entitled “**Overcoming Dependence on the Caste Hindus: A Study of Selected Dalit Autobiographies**” represents his own independent work at the University of Hyderabad. This work has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

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DECLARATION

I, hereby, declare that the work presented in this dissertation entitled **“Overcoming Dependence on the Caste Hindus: A Study of Selected Dalit Autobiographies”** has been carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. D. Murali Manohar, Department of English, School of Humanities, University of Hyderabad, this work has not been submitted for a degree or diploma to any other university.

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Introduction

The Backdrop of the Social Change

1.0. Autobiographies as assessment of social tyranny

An autobiography may be based entirely on the writer's memory because the biographer, generally, depends on a wide variety of documents and view points. The word autobiography was first used in its present sense by Robert Southey in 1809 though its original inventor William Taylor condemned the word with a sense of disapproval as 'pedantic' in 1797 in the English periodical the *Monthly Review*. However, the form of autobiography goes back to the distant past. Autobiographical works are by nature subjective. Some sociologists and psychologists have noted that autobiography offers the author the ability to recreate history.

It has been seen for centuries that, through autobiographical accounts, victims of social oppression have been able to present striking analysis of the oppression they have undergone. Among the more renowned of such works are the writings of Primo Levi, one of many personal accounts of the Shoah. Similarly, there are many works detailing atrocities and malevolence of communist regimes like Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope against Hope* and so on. From the 17th century onwards, "scandalous memoirs" by supposed libertines, serving a public taste for titillation, have been frequently published. They were typically pseudonymous and largely works of fiction written by ghost writers.

Though such a work may be called as "fictional autobiography", writing about an imaginary character, the characters were writing their own biography. Some of those are Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is yet another example of fictional autobiography, as noted on the front page of the original version. The term may also apply to works of fiction claiming to be autobiographies of real characters, e.g. Robert Nye's *Memoirs of Lord Byron*.

1.1. Postmodernism, Autobiography, and Genre

In the present scenario, certain questions arise such as to what extent the theories, methods, and insights of postmodernism allow us to know about autobiography and to what extent the techniques, practices, and cultures of autobiography reveal about postmodernism. Autobiography, as a self-representational practice that is complexly situated within cultures, and autobiography studies, as an increasingly transdisciplinary critical practice, have incorporated postmodernist techniques and critiques with a variety of results. It seems appropriate, therefore, to consider the mutual historicization of autobiography and postmodernism, especially in the context of their shared interest in theorizing the subject. Postmodernism's performance of questioning not only intersects with but powerfully structures contemporary interest in autobiography.

A glance at the history of autobiography studies reveals that, at the end of the 1970s, just as the challenges to traditional modes of scholarly practice

posed by more explicitly political forms of criticism and theory were affecting the academy, the study of autobiography was being remade. Two collections of essays published in 1980 inaugurated a new wave of interest: *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, edited by Estelle C. Jelinek, and *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, edited by James Olney. These were characterized by the vital conjunction of autobiography and emerging forms of criticism. Jelinek's collection situated feminist criticism in relation to autobiography, and Olney's collection examined autobiography through a range of emerging post-structuralisms. Together, they demonstrated the impact of contemporary theory on the field. Moreover, in both volumes, there was evidence of an emerging critical focus on the mechanisms of value by which some autobiographers and autobiographical practices had been marginalized.

In traditional studies of autobiography, the terms that are likely to shift within postmodernism are taken as the stable elements in the story of one's life. Texts that affirm this stability, or that can be constructed as affirming it, form the "tradition" of autobiography. Clearly, the time has come to consider the implications of genre for autobiography, Postmodernism's skepticism about generic typology. The insights of some postmodernists into the functioning of ideology and representation offer an occasion to rethink the relation between autobiography and its tradition, as well as the status of autobiography as a genre.

1.2. Dalit Autobiography: A Medium for the Dalits' Revolution

Autobiographies are part of a literary genre that brings personal accounts of life in public domain. They incite others too to relate with their human emotions and circumstances with lived-up reality of the autobiography writer. Autobiographies serve different purpose in different times and if autobiographies of Dalit writers are called as narrative of pain, it carries certain historical truth. We can find such stories of bitter truth in different languages.

In Marathi, the Dalit writers have developed it as narrative of struggle against caste monopoly. In Hindi also, several autobiographies were written to express precarious living conditions of Dalits. Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Mohandas Namisray's *Apne-Apne Pinjarey* and Surajpal Chouhan's *Tiriskrat* are important autobiographies. Saran Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmasi* and Daya Pawar's *Baluta* were written in Marathi but have been translated into almost all languages. One important feature of such writings is that they are strongly social assessments of *varna vyavastha* which declared Dalits as most inferior and untouchable part of society. In this struggle, autobiographies serve as moral source for Dalit movement. They split open the pain and sufferings experienced by Dalits under the rigidity of tradition. All such autobiography writers describe their childhood suffering and the cruel experiences of untouchability mostly in rural background.

In an autobiography, it is a normal trend to glorify the 'self' and boast about the extra-ordinary quality of oneself, but it changes at the hands of a Dalit writer. When he/she writes, it's about denial of opportunities, even to live as an

ordinary human being. The self becomes the representative of all other Dalits who were crushed down and kept down because of their Dalit identity. Their entire life narrative gains a representative quality and imparts the true feeling of the sting they have suffered. The protagonist of the autobiography is, of course, the writer himself, but his personal experiences, instead of being unique and individualistic, cover the general condition of the whole Dalit community. They are called by their caste names like Bhangi, Chamar, Chuhara, Katik, etc. and in essence, these names stand for their state of untouchability. In colloquial terms, the world for them turns into an insult.

The *Dalit* literature is one of its most significant recent trends since the sixties (Poitevin :1996). The trend is still alive, possibly on the increase, and a matter of literary debates and dissemination in a score of specialized journals, academic studies, literary conferences and seminars, regular press reports and articles. The term *Dalit* literally signifies the depressed and suppressed groups of various social formations (Guru 1998: 59). But it is used in ways which vary with the specificity of contexts, the speakers' ideological positions and the political strategies of those who address audiences with it. In the matter of facts, the term is essentially a political idiom and often puts one in a temper.

It is mainly since the sixties of this century that the word *Dalit* became an explosive catchword for social, cultural, and political revolutionary movements launched by untouchable castes, essentially the *mahars*, in expressions such as "*Dalit* literature" (Anand 1992; Dangle 1992; Lanjewar 1995; Gros 1996; Bhoite

1977) and "*Dalit* movement" (Jogdand 1991; Gopinath 1994; Kshirsagar 1994; Omwedt 1994, 1995; Pendse 1994). The use of the word actually tends to be appropriate for the castes traditionally discriminated as untouchables. This also refers to their specific conditions of cultural indignity and social subalternity. This limitation is often denounced as an illegitimate political discursive event. But the word is commonly used with this restrictive meaning by the supporters, as well as the critics and opponents of the *Dalit* liberation movements in India.

This explains that the term *Dalit* often leads to controversies among social reformists, literary analysts, social scientists, and political workers on account of its ambiguities and strong political overtones (Guru 1998). As a result, we enlist as autobiographical writers not only a number of untouchable caste members, as it might be expected, but also members of other socially weak categories who may be culturally stigmatized and socially boycotted for reason of untouchability. Dalithood is a kind of life condition that characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of *Dalit* people by the social, economic, cultural, and political domination of the upper castes' Brahmanical ideology (Ambedkar 1990: 204).

1.3. Indian untouchables and African blacks: A similar story

Dalit literature in India finds a similar position like the African-American black literature. Both the literatures depict miseries of the downtrodden people through caste discrimination and racial discrimination in the respective countries. Such people have become victims of a peculiar class or caste structure.

Race is nature made while caste is man made (Dangle 1992:306). However, the similarity between the both is that the blacks could not change their colour of skins nor could the untouchables their caste. Both black and Dalit writers are in search of their respective identities in society. Both writers write for the awareness of social commitment and the aim is to find new cultural values.

For radical thinkers like Baburao Bagul, major ideologue of Dali panther, the category is structured and extended as to carry the history of the revolutionary struggles of all oppressed people, and has the “ontological ability to define itself with all the lower castes, tribal people, toiling classes and women.” “The term represents those who have been broken and ground down by those above them in a deliberate manner...In the term and concept Dalit itself there is an inherent denial of dignity, a sense of pollution and an acceptance of the karma theory that justifies the caste hierarchy.” (Zelliot 1992:267)

1.4. Dalit Autobiography

In the 1970's, initially with the rise of education, the Dali panther and other Dalit writers began to write short stories and personal life stories. Cheap news paper and cheap printing began to develop these economic and social factors that made task of writing autobiography easier and more beneficial. Dalit autobiographies describe initially Dalits who had been dependent on the caste Hindus and later on overcame the dependency. Dalit literary expression shows a dramatic increase throughout the Hindi belt. The publication of Dalitbooks has increased, new Dalit journals' have growing numbers of readers, and the

newspapers have begun to include articles by Dalit writers. The Dalit autobiographies are contextualized within certain larger socio-historical process.

The Dalit autobiographies have arisen as the important genre of Dalit assertion. Finally, it has given Dalit writers a way of uniting with a larger Dalit community to create a powerful group to fight against the caste discrimination. Dalit autobiographies are meant to be understood as a representative life story. Dalithood is a kind of life condition that characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of Dalit people by the social, economical, cultural and political domination of the upper caste Brahmanical ideology.(Poitevin: 1978)

India is one of the largest democracies in the world, but ironically being a caste-structured society, it is found that a large section of people live in a life of luxuries and insufferable sadness. The caste or *varna* system in India has treated Dalits in different way. After centuries of suppression, the Dalits are in the struggle for emancipation under the liberation movement established by B.R. Ambedkar who believed that only education could bring about a change in the oppressed lives of the Dalits. Education gave Dalits a lot of self-confidence and propelled them to fight against their oppressors. In the words of M.F. Jilthe (1984:16), “The voiceless found a voice here; the wordless found word here”. Being largely influenced by the Afro-American struggle for liberation and equality in the white dominated Americans, the Dalits in Maharashtra united themselves to fight against the tyranny of caste system.They formed the ‘Dalits

Panthers Party' (inspired by the Black Panthers Party in 1972) and spread awareness amongst the Dalits of their dehumanized existence, and the necessity to be liberated from the bondage of untouchability. Thus the autobiographies, poems, short story writings by Dalits revealed their pathetic and debase existence and effectively sowed the seeds of protest and revolt in the mind of the Dalits.

1.5. Dalit Literature: An Anti-caste Struggle

The term 'Dalit' came from Marathi which means 'oppressed and rooted in the soil'. Dalit literature in India is a literature of protest, pain and agony. As a genre, Dalit literature was established in the 1960's and 1970's when Dalit writings were published in Marathi and Gujarati. Nearly two decades later, the term gained popularity in Tamilnadu. Tamil Dalit writing also has its major influence from the self-respect movement which was an anti-brahmanist movement founded in 1925 by E.V.Ramaswamy Naikar in Tamilnadu. Dalit Literature came as a part and parcel of anti-caste struggles, agitation for reserved places in the interest of social justice and political protest for economical equality(Gautaman: 96).

The Dalit writings sought to bring out the pain and suffocation experienced by the untouchables in the hands of the upper castes forces. Rajgoutham (1995) points out the different functions of Tamil Dalit writing. He is certain that Dalit writings have brought about a change in the attitude of Dalits. He says, it is the function of Dalit writing to awaken, in every reader, a

consciousness of the oppressed Dalit. Dalit writings have placed the Dalits on the tracks of self-realization and equality. Such works have above all helped, in the words of Raj goutham, 'to awaken the Dalits who is asleep within the conscience of all people of all castes' (p97). Secondly, those works have also instilled amongst the Dalits a confidence and about their existence. It has double objectives of liberation and proved reflection of Dalit culture.

After centuries of silence, when the Dalit writers narrate their stories themselves, they express their own experiences. They are the representatives of the entire community. "A public rather a private gesture 'me-ism' gives away to our-ism and superficial concern about 'individual subject' usually give away to the collective subjection of the group" (Cudjoe;280). After rising up the Dalit Panther Party, a number of autobiographies were written in Marathi followed by Kannada and also Tamil Dalit writing. Some of those major works have been discussed here. *Karruku* is the first Dalit autobiography written by Bama. It is not only the Dalit autobiography but achieved a specific identity, having written by a Dalit Christian. Dalit movements dominated mostly by men and had a tendency to sideline issues concerning Dalit woman. The Dalit women were compelled to voice their mercy doubled up due to caste and gender discrimination, this result was rise of Dalit woman voice. Thus 'Karukku' means palmyra leaf and Bama finds many similarities between her strife-filled life and the saw-edged *Karukku*. As a Dalit woman, she is twice over oppressed by her caste and gender. In Bama's case her position is further endangered by her existence as a Dalit Christian. *Karukku* is a reflection of different themes like religion, recreation, and

education etc, through these perspectives. Bama gives us a clear picture of the caste oppression meted out to the Dalit Christians not only by the upper caste society (so called upper caste) but more so within catholic church itself. The book is about Bama's inner quest for discovery and resultant courage which forces her to move away from the life of a nun to live the life of a Dalit woman. Karukku is thus a pathetic and moving statement of the suffocation and suppression of the trampled and marginalized existence of the Dalits. This book is also a revelation of the inner strength and vigour of Dalit woman as represented by Bama.

The Prisons We Broke (2008) is Baby Kamble's first Dalit autobiography. It deals with two major problems of society; firstly, the oppression, and exploitation of the Dalits by the upper caste, secondly, the discrimination towards woman in a patriarchal society (herrenschmidt: 1996) Dalit community has always been more important than her own individual suffering. She has completely observed her people, and therefore Jina Amucha was the autobiography of her own community. *The Prisons We Broke* is a graphic revelation of the inner world of the Mahar community in Maharashtra. This autobiography is unique because in analyzing Brahminical domination, it also speaks out for the woman of her community, presenting an unflinching portrait of its woman, subjugated by both caste and patriarchy.

Narendra Jadav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2002) discusses various stages of his parents' lives. His family struggled against bondage and fought for justice at the beginning of *Outcaste*. Mahar is Damu's caste, stigma, and destiny. It tells the world that this 20 year old boy is the lowest of the low in the Hindu

chaturvarna system, the system of four castes. He is so low that his touch pollutes. He is an Untouchable. Soon after Damu's present ordeal, he will launch a *satyagraha* demanding entry for Dalits into the Kala Ram temple in Nasik. (Educate, unite, and agitate; *Indian Express*; 2003).

Outcaste is an expanded, rewritten version in English of Dr. Naredra Jadav's *Amcha Baap Amhi* (our father and us) published in Marathi 10 years before. There, Damodar Ranjaji Jadav's story was reproduced almost exactly as he had scribbled it in his diaries. The language was rough, the rural and the narration unselfconscious, the language of out caste is refined, its structure conscious schematic and its narration fluent. The main theme throughout the narrative runs the slogan coined by Ambedkar, which unites all Dalits, "educate, unite, and agitate". Damu sees this slogan as his personal mission and, though he himself is an illiterate, he educates his children to the best of his abilities. "The saga of Jadav family bears testimony to that certainty (Maseeh Rahaman:1997).

Sharankumar Limbale's autobiography *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* (2009) describes various stages of the writers struggle with the caste system. Sharan Kumar Limbale, the author of *Akkarmashi*, bastard (1984) first served as a teacher and then took a job in post office as telephone operator. He introduces himself as a worker of the Dalit panther and a bastard *Akkarmashi*, the Marathi word refer to the child born from extra-marital relationship and is used only as an abuse, as a child, the author used to stay in the MaharWada (the residential area of the Mahar at some distance of the village).

Limbale describes the life of a man who suffered not only through caste system but also through pain of not even being allowed in the caste system. *The Outcaste* clearly shows how the lives of Indian's lowest citizens are completely controlled by the society around them. The dominating theme is the Dalits' constant battle with hunger. As a child, Limbale firmly believed that hunger controlled man and if there had been no hunger, there would have been no war. Another impossible hurdle that the author suffered his entire life was no identity no home, no place of belonging.

Siddalingaih's *Ooru Keri* (2003) was originally written in Kannada. The term *Ooru Keri* means 'neighborhood'. It refers to residential colony and ways. In this respect, it is similar to *Vasti*, an autobiography by the Marathi writer, Vasant Moon. Both these works recount the trauma and suffering not only of the individual but also of the community. Various stages of the writers' life, poverty, and humiliation are the prominent Dalit issues. The author narrated the story of his journey self-sufficiency and self-esteem with the help of education.

Aravind Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (2007) tells us the story of painful experiences of his life at childhood and youth. The author reflects on specific instances from his childhood and student days that illustrate the normative cruelty practiced by the caste Hindu society on Dalits. His autobiography is structured to provoke us into looking at caste experiences in all facts of society. In that sense, it shows that in the face of the oppressive structures, there are two aspect of these accounts of Dalits suppression, one is surely rooted in the Vedic narration of the Sudra's, and other is a full out of

capitalism which is based on “the class antagonism relation, belonging to a definite historical much disdain and suspicion making him double alien, his academic education social status tore him apart from his roots and threw into a class of education “bastards”ref (authors and writers by Roland Barthes), in the “Marxism and the plate after the meal” (*Government Brahmana:2007: 18*).

Vasant Moon’s *Growing Up Untouchable in India*(2002) is the translator’s first Dalit autobiography to be published in English. Moon’s story is about his *vasti* or a community of people considered to be at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. Moon explains us with the powerful personal and collective memory of caste oppression and struggle in India from the 1930’s to the 1950’s.

They even published political and social magazines news papers and established traditions of writings among the Dalits *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki. This was first published in Hindi in 1997 and translated into English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee in 2003. It is a memoir of growing of Untouchable starting in the 1950’s outside a typical village in Uttar Pradesh. *Joothan* is also a remarkable journey from childhood to his later life. He describes childhood days at home in the Dalit *basti* in rural Uttar Pradesh. He grows in the Central Indian city of Gwalior until he left home for college they were Mehtar and Chamars and Bhangis were lowest of the society so called untouchables.

Review of Literature

A comprehensive reading on the Dalit autobiographies gives an account of how all Dalits have been depending upon the caste Hindus because of caste system. Poverty, illiteracy, landlessness have always forced the Dalits to depend on the caste Hindus. With the influence of Ambedkar, “Dalit got educated and narrate the extraordinary efforts made to attend the school against all odds as the most significant step of social protest and personal assertion.” Later on, I have discussed how they have overcome the dependency from the upper caste Hindus.

Many researchers have worked on literature in connection with the lives of the Dalits. However, this area has not been touched by any scholar before. I have been inspired by the autobiographical writings of the Dalit writers in India as well as black scholars and thinkers in the U.S.A. My dissertation has been divided into five chapters except the introduction and conclusion chapters. Those have been given briefly below:

CHAPTER: II

Chapter II examines how the Dalits get economic independence socially and culturally. Initially, the Dalits had no land and no education. They have suffered from poverty, illiteracy and slavery for ages and been exploited. The Dalits have been inspired by the revolutionary Ambedkar’s thoughts. They became educated and got financial independence and left their traditional

professions, and mobilize one profession to another. However, this chapter focuses on the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits.

CHAPTER: III

Chapter III examines how the Dalits have become conscious of their oppression, and caste discrimination, injustice, atrocities, etc. Ambedkar social reform movements carried a significant place for the Dalit community in general. With educational avenues created by the architect of the Indian constitution, the Dalits have become socially conscious about the circumstances and social problems of untouchability and caste discriminations. The period from 1920 to 1956 was influenced by the writings and political activities of Ambedkar, who argued the case of untouchables from the boundaries of the villages to the round table conferences, and fought for equal rights for the entire Dalit society.

When the Dalit youth got education and changed their attitudes, they were influenced by a new stream called Dalit literary stream. This new Dalit literary stream gave impetus to the Marathi Dalit writers. Thus the Marathi writers began expressing themselves by writing poems, short stores, novel, plays, and autobiographies. Thus the writings produced by the Dalit writers were socially, politically and culturally conscious.

Ambedkar launched the Social Liberation movements for equal rights and opportunities of the deprived and downtrodden section of society. with the influence of Ambedkar, most of the Dalits were converted into Buddhism, with the independent movements to awareness of their rights as Dalits helped them

utilized their privileges of education and they overcome the caste discrimination. They could gain some authority and employment through education.

CHAPTER: IV

This chapter examines how the Dalits have changed their caste structure with the help of education. The Dalits wanted to change the oppressed with their writings and producing dramas and opening schools. The Dalits participated in cultural and literary activities, and established many organizations such as the independent labour party and communist party. These organizations struggled against the caste system and reformed their life style.

CHAPTER: V

This chapter throws light on Dalit empowerment. The major places in Dalit autobiographies are political agenda and political developments. The Dalits fight against caste discrimination, untouchability, poverty, slavery, and injustice. Dalits have been encouraged by Ambedkar's slogan "Educate, Organize, and Agitate" which has reached most of the Dalit youth. So they take up education and politics seriously. Educated Dalits write their oppression anguish and protest through the writings of Dalit autobiographies.

Educated Dalits participated in political movements with the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. They established separate community organizations called Samatha Sainik Dal and Scheduled-Caste Federation. The concept of untouchables was the darkest spot in the Hindu society. The Dalit society was to

develop social equality and political empowerment. Ambedkar led an independent labour party to fight for their own problems.

Conclusion

The conclusion includes the fact that the Dalits have a strong means to fight against the social inequalities and injustice. The fact is that lack of education made the Dalits inefficient to fight against oppression because education transforms the character and personality of a person and enlightens a person to understand the problems better. An educated person uses the advantage of his knowledge, skills and values accumulated through education. I have taken both the male Dalit writers as well as the female writers to see how they represent the perseverance and dedication of Dalits to receive education. I have also given my suggestions on my research findings and discussed the limitations which have not been covered in my research.

The autobiographies of the writers which I have chosen for my research are a source of inspiration for me. They not only give autobiographical accounts of victims of social oppression, but also they make me understand my own stand in the society and my own responsibilities towards my community. The experiences of these autobiographers through their writings provide me sources to examine my research topic as to how the Dalits have overcome the dependency on the caste Hindus. When I go through these writings, I perceive these from the perspectives which can help me to construct the structure of my argument. Bama's *Karukku* is the first autobiography of its kind to appear in Tamil. The argument of the book is to do with the arc of the narrator's spiritual development

both through the nurturing of her belief as a Catholic and her gradual realization of herself as a Dalit. She has chosen the demotic and colloquial language as her medium of narration and used an informal speech style which addresses the reader intimately, shares with the reader the author's predicament as Dalit and Christian directly.

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* was originally written in Marathi which is the first Dalit autobiography by a Dalit woman in any Indian language. She brings out the internal trauma in the psyche of her people situated on the threshold of a fundamental transformation. The book deals with the two major problems of the society; firstly, the oppression and exploitation of the Dalit by the upper class; secondly, the discrimination towards women in a patriarchal society. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* is an expanded, rewritten version in English of *Amcha Baap Aan Amhi* (Our Father and Us) published in Marathi. The language of *Outcaste* is refined, its structure consciously schematic and its narration fluent. It is a multilayered personalized saga of the social metamorphosis of Dalits in India. It examines Dalit issues in the context of the Dalits' awakening spearheaded by the champion of human rights, Ambedkar.

Sharan Kumara Limbale's *Akkarmashi* is an English translation of the work originally written in one of the Marathi dialects spoken by Dalits. It is a disturbing life narrative and a frighteningly candid story of Limbale's childhood and growth as an undesired person, an expression of his mother's agony and an autobiography of a community. Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri* is a translated version of an autobiography which was written in standard Kannada language. It is remarkable in

that it is less a record of pain and suffering than of joy and success. The reader may perceive the oppression that Siddalingayya and his community go through but the author makes the reader see the power of dalits too. Dalit solidarity and struggle become frequent motifs here. *Government Brahmana* is the English translation of the Kannada autobiography of Aravind Malagatti. It is in the form of a series of episodes from the author's childhood and youth. The author reflects on specific instances from his childhood and student days that illustrate the normative cruelty practice by caste Hindu society on Dalits.

Vasant Moon's *Growing Up Untouchable in India* is the first Dalit autobiography to be published in English. Moon tries to historicize Dalit realities and convert it into political ethno methodological record. This book traces the roots of the caste system rather than the depiction of marginalized urban life. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* was first published in Hindi and then translated into English. It is among the first texts in Hindi that identifies itself as a part of Dalit literature which is one of the most important literary movements to emerge in post-independence India. It is an autobiographical account of Valmiki's journey from his birth and upbringing as an untouchable in the newly independent India of the fifties to his present as a Dalit. It is one among a body of Dalit writing that is unified by an ideology, an agenda, and a literary easthetic.

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Chapter – II

Mobility of Professions and Economic Independence

Earlier Dalits had no land and no education. So they had to depend on people from other castes, especially the dominant castes. Poverty, illiteracy, and slavery overruled them. They suffered for ages and were exploited. Dalits were inspired by the thoughts of the revolutionary Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Jothirao Phule. They became educated and got financial independence and left their traditional professions.

Marathi Dalit writing considers Mahatma Jotiba Phule as a pioneering champion of the downtrodden. Mahatma Phule's contribution towards the Dalits is outstanding. Phule expressed his views on Dalit education frequently in his writings. He emphasized on the need of education of Dalits and he believed that education for Dalits was the only weapon. He realized that if a Dalit was educated, he could educate all the members of his family. Phule criticized about atrocities against the Dalits.

He took a strong exception to cultural oppression by upper castes. He believed that social work would generate a solution to the multiple problems of Dalits. Phule thought relevantly for Dalit education. He worked in every possible way for the betterment of Dalits, throughout his entire life. He had immense faith in education, and through his mission called "Satya Sodakh Samaj", he campaigned for the cause of the downtrodden.

Phule's wife Savithri Bai also struggled tirelessly for the education of Dalits. It was during the twentieth century that Ambedkar continued Jotiba Phule's struggle for social emancipation. In fact, Ambedkar considered Phule as one of his gurus. In order to lodge a strong protest, Ambedkar burnt publicly Manusmriti which professed the caste system. Ambedkar severely criticised the Manu Dharma Sastra as Manu imposed a number of restrictions on the Dalits. Ambedkar campaigned for the cause of all the Dalits in the society. Through his speeches and writings, Ambedkar tried to awaken the consciousness of Dalits. He presented Round Table Conference in the Parliament of India to ensure the equal opportunities for Dalits in the Society. He wanted to literate the lower caste people to make them free from Brahminical dominance.

Later, in the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar incorporated the principles of education, freedom, and brotherhood and thus tried to liberate Dalits. Ambedkar prioritized the Dalits' cause in constitution. In this way, Mahatma Phule, Savithri Bai Phule, and Ambedkar inspired Marathi Dalit Writings. They devoted themselves to the liberation of the Dalits from the slavery. They honoured Dalits. They even made some legal amendments to give Dalits equal status.

Dalit autobiographical writing is a means of self-assertion. Dalits have been inspired by Ambedkar's ideology. The Dalit movements do not adequately acknowledge the contribution of Dalits to the movements. The autobiographies, therefore, continue to be meaningful for several generations in a caste-driven society, for different readers in different social formations. No matter how specific they are referentially, they are major intercultural texts. Testimonies can

be interpreted as a powerful moral medium to protest against the adversaries both from writing and outside. Dalit autobiography testimonies could be seen as a political initiative to engage with social patriarchy.

Dalit autobiographical personnel narratives are a kind of protest against the exploitation by the state. Dalit autobiographies are also the statements of protest against their exclusion from the public sphere, literary gatherings, academic gatherings, publishing sphere and other spheres of recognition like political parties. Sharmila Rege argues that Dalit writers want their autobiographies to assert themselves and their various concerns through the act of writing their autobiographies. They have a sort of protest by writing their stories themselves.

Let us turn now to Bama's autobiography which is an account of her spiritual journey from being a childhood devotee to becoming a nun. Her *Karukku* has opened the mirrors of Dalit literature to other nearby states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Karnataka. The title too is very carefully thought out and is aptly chosen for content. Her explanation of the title creates an interest in the readers and they are aptly substantiated by the content of the text. Karuku is a Tamil word which means 'palmyra leave' which has a very sharp edge like a sword. She explains the intended pen on the title "Karu" which means a seed that connotes 'freshness' and 'newness'. It is metaphorically used as a double-edged sword. She refers to it as the word of God. For the word of god is viewing and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing to the discussion of words and spirit of joints and narrow and discarding the thoughts and intentions of the

hearts (Hebrews 4:10). So her autobiography is a doubled-edged sword. It cuts across many boundaries and brings out intimate truth.

Bama's Autobiographical novel *Karukku* (1992) discusses various stages of the writer's life and her parents' social and economic conditions. Bama explains funny reflections in a caste divide village in Tamil Nadu. She assumes that her community depended on upper caste because of untouchability, poverty, slavery, hunger, injustice, casteism, etc. When she is in third class, an elderly person from her community, a Paraya, brings some *vadas* for Naickers. He holds the parcel by its string so that the fingers do not touch him so as to avoid pollution directly. These caste Hindus behave in such a manner because poverty, bondage, slavery, force them to depend economically and socially which becomes an inheritance in the name of tradition. This tradition is passed from one generation to another. The Parayas have no independent income. So they depend upon the upper caste.

Her grandmother worked as a servant for Naickers family. When she worked in the field, even small children, born the other day, would call her by her name because they belonged to the Naicker family, and this grandmother, like all the other labourers, would call the little boy *ayya*, master. It is due to lack of education that Dalit women are not able to come out of their poverty and marginalized conditions. This lack of education makes them ignorant and innocent as there is no independent source of income.

Dalits would go to the woods or mountains to gather fire wood and sell it for earning some money. They would work in the lands of the upper caste people throughout the year. They would always depend on upper castes money. They did not have their own business. This was the reason that the system of discrimination continued for long historical periods. Most of them lived below the poverty line.

“Even the way they were given their drinking water was disquieting to watch. The neighbor women would pour out the water from the height of four feet, while Paddi and the others received and drink it with cupped hands held to their mouths”. She always felt a sense of outrage when she watched this because of the caste system. They treated to the Dalits untouchables. Her grandmother worked as a slave, “she would go to the neighbours family. She could sweep out the cowshed, collect up the dung and dirt, and then bring home the leftover rice and curry from the previous evening.” (Bama: 14)

She writes in the beginning of the second chapter that every Dalit experiences such humiliation and discrimination from the moment she breathes first. They believe that they came to them naturally as rains in the rainy season and sun in the summer. One can not oppose these acts of suppression without knowing the basic freedom and human rights which she possesses in a democratic country like India.

When she was in the seventh class, every day after school, she would play with the other children of her street before going home in the evening. There were two or three children who were related to her and the rest of the boys and girls

always played together as group. One day, they were playing under the big Neem tree in front of the school, hanging like bats upside down from its branches. After a while, they started another game. When they were playing the game, she came running from a distance at a top speed. She could touch the coconut growing there. The coconut fell at her touch. It was not a fully ripened coconut, just a green one without so much water in it.

The next morning at assembly, the Head Master called out her name. “You here showed us your true nature as Paraya,” he said. “You climbed the coconut tree yesterday after everybody else had gone home, and you stole a coconut. We cannot allow you inside this school. Stand outside.” (Karukku: 1992) She was in agony because she had been shamed and insulted in front of all the children because of the low caste.

Another important issue in the lines of Dalits which is discussed in Karukku is “the act of naming”. Names do play an important role in every one’s life. But in the case of a Dalit, it plays very different role. The name sometimes proclaims the caste and class. The names are not fashionable or good to hear. They are mocked at by the upper caste villagers. Bama in the book has narrated a lot of incidents related to names wherein she describes how each one is named based on his or her talent and peculiar quality. A lot of affection is evident when the people in the community call each other by their names:

The names you heard along only streets would really surprise you.

People’s baptismal names given at Church were one thing. The names we

used in the street were quite another. One child name was Munkovam, short temper. A woman was called midday masalas because one day she ground masala at midday, and made curry.....Certain child who was now dark-skinned and plump was named Murugan, spring pig. There was a woman who leaked all over her legs when she revealed herself. She was called Kazhinja, Leaky. A small girl who went off to practice swimming in the well, but could only manage to float, was promptly named Medenda, Floater. I could go on, Konnavaachi (Starter), Deaf-one, Dumbo, Crazy, Severiyaa (Xavier), Black-ant Manacchi (Flat nose), Uzhamuki (Running nose), Green nose, Needle-bum. All sorts of names like that. (Karukku: 7-8).

Naming is a part of the life of Dalits, and Bama has narrated this very realistically and ordinarily. It happens in each and every generation. “My mother in her village is called “Bodi” (Shaven-head) because my grandmother used to always shave her head in her childhood. These names continue even now. They call me ‘Cheemidi Mukku’ (Running nose) because I used to have a cold and a running nose always, even in summer in my childhood.” (Karukku: 1992. P-8) This is how the names are coined in villages. No one gets offended. This is reality and ordinariness that Bama narrates throughout the book. This has been treated as “routine” by M. S. S. Pandian in his essay titled “Writing Ordinary Lives.” I do not agree with the terms such as routine, stereotypes and monotonous while referring to Dalit autobiographies because this is the life of the Dalits which will never change.

When she completed eighth class in her village, she went to high school in a neighbouring town. She was very surprised when she saw the school there. The children who attended it and the clothes they wore were very fine. So she felt very shy and was almost fearful. She realized the importance of education and began to work hard with her studies. The children that were living in the hostel were of the same age. They wore smart clothes and possessed all sorts of things like jewels and wrist watches. She thought it was so because they were probably from the upper caste families and why Bama was humiliated was because of her poverty. Teacher played an important role in Dalit students' life. The Dalit students were severely punished. "I don't want to be beaten by teacher, I want to study well and I want to be clever. We prayed all sort of things like that." (Karukku: 77) There were lots of discriminations in the school for low caste, low class and soon, the triple oppresses of a Dalit girl child started in the school. Though Bama was the topper in the class, she had to face a lot of humiliation.

"The PT Teacher would ask all the Harijan children to stand up either at the assembly, or during lessons. They write down our names, and then ask us to sit down again. We felt nearly two thousand children hanging our heads in shame, as if we had done something wrong" (Karukku: 18). Bama found that wherever she went, there was painful reminder of her caste and untouchability. The financial grants and special tuitions that the government offered the Harijans were more of a humiliation because it singled out her caste identity.

Even though against all these odds, Bama was awarded a prize for studying first among all the Harijan students of the district who took the

government S. S. L. C. Exams that year. It was impossible for a Dalit to study. She felt a certain pride and a desire to prove that they could study as well as others and make progress. Bama used to work a lot like machines during Christmas and Easter, when she was admitted into the hostel of a convent in the next village. "It was a hostel which demanded quite a high fee, and I felt uncomfortable to stay there although they fed us well. It was really big school. Both in the hostel and in the school, the children wore all sorts of fine clothes, and they kept nice things to eat in their rooms." (Karukku : 1992 :62-63) So she thought they must all be upper caste children. She had no money either. She thought she would study hard and make good earning. She worked really hard. At her village everyone said she would gain good marks in the eleventh year public examinations. However, she passed the exams successfully.

Dalits are mad to work like machines during those days. Comparatively, it was a very huge loss for Dalit women to get educated. They lacked the support they needed from their family. The fact that their daughter was studying further increased their worries because it was a difficult task for them to get a husband in the same caste. This is one of the reasons why Dalit girls were not encouraged to go for higher studies. "Then, they said it would be difficult for me to find a husband in my community if I went for further education. So they wrote off to a few places to find out about teacher training. (Karukku: 64)

It was against all these odds that Bama completed her under-graduation during her college days. She did not wear fine clothes. She did not have fine slippers. Another fact was that, many of her classmates came to college wearing

all kinds of fine clothes. It humiliated her because of her poverty. When she completed her B.Ed. and completed her education, she went to work at her first place. Life became comfortable enough. It was really good to earn enough money every month and to become financially independent. She could go wherever she wanted to go. She could buy and eat whatever she wanted. She could even have a few pieces of jewelry made for herself. She became aware that if she had a little money in her hands, she could gain some authority, status, and prestige. She realized that those who had the cash to spend could always afford to live in comfort in her community. However, hard toil never seemed to make them have so much cash in hand. They worked so hard that they were themselves out like pot shared. They lived in poor conditions. They did not have own property nor land nor even a decent house to live in. In such conditions, they worked only for the rich. How can they even hope for luxuries? Even at the end, she could find to live a life of moderate comfort. She realized that if only the children on her street acquired a little education and found jobs, they could live themselves. It was this train of thought that she became a nun and entered a convent. There was a desire in her heart to help other children to settle themselves. As she was born into the same community, she really wanted to teach such children. But she entered the convent before. They did not care for poor Dalits children. So she left teachership and joined the religious order. The convent did not know the meaning of poverty. There was food of all kinds. There were always abundance of fruits and a variety of vegetable. There were comfortable rooms to live in that convent. Convent life had changed her fundamentally.

Bama in *Karukku* has described the painful life of herself as well as of her community. Her perseverance to get education is exemplary. I have tried to argue that she too has mentioned that it is education that has helped her understand her state of life and it is education that has helped her show the reality to the world and to aim to come out of it. She has aspired to educate her own community by making them understand the realities of Dalit poverty and dependency and thereby to come out of the bondage. They set financial independence with the help of education.

According to the ancient *Dharmashastras* of the Hindus, Dalits are labourers doing menial work. This hierarchy is primarily a class system and the development of a society based on class is a world-wide phenomenon. The social, political, economic and religious restrictions laid down by the caste Hindu in their religions were implemented by the Hindus. Thus it followed the duties allotted to particular Dalits by the caste Hindus. So the life conditions of these untouchables were shameful. They had no land to till nor could they follow any profession other than the menial work ordered by high caste. They were treated like animals and they had to accept leftovers from the Hindu caste people. Hindu tradition forbade them to wear good clothes or ornaments or even foot wear, and prescribed severe and humiliating punishment for violating these orders. Even for a basic necessity like water, they were helplessly dependent on the good will of the people of higher castes.

Dependency became inheritance in the name of tradition and the Dalits had no way to come out of the oppression. This tradition passed from one

generation to another. After centuries of suppression, the Dalits were in struggle for emancipation under the liberation movements established by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who believed that only education could bring about change in the oppressed lives of the Dalit. Education is the means of realizing one's life's desire which will help in developing one's personality and improving one's status in all respects. Education has direct association with the socio-economic and political status of Dalits with the help of education the Dalit are able to come out of their poverty, depending slavery, bondage.

Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2002) discusses the story of Narendra Jadhav's parents' journey from a small village in Ozar in Maharashtra to Mumbai. Jadhav tells the story of his family struggle for equality and justice in India. At the beginning of *Outcaste*, 20 years old Damu the chief protagonist of the story is addressed contemporarily as "Mahar". Mahar is Damu's caste, stigma destiny. It talks the world that he is the lowest of the low in the Hindu *chaaturvarna* system, the system of four castes. He is so low that his touch pollutes. He is an untouchable. The place is Damu's ancestral village in Western Maharashtra, the date is March 1st, 1930, when Damu was a young man doing his *yeskar* duty. The Mamledar as a senior revenue official was to visit the village for a routine inspection. Damu was running barefoot out of breath as he arrived the Mamledar's Tonga because an honourable person was arriving. Later Damu patiently waited outside the house of Patil, the village headman, to escort the Mamledar back, because of his low caste according to the Hindu *chaaturvarna* system. He knows clearly the dangers of village duty. When the police man came

looking for him, he told that a dead body was floating in an abandon well near the village. He has been told to sit guarding the body till the *Fauzdar* and police party came to inspect to seen the body.

Patil, the village chief had already received the news in the evening. Damu stayed up the whole night by the well guarding the corpse, because of his lowly position. He did not have a respectful profession because he was illiterate. He depended on the mercy of the upper caste people to guard the village traditions duties and all their needs. Even if they get angry and beat him he has no choice but to obey them. Damu stands facing the *Fauzdar*. The police chief ordered to get the body out. But Damu refused to do the task of getting the body out and cried out:

I will die but I will not bowdown before you
Come on, beat me all you can and kill me
Let the world know that a helpless. Mahar was
Killed doing his duty, see the entire village is
Witnessing your atrocities. (Outcaste: 9)

Hearing this dialogue of Damu, the *Fauzdar* thundered, “You lump of dirt! Are you going to jump or do I have to whip you?” At these words, Damu remained silent. Seeing that the *Fauzdar* was enraged, he was not going to do it. The *Fauzdar* and the constable started scolding him with abuses. They charged at him overflowing with abuses. That must be why *Fauzdar* enraged. In those days,

the oppressive power and prestige of the Fauzdar were tremendous and a Mahar was a mere wisp of straw.

Seeing and hearing all this was a shock to Damu's young mind. He questioned himself:

Why I am doing these menial job? Why I was cursed, and their shouting, whose dead body? Whose well? Why I should have to be guard the dead body. The *Fauzdar* threatened because he was the lowest poor Mahar doing yeskar duty. He refused to carry out the village traditional duties. He would throw away the miserable crutches of traditional village duties because he was aware of his rights as a human being. As he participated in Baba Saheb Ambedkar's Social Movements, he was reluctant to perform yeskar duties. (Outcaste: P-6)

Then Damu's journey was from a small village in Ozar in Maharashtra to Mumbai to escape persecution and reclaim human dignity. So he left his village and went to Mumbai. He recollected his village life of Ozar. He first realized that he was untouchable when he was a child. He was told he could not drink water straight from the well because the water would get polluted. The child Damu was touched to observe strict rules regarding the taking water.

He grew up into the Mahar household and challenged the daily indignities inflicted on him. He refused to perform the annual yeskar duties when his turn came, to announce deaths and tend to the carcasses of cattle in the village, and run as a human pilot foaming at the mouth ahead of the carriage of

government officials, singing their praises, in return for being allowed to beg for left over from house to house (Outcaste: 16).

Around 1919, he participated in Ambedkar's social movements. He was reluctant to do Yeskar duties. He recollected about the influence of Ambedkar in his Memoir. Ambedkar was the light of their life. Ambedkar's slogan was to 'educate, unite, and agitate', and inspire them to fight against the Atrocities. He asked the Mahar to educate their children. His speeches at the Mahad Satyagraha brought about a revolution among the untouchables. Their thoughts and behavior began to change. They began to take part in meetings and conference in large numbers. Dalit youth and women's organizations were formed and Dalit women began to speak with vigour at meetings and conferences. They went on processions and became active in the movements and its struggles. We cannot forget that Ambedkar's liberal views on Dalits and Dalit Women were a motivating force (Pawar and Moon 158). The liberation movements started with the speeches of Ambedkar. His speeches changed their lives significantly. He stressed more on education, moral education and self dignity in his speeches. He urged the untouchables to do away with the humiliations and enslaving traditions of village duties like carrying away dead cattle. "It is utterly disgraceful to sell one's human rights for few crump of bread. We will attain self-elevation only if we learn self-help, regain our self-respect and gain self-knowledge," Baba Saheb said. (Outcaste: 22)

Ambedkar talked on child marriages, cleanliness among the Dalits, responsibility of parents to encourage their children to send them to schools,

morals, etc. So he was inspired by Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar's speeches to standup and reclaim his dignity. He wanted to fight back against injustice. So he looked back on his behaviour with the *Fauzdar*. He worked in Bombay slum and knew the freedom and dignity of "touchability". In the city, all thought illiterate and despite the disadvantages of his Mahar Caste, he began going to the railway station, doing all sorts of odd jobs. Slowly people knew him and it became easy for him to get works. A man called Gangaram hired him to sell newspapers. On the first day, he earned five *annas*. Then he began a new phase in his life. He sold newspapers among the customers. He also worked for the Great Indian Peninsula (GIP) Railway as a daily wage labourer, but he would get work only for few days. He would have to wait every day to be called. While all the other workers were offered work at 11 *annas* per day, he returned home frustrated and hungry. Later, he found some work in Thane where a new railway line was being laid. He had to work with cement and concrete. They dug large ditches for electricity poles and filled them up with cement. The Saheb entrusted four men and women to help him and arranged for a boat to ferry them across Kalyan. His job was to get the work done and give a report to his boss. So he maintained cordial relations with the workers.

The workers appreciated this and always cooperated. This project was complete a few days later. Their file returned to the Kurla car shed. He got some odd jobs like cement loading from the truck and taking those inside the warehouse, carrying water, etc. Then he talked with Gora Saheb that he wanted to

work. The next day, he had to be examined by a doctor and on 1st November 1924, he became a regular worker of the GIP Railway.

First, he joined as a temporary worker and with great difficulty. He was paid 18 rupees per month. Then he became a regular worker. He received 20 rupees and 8 *annas*. He worked with William Saheb and was explained his duties very patiently. He put his heart and soul into his work and learned much in just few days.

He was transferred to the main railway station called Victoria Terminal. William Saheb was also working there. He was very happy to see him. Damu had worked under him for two years at Bori Bundar. When a train came to the station, he asked the driver if there was any problem. There was some problem with the engine. He solved the problem and became friendly with all the drivers. They chatted and joked and had good time. So his pay rose to 27 rupees per month. He was promoted to the post of electric motor mechanical in his new job where he had to inspect every train that reached there overnight. He learned to operate the train as he had to drive the inspected train to the station. There he handed the charge to the driver who worked with him in the previous department. Even though he was an untouchable and illiterate, he earned a square meal for his family. So it looked as if his good days finally arrived.

He was married for two years and all was going well. He had a good job in the railways and his mother also worked there. His wife took care for the first time since coming to Mumbai. It was around 1929, when he came home and told

Sonu that there was a strike in the GIP Railway and consequently lot of people would lose their job. He also lost his job and was in a desperate state because there was pressure from his mother for accepting the Yesker duty in his village. So, he participated in Baba Saheb's movements to stand up against injustice at all costs. Then all returned to Kurla from Mumbai. There were no jobs and they did not have money to pay rent. So he faced problems because of his poverty and he struggled for existence. They did not have enough money for meals. So buying medicines or taking his wife to a doctor was out the question. Sometimes, he found an odd job in another town. There was not much regular work available and even odd jobs were hard to find with the help of the local leaders. He was able to get a job in the United Mills in Parel. He was excited to get a fulltime job after searching for work for years. Then he was soon promoted. Skill rather than speed was more important here. In this new job, the machines moved at high speed and the operator had to concentrate on the levers. So he was paid 2 rupees extra for this job. Unfortunately, he lost his thumb. So he faced difficulties to overcome his poverty. So he wanted to dedicate his life to Baba Saheb's social movements. "With the inspiration of Ambedkar at least I could do was uplift at least one family my own. I vowed to give my children the best possible education and raise them with the spirit of public service (Outcaste: 146).

Subsequently he participated in Baba Saheb's movement. There were lots of works to be done. Ambedkar announced a change of strategy in the struggle. The efforts were for securing respect, independence and equality with others through education. Damu wanted his children to grow up and have a dignified

life, not to be treated as inferior without any respect in society. His four sons Janu, Sudha, Dina, Chotu and two daughters Leela and Trusha achieved high position. Janu was selected to become an I. A. S. Officer. Deena was a successful broker even though he was illiterate. His children reached higher positions. Narendra Jadhav studied for a Doctoral Degree in America. He was recipient of national scholarship from the government of India. Then he joined the IMF representing our country. So the author narrates the story of his journey from poverty and suffering towards self-sufficiency and self-esteem with the help of education.

Sharan Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* is generally an autobiography which insists at lengths upon the condition and oppression of the individuals and their community, and upon the accessibility to school and education as the essential way towards employment and social mobility in modern urbanized setting. That allows for an escape from the grip of traditional repressive system.

Limbale expresses his deepest anguish over the helpless condition of the Mahar women. They suffered for ages because of lack of education and without culture, property, self-respect, and dignity. Limbale elaborates the wrong-doings of the upper caste people who had property and land belonging to their ancestors. These upper caste people exploited the lives of the Dalits at times and this ruined the married lives of the women. The Patils and Zamindar of the village often kept untouchable women as their whore. The Mahar women relied on them solely. They are always at the mercy of Patils, the entire Dalit house hold calls

these houses as the houses of Patil's whore and their son's as the son's of Patil's whore (Limbale: 50).

His mother, Masabai, was a Mahar. She was a landless woman and agricultural labourer whereas his father, Vithal Kamle, was a landlord and village chieftain called Patil. Kamble was working as a bonded labourer and was a very poor man. They worked as grass movers and never had enough food. After moving the grass, they had to carry the bundles down four miles away. They had to sell the bundles for getting some money to buy things for their daily meal. Sometimes, they collected and sold twigs and faggots. Hanumantha Limbale Patil helped him during hard times, but while helping Kamble, Patil's intension was quite different. This rich man was out to ruin a poor man's family.

Kamble was working as a bonded labourer on a yearly agreement in the agricultural land of Hanumantha Limbale, the Patil of the village of Basalegaon. He was forced to depend on the landlord's mercy because of his poverty and landlessness. His poverty was his sad lot and he was worried about his food. Masabai is the protagonist in Limbale's *Akkarmashi*. She was harassed by the upper caste Patil of the village. Her entire life took a different turn. She had physical relation with upper caste people and bore many children. Her marriage to Vithal Kamble broke up when Hanumatha Patil forced his attention on her and their caste *panchayat* ordered the husband to desert Masabai. Taking her two sons, she was then forced to seek refuge with Hanmantha Limbale and Patil with different upper caste Patils. Masabai changed men like clothes. All the men in her life deceived her. Masabai, however, used this as a strategy for survival.

She bore Sidram Patil's nine children and took care of all of them. Masabai led a very pathetic life and, despite her difficulties, she educated Limbale, which is some thing praiseworthy. Limbale suffered from the caste system because he was an outcaste below everyone else. He suffered from hunger both physically and mentally because he did not have 'pure blood' and no one would accept him. At times, his anger would become emotional. He questioned himself and became rebellious because of the existing social circumstances. The pain and suffering of Sharan Kumar was not because he was untouchable or because he was poor but because he was rejected within his own community. His own community boycotted him. This added fuel to fire. It troubled him psychologically. His pain of being rejected perplexed him and he was traumatized by the bitter and harsh social experiences. He was utterly confused. Sometimes, he behaved in an eccentric manner. The existing social circumstances were responsible for Limbale's suffering and torturous life.

There were many factors in Dalit life for which they suffer. Hunger is one of the most important factors in Dalit autobiography. Limbale narrated his school experiences to show how he suffered because of hunger. Once as a child, Limbale was going on a school trip along with his classmates. During lunch hour, their teacher distributed the leftover of the upper caste children's lunch to Limbale and his friends. In order to satisfy their insatiable hunger, Limbale and his friends ate the leftover like hungry vultures. Untouchability is another significant factor in Dalit autobiography. It is also one of the reasons why the upper caste people tortured and troubled the untouchable. At last, he found salvation in Buddhism.

When he was attending school regularly for some days, the teacher asked him his father's name. He did not know his father's name because his mother was not married to Hanumantha. So he faced painful experiences in school days. When he completed his school education, he went to high school in a neighbouring village, Chungi. They asked his father's and sarpanch's signature for scholarship. Getting the signature of the sarpanch was always a problem because his mother was not married to Hanumantha. Though he faced such hurdles, he studied hard and stood second in the final school exams. He passed with merit and was greatly admired. After that, going to college was a big problem because of his poverty. His grandmother borrowed money from many people in an insulting manner.

Then he was admitted to Dayananda College in Sholapur for his college education. His mother and he were suffering a lot of because of poverty. They did not have proper clothes. With the help of his friend Mallaya, he studied up to B.A. in spite of facing such hurdles. He got a telephone operator at Ahamedpur and got financial independence. He was able to escape from his poverty and oppression and became a professor of economics with the help of education.

Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri* (2003) has been originally written in Kannada. He describes various stages of the writer's life. He speaks eloquently in the context of the socio-economic dimensions through the lens of his own life in the contemporary social system. Autobiography, as commonly understood, presents the facts by a person from the circumstances of his life. His family and he might

represent socio-economic conditions of his community through his autobiography.

Poverty and caste humiliation were the most prominent Dalit issues. Poverty that struck Siddalingaiah family was beyond his comprehension as a boy. “It was amusing to watch the two men trundle on the bullocks. While the third followed them swimming a whip and making them plough. A strange agony gripped me the movement I realized that one of the men carrying the yoke was my father” (Siddalingaiah: 2).

It was really a shocking sight for the child Siddalingaiah. This sight naturally saddened the boy. He was incapable of thinking about the intensity of poverty that affected his family at this stage. As a child, he could hardly understand the crux of the problems. Therefore, economic misery appeared to him almost peripheral.

Siddalingaiah grew up like any other Dalit boy. He was socially humiliated and economically oppressed, but he was incapable of understanding as to why his family suffered from poverty. He was in the grip of anger and frustration and ultimately awareness led him to become one of Kannada literature’s most influential Dalit writers. First of all, his parents were very poor. They earned from working as labourers, but this was not enough to maintain the family. His mother would sometimes go to the forest to collect firewood and sold those at the Shandy to earn some money when two sisters were born in his family. His father found it difficult to take care of his family. He started going farther and

farther away to look for work. He came only for three to six months. Meanwhile life in the village became tough. His father, burdened with debt, left his family because of poverty. His mother and his two sisters faced the difficulties in those days. So his mother's family migrated from Magadi to Manchanabele. When he completed second and third standard at Magadi and Manchanbale, he joined a Government primary school. At that time, a teacher called Andalamma worked in the school. She would bring food and also bring books and pencils for him because of his poverty. He was the son of an utterly poor man. His father was poor and illiterate. He depended on others. He was an employee in Rajan Mills. He got work at least for few days in a month. But after the workers' strike, the owner closed down the mill. It closed for many years. His life became miserable. He had trouble finding a day's meal. Then his father got a job as a wood cutter. He earned some money, but it was not sufficient to run the family. So he became a debtor. He made loans, but spent money like flowing water. He did not repay them because he could not find any job. He was beaten by the agents of the money lender. His mother also could not find any job. So his family was socially humiliated and economically oppressed, but he was incapable of understanding as to why his family suffered from poverty. As Nagaraj Says "A Dalit story without poverty and caste humiliation would be false" (Nagaraj 2003: 111).

Then his mother worked in the Dalit hostel in Srirampura as a sweeper. The hostel warden would give food to her. His mother used to bring home the food they gave her in the morning and night. It solved the food problem.

So he describes his painful life that he experienced within his community, the harsh reality of poverty and dependency. He would eat and go to the school. The high school was near the hostel. Gangamalaiah, one of his father's elder brother, taught him to speak in the public. He could learn more. He went to several libraries and read a lot of books and journals. He could gain some knowledge. Gangamalaiah had also taught him how to rehearse a speech. He could gain some confidence. He gave speech in his colony and in Manchanabele, everyone listened to his speech.

Hostel life gave him some courage and new experience. Three hundred students were staying in hostel. They came from various places and spoke Kannada in different ways. The students participated in extracurricular activities in the hostel. It gave him a new experience. Before, he was in the grip of anger and frustration and ultimately awareness led him to become the most influential Dalit writer in Kannada literature. There were open libraries in many places. He started visiting them and read Kannada news papers and magazines. He visited those libraries and got knowledge. He went to Seshadripuram frequently and visited public library there. He read Basavaraja Katliman's novel "Towards Freedom". This library helped him a lot. A student called Basavanna, his hostel mate, gave him the book, "Avatara Purushudu Ambedkar (Ambedkar the Messiah)". He read the whole book and wrote a lot of songs and poetry at that time.

He studied up to 10th class in Srirampuram and then he joined the Government Arts College at Tirupati. He got a seat in the Dalit hostel on

Mahtama Gandhi Road. This changed his life. The food arrangement at the hostel was excellent. They gave rice and chapati every day. They were served non-vegetarian food twice a week. He started eating well and his appearance changed. He visited the central library at Cubbon Park in Bangalore daily and read all the books. He made good use of the library during this period. When he studied in the high school, he participated in the inter-college debate. He won many books and prizes in debate. During his college days, he did some part time job. Bangalore University had launched “earn while you learn” scheme to help the students. It helped the poor students to support financial assistance. When he was in M.A Course in Kannada, he became a direct disciple of G. S. Shivarudrappa. As he had not paid his hostel fees, he was thus not in a position to take his exams. K Murali Siddappa paid his fees and made all possible arrangements for him to write the exams. He was awarded a gold medal in his post-graduation. In spite of such hurdles, he joined as a lecturer in the Kannada Department and became financially independent. Even though Siddalingaiah was born of an illiterate couple, he conquered poverty and dependence on others through education. So his journey from poverty and suffering ended. He came out of oppression and got self-sufficiency and self-esteem with the help of education.

Vasanth Moon’s story *Growing Up Untouchable* is about his vasti or neighborhood. He along with his community struggled against poverty and deprivation. Moon’s autobiography presents us a powerful personal and collective memory of caste oppression and struggle in India in the 19th century.

The Hindu caste system, which forms the backdrop of Moon's narrative, operated on a graded hereditary scale of professions. Brahmins were at the high position and Dalits at the low position because they did not have their own land. Dalits were also relegated to work that was considered ritually unclean such as, the disposal of dead animals, upkeep of crematoria, cleaning of latrines and tanning of leather. The Dalits existed literally as outcastes living in the margins of villages in Indian society where the upper caste Hindus were also feudal land owners or had control over land in the form of temple trusts. Dalits depended on upper caste Hindus because they wanted to work. Firstly, he eloquently describes growing up in Dalit slum in the city of Nagpur in central Maharashtra Model Mill. The writer discusses the various stages of his personal life. Before he was born, his grandfather worked as a tailor at Dhantoli. He was living with the neighbours. He migrated to Kamathi because of his poverty. Sadasiva lived at Kamati for seven years. He came again to live in Badri. His wife Kemalaja worked in the mill while he managed the household. Later Sadasiva proposed to marry his daughter off to Waman. He thought that his daughter would have good life. His mother was a widow. He had four daughters and one son by his first wife his father was driver for the Parsis at a wage of 250 rupees per year. It was not a small amount at that time, but he became addicted to drinking alcohol. She left her drunken husband and returned to her father with her two children. Before the death of her father, she had never put a foot outside the house for work. She was unusual manual labour.

She would not get any work in house because of caste system which Moon describes with aching poignancy. As he reveals:

Now our days hunger began he started going hungry for two days at a time, at a first time we were troubled by pangs of starvation. However, once the body gets the habit of fasting. Hunger is not felt. Hunger slowly begins to die (Growing Up Untouchables: 75).

His mother left her husband and returned to her father and two children. Purna, leaving her young children in the care of her neighbours, set out in search for work. His mother went out daily to look for work and came back only at seven or eight in the evening. Occasionally, she would earn one or two rupees. When his grandmother died, their situation was very miserable. Laxman took the control of the house. They were forced to live on the veranda in grandfather's house in Maharpura. The heat and rain brought both trouble and joy. Taking taste of all this, he returned to the house. Dark had fallen, his mother had not yet come. His little sister was sitting quietly often bringing water from the tap. The neighbour woman inquired "Bapu, hasn't your mother come"? He would only shake his head. Many times, they would have to go to sleep without food.

Moon remembered the strong sense of collective responsibility for the children in the community:

There were mothers who went to work leaving their small boys and girls in the care of some trustworthy neighbour and there were the aged

teachers, uncles and elders, who kept watch over the confide neighbourhood (Growing Up Untouchables: 118).

When he passed fourth grade examination and joined fifth class, his mother did not have even a rupee. His uncle Hari got him admitted to the Patwardhan High School. His uncle paid the school fees and bought text books, note books, pencils, slates and other equipments for him as it was impossible for his mother to manage all this. During his school days, he did not have sufficient clothes. With the help of his community, he got financial support for his education. Moon rejected the scholarship of Harijan Seva Sangh because of the caste implication of the word Harijan. His economic situation was very bad because his mother did not have regular work, but they never left the community. Atmaram Patil had just built the house beside the Mahar community. He sat on the steps of his home. He was filled with anxiety and melancholy. There was no food in his house. His sister would fetch the water and washed the clothes. She has stopped the school from the third standard because of their poverty. Maroti Bagade, a youth from the Samanta Sainik Dal, saw his sad face and brought him a whole bag of hot chick peas. He brought those chick peas to the house and both of them fulfilled their hunger.

During those days, he started to roam in the colonies. He collected cycle tubes and earned a few rupees from selling them. When he was in middle school, he collected all kinds of iron goods, the printed match labels, the sheet of spoiled labels, and matchbox and cigarette packets for sale. At that time, the militants of the Dal became aware his economic misery. They gave him food. Many Samatha

Sainik people gave him food and they also helped him by providing books and note books for his education. They began to live as tenants in Radhabai's house.

His mother used to say, "People would also tell me take your children to the Gudi, but I never did. I said I will endure day's poverty but I won't give my children to their religion". They faced such poverty but he was educated. While he was a college student, he used to go to Calcutta. There was a settlement named Santragachi. People from various castes and communities from all over India lived there in the railways quarters in Santragachi near their house. There were many speakers of Tamil, Telugu, Malayali, Bengali and other languages. There were one or two houses of Marathi speakers. His friend Anutai could clearly speak South Indian Languages such as Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam as well as Bengali.

During that time, the people of his community participated in many activities like sports and wrestling everywhere in Nagpur. Samata Sainik Dal overcame obstacles like conducting wedding in the community. Later, many sports activities went on in the community in Nagpur. The boys of his community participated both in sports and wrestling. The hostel was established around 1925 by Nanasaheb Govai in Nagpur. Many activities went on there in the community. Moon describes his childhood experiences in middle school that consisted of fifth through eighth class. While he was studying in the ninth class, a teacher called Vaidya was teaching Marathi in sixth class. He would teach very well and instruct the students to memorize poems.

He was crazy for memorizing poetry since childhood. At that time, all students were enthusiastic in playing poetry games. In his class, there was a very smart boy named Aravinda Buse who was always first in the class. This boy had a note book of poems. Vasant also collected poems from many books, but he could not achieve such proficiency as Buse. Vasant, Buse, and Baskar Joshi were the boys in their class to represent the school in poetry contest. While he was studying in the middle school, he wasted much time in playing games. He would do the homework exactly whatever the teacher had given. He had a quick intellect but he did not study. Because of this he failed the three months and six months examinations. During his examination time, he dared try copying. However, just as it is said that stealing to fulfill one's hunger is no sin, his only aim was to pass from one class to another and, to come first, he used this dangerous method for the final examinations. This was the secret of his success in examinations. During his time, Bokil Master had written the algebra and geometry books for middle school and the arithmetic book was written by Ozha. These three books served him from fifth to eighth class. In ninth class, the only optional subjects were arithmetic and Chemistry. So he sold old books and bought the new books. He could not spend much money on books and note books because of his poverty.

His knowledge of Marathi was good even in childhood. After passing eighth class, he faced the question of what to take as an electric. Most of the Brahmin boys would be put in the A Class, which was English Medium. In the B Class were the Marathi medium students. He felt like taking science class. His thought was that if Brahmin students took it why could not he? He took algebra

and chemistry together in 1949. Nearly 90 per cent of the students failed in chemistry. He also obtained low marks in chemistry and, from that night onwards, he started studying for algebra and chemistry. He prepared well and passed with distinction in Mathematics and Chemistry. For the optional subject, he took manual training that was carpentry. He was short in height and weak physically. The carpenter's plane for making wood smooth was heavy and difficult for him to lift. Still he took the subjects. He decided he might as well learn wood work with the other students. So he changed classes. He got only twenty-nine marks in the matriculation exams and he failed. He got more marks in manual training than the other subjects. With the grace marks in Marathi, he passed the matriculation exams. He was working in the mill continuously. Many people from the Mahar community worked there. Nilkanth Ranteke was a supervisor and also an organizer of the union. If he went with his mother to the mill, he would go and sit by him. He would cross-examine him on his studies. In 1949, he joined in college. After completing the two years in Intermediate, he joined B.A. Degree. All the students studied up to B. A. in Marathi. However, during his college days, he learned how to criticize religious ideas after studying Lokahitawadi's Shatpatre and Agarkar essays. Y. B. Kolte and Madav Gopal Dashmukh were his Marathi teachers in his college from the first year through the M. A. classes.

Agarkar's reformist ideas had a strong effect on his mind. "The season of five people" or "the Foolishness of the Wise or our care of corpses" and other Agarkar essays had a turn to his thinking and use a language. The voice of the Brahminical hitavadi cursed Brahmin practices was helpful to us in our religions.

His Marathi teacher Kolte would give us an awareness of the ordeal of the social reformers. In those days, he read Agarkar and Lokahitavadi essays. Later, he read Ambedkar's analysis of social reforms. He had studied many writers and poets in the college syllabus at that time. In Narayan Wanam Tilak's "the flower of the forest," the lines "without darkness even the light of the sun is dim, without sorrow the idea of happiness seems in vain". These poems had great impact on his mind.

After he appeared B.A. supplementary examinations, he got the employment in the office of the Deputy Account General in the Post and Telegraph department. Later, he registered for M.A. in Marathi. He wanted to become a Marathi professor. So he applied for Marathi at the M.A. level. He studied hard as he wanted to get more marks. He studied day and night. He took the second year M.A. exams. Three years later, while he was employed, he was an external student. He received third rank in the exam. However, he wanted a degree and he overcame discrimination and poverty. He got financial independence through education.

The study of Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2003) gives us a clear picture of his childhood days at home and in the basti, and his experience in the village school as well as his later life. He describes extremely wretched socio-economic conditions of his childhood experiences. He was born into the Chuhra caste (Bhangi) whose ordained job was to sweep the roads, clean cattle shed, dispose of dead animals, work in the fields during harvest season, and perform other physical lessons for upper caste people including the Tyagi Brahmins. The Tyagi's did not

call them by name, except calling them out as 'Oe Chuhre' or 'Abey Chuhre'. Upper caste people could even touch cows and stray dogs, but touching a Chuhre caused instant 'pollution' to the Tyagis. During his boyhood days, his entire family worked hard, but they did not manage to get two decent meals a day, not the least because they were often not paid for their labour and instead got sworn at and abused.

The Chuhras were forced to live outside the village reserved for upper caste people. A high well and a pond segregated their break house in his village from the Chuhra basti or cluster of shanties. Upper caste people of all ages here used the edge of the pond as an open-air lavatory. Squatting would be seen across from the Chuhra homes. There was much stinking everywhere. The stink was so over-powering that one would choke within a minute. The pigs would be wandering through the narrow lanes, naked children, and the dogs' daily fights. This was the childhood environment. In the rainy season, these narrow lanes of the basti would fill up with muddy water mixed with pigs' excrement. Flies and mosquitoes thrived. Everybody's arms and legs would become mongy and develop itchy sores.

There was one well in their basti for the purpose of drinking water for about thirty families. Its water was full of long worms during the rainy season. They had no choice but to drink that water as they were not permitted to use the well of the upper caste people. Their houses were made of clay that leaked all over during heavy rains. During one rainy season, most of their houses collapsed.

There was no outside help or insurance and they had to rebuild their houses on their own.

In 1975, Dalits in Maharashtra were encouraged by Ambedkar and his movements. Ambedkar's slogan was "Educate, Organise, Agitate" reached most of the educated Dalit youth. So they took up education and politics seriously. His introduction of reservation policy which was criticized by many in the beginning helped the poor and Dalits. So the Dalits were able to show interest towards education.

Gandhiji worked for the upliftment of the poor and the new anti-discrimination laws on the books. During his childhood days, he faced a lot of caste discriminations and also the problems of untouchability, poverty, inferiority complex and so on. Gandhiji's uplifting of the untouchables was resounding everywhere:

Although the doors of the government schools had begun to open for the untouchables, the mentality of the ordinary people had not changed much. I had to sit away from the others in the class, that too on the floor. The mat ran out before reaching the spot I sat on. Sometimes I would have to sit way behind everybody, right near the door. And the letter on the board from there seemed faded (Valmiki: 2).

Even the teacher looked for excuses to punish him, he writes, "So that I would run away from the school and take up the kind of work for which I was born." In fourth grade, a new head master arrived. Who thrashed him almost daily

and one day asked him to take a broom and sweep all the rooms and the play ground in school. The helpless boy spent two full days sweeping hoping it would soon be over. The third day, he went to the class and sat down quietly. After a few minutes, the Headmaster's loud thundering was heard, "Abey Chuhre ke, where are you hiding ... your mother..." He had begun to shake uncontrollably. A Tyagi boy shouted, "Master saheb there he is, sitting in the corner." (Valmiki - 2003:,P-5) The head master had pounced on his neck the pressure of his fingers was increasing. As a wolf grabs a lamb by the neck, the head master dragged him out of the class and threw him on the ground.

The Headmaster screamed and said, "Go. Sweep the whole play ground.... Otherwise I will shove chillies up your arse and throw you out of school." (Valmiki :2003, p5.) Frightened, he picked up the three-day-old broom, only a cluster of thin sticks. Tears were falling from his eyes. He started to sweep the compound while his tears fell. From the doors and windows of the school rooms, the eyes of the teachers and the boys saw this spectacles each pore of his body was submerged in a abyss of anguish.

Obeying the head master's order, he cleaned all the rooms and the verandas. Just as he was about to finish, the head master came to him and said, "After you have swept the rooms, go and sweep the play ground." "The play ground was way larger than my small physique could handle and in cleaning it my back began to ache my face was covered with dust. Dust had gone inside my mouth. The other children my class were studying in his room and watching me. I

was not even allowed to get a drink of water. I swept the whole day” (*Valmiki:P-4-5*).

As it turned out so, his father was passing by and saw him sweeping the grounds. Overcome by sobbing and hiccups, the boy told his story. Father snatched the broom and, with eyes blaring, began to scream, “Who is that teacher, that progeny of Dronacharya who forces my son to sweep?” All the teachers stepped out, including the Headmaster, who called his father’s name and roared back, “Take him away from there... the Chuhra wants him educated... Go, go..... Otherwise I will have your bones broken.” (*Valmiki: 6*)

On his way out, his father declared in a loud voice, “I am leaving now.... But this Chuhre ka will study right here..... in this school and not just him, but there will be more coming after him”.His father’s courage and fortitude left a deep and decisive mark on the boy’s personality. His father kicked on the doors of other upper caste men whom he had worked for, hoping they would support him against the Head Master. But the response was the opposite. He was plainly told:

“What is the point of him sending to school?”

“When has a crow become a swan?”

You illiterate boorish people, what do you know? Knowledge is not gained like this.”

“Hey, if he asked a Chuhra’s progeny to sweep, what is the big deal in that?” (Valmiki: 6)

When his father had all but given up, one village elder yielded to his tearful beseeching and intervened to get the boy reinstated. A close call or else he would have ended up illiterate like rest of his family. He faced such hurdles in his childhood days. He never forgot the courage and fortitude.

His family fell on even harder times when his eldest brother and wage earner had a high fever, and without access to clinic, he died. Valmiki had finished fifth grade but there was severe poverty. They did not have enough food to it. He could not continue with school. He dropped out and began looking after buffalo’s in the field, watching with a heavy heart his school mates going to school. Over the protest of others, his brother’s widow pawned a silver anklet, the only piece of jewelry she had, to pay for Valmiki’s school fees. Valmiki sat in the last row in school. He continued to face severe discrimination even though he consistently did well in his studies. His memories of school suffered with pain and humiliation, beginning from taunts and beatings by schoolmates and teachers in ‘terror-filled’ color activities to his exclusion from extracurricular activities like school plays. During his exams, he was not allowed to drink water from a glass when he was thirsty. He had to cup his hands, and the peon would pour water from way high up, lest our hands touch the glass. “At times I feel I have grown up in a cruel and barbaric civilization”. (Valmiki: 48). He does remember fondly a couple of boys who be friends him and did not let caste came between them.

In 1962, he was admitted to eighth class when he passed seventh class with good marks. He was harassed by upper caste people because of his low caste background. When he was going to school, Suraj Bhan Taga's son Brajesh followed him and called, "Abey Chuhare Ke", stop, the school was not very far from there, and he came near Valmiki and said; "Chuhra you really have sprouted horns you became arrogant, even your stride has changed, and hungry voice he said, 'I hear you are clever in your studies. He planted one end of stick in Valmiki's stomach. Let me also see me how bright you are you will remain a Chuhra, however, much study. He pushed Valmiki with the stick. Valmiki managed to prevent himself from tailing out his bag had fallen on the ground. He picked up the bag. Brajesh put it on his stick, and twinkled it around. Valmiki begged him, his books will be scattered.....he asked to return his bag.... his answer books will rip. Brajesh could not careless and twirling it hard, he threw the bag for away. When Valmiki ran to pick it up, Brajesh started laughing loudly. Valmiki's bag had fallen into the muddy ditch on the side of the road. His clothes were soiled in his attempts to fish it out. Valmiki's feet were smeared with mud and the books and note books in the bag were soaked. He burst into tears.

He washed his hands and feet at the school tap and dried the books and note books in the sun. His heart felt very heavy that day. It seemed that studies were not going to be possible for him because of his low caste background. Caste was the root cause of all these problems. Valmiki's father insisted a lot on improving his caste status. Through the education of his child, can caste be wiped away with education? For that matter, can anything on this earth take away the

caste you are born in? Caste is like wheels to a vehicle called life. Blessed is the one who is born in an upper caste family and woe to a person who is born in the lower caste. Caste discourages and makes a person a slave or a boss. It creates imbalance in society. Every problem has its roots in this monstrous caste system. Valmiki remarks; “He (my father) seldom asked me to do anything by way of help because he wanted me to be able to focus single-mindedly on my education. He constantly said that I should improve my “Caste” by getting an education. He did not know that “Caste” cannot be improved by education. It can only be improved by taking birth in the right caste.”(Valmiki: 58) The indignities and discriminations were faced by Valmiki. Even though he could not change his mind, he was able to concentrate on his studies.

During the time when he was studying in ninth class, the financial situation of his family was not good. Each member of his family had to work hard for the sake of a few paise. In those days, he never had all the textbooks. He had to borrow books from his friends. It was the same story about clothes. He worked whatever he could get and he ate whatever he was given. In those days, it was the Chuhra’s responsibility to dispose of dead cattle in villages. Wherever one worked, the disposal of the employer’s dead cattle was a part of the job. No wages were paid for doing this work.

Discrimination from peers, colleagues and fellow students hurt Dalit students a lot. Most of the dropouts occurred in villages due to this reason. Similar incidents in the case of happened Bama. She had to pass through upper caste houses to go to school. She was blamed for plucking flowers in their houses many

times, even though she did not look at them. And some upper caste women made her work in their houses before she went to school. Valmiki also had to work in the fields of upper caste men on the day of his exam. He recalls when he was forced by Fouza to work for him just before the exam:

“Study at night..... come with me. I have to sow cane”, Fouza ordered. I told him repeatedly that I had to study for my paper tomorrow, but he was adamant. He held me by the elbow and dragged me to his field. He threatened me to do the work or else. My mind was set aflame by his swearing (*Valmiki: 57*).

For studying, he was mocked at by both the upper caste and by his own community. His village people would say to his father, “Why are you making a nincompoop or your son by letting him study? He will belong neither at home nor in the outside world. Educated people are generally quite foolish, any way” (59). But he never got discouraged by such statements. He too had begun to realize the responsibility of carrying out his study. During examination time, he faced a lot of problems. There was no electricity in his house. He had to study in the light of a lantern in the street. He appeared the tenth class examination. When the result was announced, he was very happy to see his name in the paper. His father invited the whole people of his basti to a feast in order to celebrate his results. Then he took science in class eleven. In Intermediate, he passed all the subjects except chemistry. He secured good marks in all subjects. He left his village and went to Dehradun to study there. He was admitted to DAV College. He felt humiliated from the time his friends teased him about his poverty. When he was

studying in Dehradun, he did not have good clothes to protect himself from severe cold. He used to wear his uncle's sweater which looked big and funny to him. His friends used to make fun of him. He was very much humiliated when his friends called him "Abey Chuhre" (Valmiki: 5).

Later, he abandoned his college education and joined the Ordinance Factory, in Dehradun as an apprentice. His technical education enabled him to be self-reliant. After one year training at the ordinance factory, he attended a competitive examination and he was selected for further training. He had to go to Jabalpur to join the Ordinance Factory Training Institute at Khamaria. This selection opened new doors for his progress. This training institute changed lot of his speech pattern and his manners also changed. He took part in seminars and cultural functions. He became involved in Jabalpur literary life. When he completed two years there, the ordinance factory training institute of Bombay invited him for the application of the draftsman training. Then he was selected in the written examination and was asked to come to Bombay to appear in the oral test with the help of his friend Vijay, who gave him some money to attend the interview in Bombay. Later, he was selected for further training in Bombay. Then he was appointed at the ordinance factory at Chandrapur. This made him financially independent. Subsequently, he was in theatre groups and performed many plays along with his friends such as Meghadut, Natya Sastra. He also began to write a weekly column in Jana Prathinidhi.

These autobiographical writings convey how the Dalits became economically independent. The Dalits were influenced by great revolutionaries

like Ambedkar and Phule. In 1975, Dalits in Maharashtra were encouraged by Ambedkar's slogan, "Educate, Organise, Agitate." This reached most of the educated Dalit youth who took up education and politics seriously in order to stand up on their own and reclaim their dignity in the society. This is also seen in Narendra Jadhav's autobiography, *Outcaste: A Memoir*, wherein Damu, his father and the protagonist, tells the story of his struggle for equality and justice and his attempt to educate all his children facing inexplicable difficulties to find a place in the society.

Vasant Moon narrates his struggle for education through his autobiography, *Growing Up Untouchable*. He struggles against poverty and depravation. Though his dream of becoming a Marathi professor remains unfulfilled, he becomes a post-graduate and is employed in the office of Deputy Accountant General in the Post and Telegraph department which improves his financial condition. Siddalingaiah grows up as a child encountering the most prominent Dalit issues such as poverty and caste humiliation which he narrates in *Ooru Keri*. Fighting all the difficulties that come on his way, he becomes a post-graduate and the job of lectureship makes him economically independent.

Valmiki's father wants him to focus single-mindedly on his education so that he can improve his "Caste" by getting an education. He continues to face severe discrimination in school even though he consistently does well in his studies. However, with his technical education, he is appointed at the Ordnance Factory at Chandrapur and this makes him financially independent. In every case, the Dalits leave their traditional professions and opt for higher education. It is

their education which makes them raise their voice against the atrocities and find more dignified jobs other than the traditional ones. This improves their economic condition and social status. They become conscious of the discriminations made to them and they fight for equal rights which will be the subject of discussion in the next chapter.

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Chapter – III

Dalits Become Conscious and self-Esteemed

The Dalits became conscious of the tyranny, caste discrimination, injustice, atrocities they were experiencing. Ambedkar's social reform movements carried a significant place for the betterment of Dalit community in general. Educational awareness was created for Dalits by the architect of the Indian constitution. Dalits became socially conscious about the circumstances and social problems of untouchability and caste discrimination meted out to them.

Establishment of the British colonial rule in India made a huge difference in the lives of the downtrodden people. English Education was introduced in India for the first time. Various British policies brought a sense of hope for the marginalized communities. The doors of Education were open for all sections of society. Mahatma Phule who belonged to the Mali Community of Maharashtra realized that, if the community remained uneducated, they would not be able to emancipate themselves. So he started massive work on education by establishing various schools in and around Pune. Earlier, Dalits were denied education for centuries, and the Brahmins of Pune opposed education for Dalits. Phule came out against the exploitation of the farmers. He appreciated Christian missionaries for their noble work in school education.

Ambedkar's social reform movements carried a significant place for the Dalit community in general and for Dalits of Maharashtra in particular. With educational awareness created in the Indian constitution, Dalits became socially conscious about the circumstances and social problems of untouchability and caste discrimination. Limbale observes:

The period from 1920 to 1956 was influenced by the writings and political activities of Dr. Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar. He argued the case of the untouchables from the boundaries of the villages to the Round Table Conferences. He fought powerful forces ranging from the upper caste Hindu gate keepers to God for their rights. The entire Dalit Society felt the impact of Baba Saheb's Work (Limbale: 24)

The education that the Dalit youths received in the post-independence period gave them the idea for revolution and voice for protest. The works produced were not only the expression of anguish but of emphatic assertion of a newly-discovered power. After 1960s, Marathi Dalit Literature was introduced by a new stream called the Dalit Literary Stream. This new literary stream gave impetus to the Marathi Dalit writers. Thus the Marathi writers began expressing themselves by writing poems, short-stories, novels, plays, and autobiographies.

Ambedkar launched the social liberation movement for social rights and opportunities of the deprived and downtrodden section of society. The early phase of the Marathi writing was upper caste centric. It had description of nature and

imagination of the life and trees of the upper castes, whereas the downtrodden and the marginalized class was absent in their writings.

The Marathi writing produced at that point of time was no way connected with the condition of the ordinary people. But the Dalit writings produced in the 1960s were replete with Dalit experiences and Dalit consciousness. These Dalit writers subverted the myths of the upper caste writings. They wrote against the dominant mode of traditional Marathi upper caste writing. They wrote what they felt. Thus the works by the Dalit writers raised conscious socially, politically and culturally and established a new paths in the early 1960s.

Dalit consciousness played a major role in the making of Dalit writers who analyze the minutest things in the society to portray those in their writings. The Dalit consciousness believes in change. Therefore, the writing which comes out through Dalit consciousness is revolutionary in nature. The consciousness thus fights for social justice and equality and demands for an egalitarian society. As Limbale suggests:

Dalit consciousness in Dalit Literature has a revolutionary mentality. It is connected with struggle. It is a rebellion against the caste system. The recognition of human being is its focus. Ambedkarite thought is its inspiration. It is separated and distinct from any other consciousness. Dalit Literature is unique because of its Dalit consciousness. (Limbale:P32)

As Daya Pawar puts it in his comments on Dalit consciousness in Vasudev Mulate's books, "Dalit consciousness is that revolutionary consciousness which

intersects the framework set by the upper middle class society. It shows affection towards the downtrodden” (Mulate: 13). Commenting on Dalit consciousness in the same book, Sharad Chandra Muktibodh says, “Being a Dalit is different from having Dalit consciousness. The literature which is produced from Dalit consciousness is Dalit Literature”. (Mulate: 13).

From the above mentioned view of Dalit consciousness, it is clear that Dalit consciousness differs from any other consciousness. It is ‘human-centric’ and it is related to the experiences of the Dalit communities. The Dalit experience is an integral part of a Dalit writer. After being conscious, the Dalit writers march ahead to fight against social ills and evils. This consciousness awakens in a Dalit writer through analysis of the ‘self’. Thus, Dalit literature is not individualistic in nature. The consciousness in Dalit literature is socio-centric and it vows for social change.

Dalit writers have presented a vision of “pain”, “rebellion” and “rejection” through their writings. The social mainstream considers one set of human beings superior and the others inferior, and thus differentiates between people. The birth of a person in a particular caste becomes the criterion for judging him/her:

The pain of a Dalit writer has been expressed by many Dalit writers .In *Kolhatyacha Por*, Kishor Shantabai Kale talks about it through *Baluta*. Daya Pawar depicts it. Thus, the pain of a Dalit writer becomes the focal point of Dalit literature in general and Dalit autobiography in particular.

The Dalit literature does not believe in shading tears and expressing grief but in revolting against the repressive trends in the society (Limbale: 134).

Dalits have suffered for ages. Lately, they have become conscious and have realized their potential. They no longer want to be subjugated to the upper castes. They have the torch of Ambedkar to take them forward. They have broken the shackles and have smashed all the barriers and hurdles in their paths. They are revolting for equal status in the society. 'Rejection' and 'revolt' in Dalit Literature has been born from the womb of Dalit pain. They are directed against a human system that was imposed on them. The rejection and revolt in Dalit Literature is portrayed socially and collectively. The rejection is aimed at the unequal order which has exploited Dalits. In the words of Limbale, "Its form is double-edged rejecting the unequal order and demanding equality, liberty, fraternity and Justice" (Limbale: P-31). As Limbale declares:

Resentment in Dalit literature has been the result of suppressed imitation for many years. This very resentment is the expression of anguish, rage and rebellion. The unequal social system caused anguish among Dalits. Since the pain of the Dalit writers gushed forth like a 'burst Dam', it is inappropriate to expect this pain to be restrained and artistic. It had remained suppressed for thousands of years. Now, the expectation of liberation has given it an explosive form (Limbale: P-36).

From the above statement, it is clear that Dalits, after gaining consciousness, began to improve themselves. Their lives were pathetic and

miserable. They experienced all sorts of hardships. Nobody tolerates repression after a certain period of time. A stage comes when the suppressed fight back. Now, that stage has come and the Dalits are fighting for their rights and equal opportunities.

Now, the Dalits have realized what is good and what is bad for them. Because of education, the Dalits have become more conscious and now they cannot be deceived by the upper caste people. They have launched their protest by using poetry. They have expressed themselves openly through poetry.

Marathi Dalit writing considers Jotiba Phule as a pioneering champion of the downtrodden and of Dalit rights. Mahatma Phule's contribution towards the emancipation of Dalits is outstanding. Phule expressed his views on Dalits' education frequently in his writings that, to be on par with men, women need to be educated first. Therefore, Mahatma Phule emphasized the need for education of Dalits. He believed that education for Dalits was the only weapon for eliminating social inequality. He realized that if a Dalit is educated, he/she can educate all his/her family members. Phule criticized about the atrocities against Dalits. He took a strong exception to cultural oppression by upper caste.

Phule believed that social activation would generate a solution to the multiple problems of Dalits. He fought relentlessly for the cause of Dalits' education. He worked every possible way for the betterment of Dalits. He made them aware of their being throughout his entire life. He strove hard for liberation, emancipation, and education of Dalits. He had immense faith in education

through his mission called 'Satya Sodhak Samaj' (Fact Finding Society). Phule campaigned for the cause of the downtrodden.

It was during the twentieth century that Ambedkar continued Jotiba Phule's work of a struggle for social emancipation. In fact Ambedkar considered Phule as one of his gurus. In order to lodge a strong protest, Ambedkar burnt Manusmruti (a holy book of the Hindus) which was considered to be the Manifesto of caste system. Ambedkar criticized the Manudharma Sastra severely as it imposed a number of restrictions on Dalits. Ambedkar wanted to eliminate such age-old customary beliefs. He wanted to eradicate the caste system and bring about social justice for the Dalits. Through his speeches and writings, Ambedkar tried to awaken the consciousness of Dalits. He attended the Round Table Conferences for equal rights of Dalits. Ambedkar wanted to liberate Dalits from the clutches of Brahminical domination.

Later, in the Indian constitution Ambedkar incorporated the principles of equality, freedom, and brotherhood and thus tried to liberate Dalits. Ambedkar prioritized the Dalits cause in the constitution. In this way, Mahatma Phule, Savitribai Phule, Tarabai Shinde, and Ambedkar inspired Marathi Dalit writing. They devoted themselves to the liberation of Dalits from slavery. They honoured Dalits and even made some legal amendments to give Dalits equal status with the people of the upper caste:

The Dalits represent their communities and in that their biographies really are socio-biographies. The very act of writing and autobiography for a

Dalit woman in Marathi represents a movement of self-realization for the entire community because the act of writing is located in a political struggle (Patil: 91-93).

Dalits have been inspired by Ambedkar's ideology. They have written poems and autobiographies and have asserted themselves. The dominant discourse of the Dalit movements does not adequately incorporate the contribution of Dalits to the movements. The autobiographies, therefore, continue to be meaningful for several generations in a caste-driven society for different readers in different social formations. No matter how specific they are referentially, they are major intercultural texts. Testimonies can be interpreted as a powerful moral medium to protest against the adversaries both from and outside it. Dalit testimonies can be seen as a potential initiative to engage with Dalit patriarchy and a larger social patriarchy. Dalit personal narratives are a kind of protest against the exploitation by the state on the one hand and market on the other. Dalit Autobiographies are also statements of protest against their exclusion from the Dalit public sphere, literary gatherings, academic gathering, publishing spheres, and other spheres of recognition.

Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* has been written in a deep rooted urge to engage with the history of the Mahar community's oppression. The political edge of the writing comes obviously from the radical, self assertive policies of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar to whose movements she belongs. Baby Kamble asserts in the 'foreward' of her book that she is writing for her people:

Today, our young educated people are ashamed of being called a Mahar, but what is there to be ashamed of? We are the great race of the Mahars of this Maharastra. We are its original inhabitants, the sons of the soil. The name of this land is also derived from our name... I love this word 'Mahar', our caste name. It flows in my veins, in my blood, and reminds me of our terrific struggle for truth (Kamble- ix).

Baby Kamble makes her stand very clear by stating herself in direct and self-conscious way in the very beginning of her book. Baby Kamble's autobiography is located in the tradition of direct self-consciousness. It also goes two steps ahead. It is a head-on confrontation with Brahminical hegemony on the one hand and with patriachal domination on the other. Without trying to glorify the life of the Dalit community (Mahar) in a celebratory mode of address, she explicitly states that her intension is to demonstrate how Brahminical domination has turned mahars into slaves, forcing them to live in conditions worse than animals. It is worthwhile to quote Baby Kamble at this point:

I have described in this book the details of the life of our community as I experienced it in the last fifty years. The readers should not feel ashamed of this history. I have tried to sketch a portrait of the actual life of the Mahars and the indignities they were subjected to. I am writing this history for my sons, daughters, and daughters-in-laws and for my grand children to show them how the community suffered because of the chains of slavery and so that they realize what ordeals of fire the Mahars have passed through. I also want to show them what the great soul Dr. Baba

Saheb Ambedkar single handedly achieved which no one else had achieved in ages (Kamble: IX – X).

Kamble states in very clear terms what she intends to do in her book. Kamble's book is almost like a social biography. It educates the readers about the history of the Mahars of Maharashtra in the last fifty years. Kamble doesn't seem to hide anything. She says whatever she has witnessed in her life. She is very clever and straightforward in terms of her outlook and thinking. In a way, Baby Kamble's book unravels the facts about the Mahar community in an explicit manner. It is a rich source of social survey. It exhibits the social reality of the Mahar community in a striking way. This book can also be considered a great social documentation of the Mahars of Maharashtra. Kamble's autobiography presents extremely graphic description of Dalit women's torturous lives. She has given enough information about the women who have been exploited and harassed in the name of God, religion, rituals, customs and traditions. For instance, girls married off at the age of five to six years and forced to do all the work of the household at such a tender age. If at all a girl made a mistake, she was punished severely. The mother-in-law of the girl ensures that the couple does not have the opportunity of being together.

The girls suffer a lot at their husband's house. Sometimes, they run away from their husband's house to the parents' house. But they are inevitably taken back and beaten black and blue. In case, the husband suspects their fidelity, the mother-in-law of the girl also supports her son against his wife. The in-laws of the girl chop off her nose which is a sign of her disloyalty to her husband. These are

the ways in which many Dalit women have suffered throughout their lives. The mother-in-law would pour poison in her son's ears against his hapless wife. She would whisper into his ears. :

Dhondya, what good is such a runaway wife to you? Some bastard must have made her leave you. She must be having an affair. You are her husband, but obviously the bitch prefers some one else. I suspect that this somebody is from our own community. This bitch will bring nothing but disgrace to us (Kamble: 100).

In this way, a newly married girl is harassed by her in-laws. According to Baby Kamble, a wild practice is to inculcate the idea of "humble Mahar woman, fall at your masters feet." It was made mandatory for them to say this phrase whenever they came across any upper caste man or even a young upper caste child. Sometimes, if a newly married girl failed to say this, there would be a huge fuss: "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?"(Kamble: 51).

Kamble narrates the condition of the people of her community in a vivid manner. The title of the book, *The Prison We Broke* indicates the living conditions of her people. She describes the conditions of her people thus "We were just like animals but without tails. We could be called human only because we had two legs instead of four. Otherwise, there was no difference between us and the animals. But how we had been reduced to this bestial state? Who was

responsible? Who else, but the people of the high castes!” (Kamble: 47). Kamble criticizes the upper caste Hindus here for their deeds. She expressed her views in a very straight forward and explicit manner. She seems to be agonized by the fact that the upper caste people had been exploiting Dalits for ages. They harassed them, troubled them, etc. She talks here from her experience. Her words look very pointed and sharp. We feel as if tremendous fire is coming out from her mouth when she reveals the painful experiences of her community. But at the same time, her statements look very promising and challenging.

In another incident, Kamble describes how the village women gather wood from the forest and sell it to make their both ends meet. They labour hard to collect it. But if the upper caste ‘Kaki’ in the village found even a small piece of thread along with the collected wood, the Dalit women were threatened and punished severely. In the course of her narration, Baby Kamble narrates a world which is constituted by a difference in location. This difference is not only in terms of geographical entity but also a linguistic one. A Dalit woman’s world is physically located on the margins of the village and also on the margins of the social imagery. The customs, the rituals, the rights, the festival, the “Jatras” that Baby Kamble describes are indeed a source of unexplored treasure for a sociologist. As Maxine Bernson says in her introduction to the Marathi edition of the book, they represent the composite apparatus of Brahminical domination, maintained to weave a web of superstition, illiteracy, ignorance, and oppressive practices. Baby Kamble debunks this apparatus in many ways using the dialect of her community, matching the rhythms but filling them with a subversive content.

Baby Kamble elaborates in some details about traditions in the Mahar community such as the offering of boys (the eldest one) to god as “portraj” and the girls as the “Murali” to the goddess. She points towards the conniving and hypocritical politics of the upper caste. For example, the “waghya-murali” tradition among the Mahars was established long back in Maharashtra. In her autobiography, Baby Kamble criticizes such rituals and practices among the Mahars. She describes the Devadasi system which brings disrespect to their individual selfhood. In the Devadasi system, young girls are married either to a god or goddess. This is done for the well-being and survival of a male child. The Devadasi system is prevalent among Dalits in several states in India. Baby Kamble criticizes the humiliating practice of the Devadasi system in the country. She also criticizes Dalit men for supporting this heinous system. She feels terribly disturbed by these wicked practices. In some parts of Maharashtra, it is still prevalent and has become a source of exploitation of the lower castes. In Devadasi System, the marriage usually occurs before the girls reach puberty and it requires the girls to become prostitute for upper caste community.

Such girls are known as ‘Joginis’. They are forbidden to enter into a real marriage. The term Devadasi means ‘a female servant of God’. Dalits offer their sons and daughters to the deity *Khandoba* (Jejuri in Maharashtra). The terms used are ‘*Waghya*’ for male and ‘*Murali*’ for female. Murali whose token marriage is performed with Khandoba remains unmarried throughout her life and leads a life as a Devadasi of *Yellama*.

Kamble describes in her autobiography that she rejects all forms of superstitions. She claims that, from her early childhood, she saw things such as giving one's own child to the "Potraj" or leaving a girl to become a "*Murali*" torturing a daughter-in-law in the name of God under the pretext that she is possessed by ghosts, etc. Kamble declares, "I detest all these practices. It is partly because of this feeling of disgust that I wrote the autobiography" (Pawar and moon: 297).

Baby Kamble criticizes both the upper caste social system as well as the Dalit patriarchal system severely. The Dalit women experienced patriarchal oppression, given that the oppressions of both caste and patriarchal system marked the lives of Dalit women in a particular way. The Dalit woman was exploited in the society because of her caste and her status as a weaker sex. She was looked down upon in the society. She was given a very heinous treatment both from the upper caste and the Dalit society. '*The Prisons We Broke*' is a stringent criticism of the patriarchal norms of society as well as within the Mahar community. Kamble's insistence on the charitable spirit of Dalit women and their love for husband is more a denunciation of the upper caste exploitation of Dalit women rather than patriarchal norms. She reveals many interesting facts about the political and ideological discourses reflected in folk literature as well as for the upper caste people. '*The Prisons We Broke*' brings forward amazingly infuriating and inspiring facts about Dalit women. In this regard, the remarks of Urmila Power against Dalit patriarchy are very apt: "Dalit men fight for humanity, but

what is humanity even they do not know, because they do not have humanity towards their wives” (Tapan: 237).

The above remarks by Urmila Power are appropriate and pertinent. She writes from her own experiences. Dalit Women decisively destroy the myths of patriarchal society which is proclaimed as democratic. Baby Kamble too in her autobiography exposes the suffering and physical tortures faced by Dalit Women. ‘*The Prison We Broke*’ shows the inhuman face of Dalit patriarchy. Many of the Dalit men torture their women inhumanly. They often beat them privately as well as publicly. They are suspicious by nature. They always suspect the fidelity of their wives. Physical torture not only causes harm to a woman’s body but also affect the woman psychologically. Dalit men in *The Prison We Broke* punish their wives severely for no fault. They chop off the nose of their women who are allegedly not loyal to them. Kamble vehemently criticizes Dalit patriarchy in general and the dominating nature of her husband in particular. She says:

My husband was very suspicious by nature. He used to beat me almost every day. The men folk of those times used to play with the lives of young girls without reason in this way. Sometimes I would be so scared of this harassment that I felt like committing suicide (Power and Moon: 294).

Baby Kamble further elaborates on her personal experiences. She says that she suffered a great deal in her household due to domestic violence. There was nobody to whom they could complain about this. She tolerated all these humiliations and suffering over the years. She says that her life was caught

between the blades of a pair of scissors. Kamble's greatness lies in struggling against these adverse conditions and emerging victorious in a male-dominated social setup because of the inspiring message of B. R. Ambedkar. She asserts how and why she gave utmost priority and preference to the Ambedkar ideology in her life. She was immensely influenced and motivated by Ambedkar's writings and social movements. Kamble worked with Ambedkar movements for social emancipation. Writing about this influence she says:

Ambedkar visited Phaltan when I was a child. The speech I heard then is fixed in my mind, 'get educated, eat less but educate yourselves.' Unless you are educated you will not lift yourselves up. Hinduism has until now shut the Dalits up in the darkness of ignorance, in the framework of the four varnas, but through education you can make progress (Power and Moon: 295).

Kamble discusses in her writings how she was attracted to the Ambedkar movement in the later stages of her life. Her husband never objected to her association with the Ambedkar movement. He was also an ardent follower of Ambedkar. She quotes Ambedkar's statement while comparing Ambedkar and Gandhi in terms of social service and says that Gandhi only showed sympathy towards untouchability and did not do anything substantial for the deprived sections of the society. Ambedkar however, worked to eradicate social misery from its roots. She feels that "... only when you are born in that race you can feel the real pain" (Pawar and Moon: 296).

Kamble's constitution to the Ambedkar movement cannot be sidelined. Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon appreciate the sterling work done by Dalit women for the growth of the Ambedkar movement. They interviewed all the Dalit Women who were instrumental in the movement. Urmila Pawar's *Amhihi Itihass Ghadawala* focuses on the involvement of women in various Dalit struggles from the early twentieth century drawing on diverse sources. It provides rich materials for historians. This book also throws light on how the social change took place in the society with the entry of Dalit women into the revolution. This book talks about the participation and contribution of Dalit women in various Dalit struggles during the early twentieth century. It is an important work documenting detailed interviews, and the history and the struggles of women in the early untouchable liberation movements. Ambedkar was converted to Buddhism. Buddhism means good character, the person who preaches Buddhism has to be morally upright and lead a virtuous and uncorrupted life. Advice from a pure tongue, such as the Dalit saint Chokha Mela, will transform millions of followers of Bhim into pure beings. The aim is to serve mother India well. That is why Ambedkar introduced Buddhism philosophy as the part of truth and righteousness. His greatness is apparent in the following lines:

Before him, millions of our people had broken their heads against the stone steps of temples, trying to reach their voices to gods who would not hear them. Generation after generation, they gave births to children, only to see them turn to dust. The creator gave us a human form, sent us down to earth, and abandoned us. He turned a blind eye to what was happening

in the world. It was our Bhim who finally breathed life into lifeless statues, i.e. the people of our community. It was he who lighted a lamp in each heart and brought light to our dark lives. First, he gave us life and then made us human being. The first need of a human being was education. He made it possible for us to receive education. He even spent his own money for that. He helped us to graduate and helped us obtain prestigious jobs. He made our household rich. He empowered us to obtain wealth and power. He demonstrated to the whole world that we had the ability to reach the highest position. (The Prison We Broke: 118)

The struggles yielded them three levels; humanity, education, and the religion of the Buddha. Baby Kamble was inspired by Ambedkar's thoughts. She joined the movement when she was eight. Ambedkar activists like Pandari Nath Kakade, Navachiwale, Laxman Kakade were all educated. They used to bring two news papers such as Daily Kesav and Daily Sakel to the Chowdi and read those out to the people sitting in the courtyard. Ambedkar published a news paper called Bahishkrut in which his speeches were reproduced. Men from both the Mahar lanes gathered to listen to them. The readers explained the issues to the people. The entire community was beginning to be aware. She grew up in that charged atmosphere. Ambedkar taught them that character is the foundation of human society. When compassion and morality follow character, society achieves its real strength. He wanted to transform society in the light of this philosophy. Many Dalits irrespective of religion embraced Buddhism after the influence of Ambedkar and his ideology, with the inspiration of Baba Saheb's speech. She sent

her children to school. Her sons studied very well. They became educated, with the help of her children. She started Ashrama Shala for the orphans. She was the president of Mahatma Phule Dhyan Vikas Prasarak Samstha.

Rejection and revolt in Dalit autobiographies have emerged from the womb of Dalit pain. Just as the anguish expressed in Dalit autobiography is in the nature of a collective social voice, the rejection and revolt are social and collective. This rejection is aimed at the unique order which has exploited Dalits. Its form is double-edged rejecting the unequal order and demanding equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice. Dalit writers use autobiography as a means to political and social assertion and portray their real-life problems and experiences. They choose the strongest means i.e. autobiography to fight against the social inequalities and injustices.

Dalit consciousness played a major role in the making of Dalit writers. The Dalit conscious writing by nature is intellectual and, therefore, scientific. The writer with Dalit consciousness analyzes the movements in society. The consciousness believes in change. Therefore, the writing which comes out from Dalit consciousness fights for social justice and equality and depends on an egalitarian society. 'Dalit consciousness' in Dalit literature has a revolutionary mentality. It is connected with struggle. It is a rebellion against the caste system and the recognition of human being is its focus. Ambedkarite thought is its inspiration. It is separate and distinct from any other consciousness. Dalit literature is unique because of its Dalit consciousness.

Education is the means of realizing one's desire which will help in developing one's personality and in improving one's status in all respects. Education has direct association with the socio-economic and political status of women. It is due to lack of education that the Dalit women are not able to come out of their poverty and marginalized conditions. This lack of education makes them to be ignorant and innocent. They are not aware of their own rights. They fail to take proper care for their hearts.

Most of Dalit women's assertions and liberation movements started with the speeches of Ambedkar. His speeches changed their lives significantly. Women also made history in the Ambedkar movement. Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon discuss several changes that accrued during the times of Ambedkar. Ambedkar started empowering women from his home. He made his wife Ramabai read and write. He was insistent on women getting educated as men and upper caste women. He stressed more on education, moral education and self-dignity in his speeches.

Ambedkar speeches at the Mahad Satyagraha brought about a revolution among the untouchable. Their thoughts and behaviour began to change. They began to participate in meetings and conferences in large number. Women's organizations were formed. Women began to speak with vigour at meetings and conferences. They went on processions and became active in the movement and its struggles. "We cannot forget that Ambedkar's liberal views on women were a motivating force behind this transformation of untouchable women" (Pawar and Moon: 158).

When Ambedkar was in the U. S., he wrote a letter to his neighbour congratulating him for sending his daughter to school. He said that it was wrong to say parents only give birth and rest of the life of the child depends on his Karma. He said, “Children must be moulded. If girls as well as boys are educated, there is no reason why we should not make rapid progress. So you must spread these thoughts at least among your close relatives.” Baba Saheb here succinctly points out about the responsibility of parents in the educating girl children (Pawar and Moon :158).

He started a co-education college also. The concept of co-education was not prevalent at that time. “Baba Saheb showed every one that girls had an independent existence in society as individuals” (*Pawar and Moon: 158*). He talked on child marriages cleanliness among women, responsibility of a mother to encourage her children to send them to school, morals, etc.:

However hard your life may be, send your sons and daughters to school. If the men bring home the meat of carcasses, oppose them strictly: Even if your clothes are torn, mend them and wash them before you wear them. There should be no visible difference between you and caste Hindu Women. Even if you do this much, it will be as if you are playing an important role in the activity of liberating our community (Pawar and Moon: 159-160).

He further explained the responsibility of family planning. He said that poverty and large number of children would hinder the progress of the

community. He stressed on the pain of a mother for bearing fourteen to fifteen children. He explained to them about the consequences and problems if a mother bore more children. Most of his speeches aimed at liberating and empowering Dalit women. The writers mentioned in the book by Pawar and Moon, reasoned that the western education had inculcated a liberal ideology (gender, equality) in Ambedkar. He appealed to women to give up prostitution: “Give up prostitution and live a moral life. We are not afraid of poverty; it is with us from our birth. So do not take up this profession for fear of poverty.” He gave a lot of opportunities to women in agitations and in press – *Janata Weekly* (Pawar and Moon: 165).

Another essay in the book, “Enlightenment Through Literature” brings out different Dalit women voices in black and white. The women established a literary discussion society to discuss literature, folk songs, and debates on different issues. The main reason was to assert the voice of women along with voices of mainly Dalit and mainstream male writers. Swathy Margaret in her essay “Dalit Women Writers” talked about how one should not give speech for the others to define them. In an autobiographical account of her life in the University of Hyderabad, she critiqued the domination of Dalit male students in Ambedkar Students’ Association, she mentions that the Dalit girl students are meant to give away the bouquets and to distribute refreshments. She thought of women’s participation in the student union. Women began to articulate their opinions through letters in the news papers. They began to ask questions in the news papers about the events taking place around them. They thus transformed them into writings. “Dalit women writers took the position that all must be aware

of the need to limit the number of children. Birth control is the responsibility of both men and women. Just as women help men in all their work, men should help women in child birth, child rearing, and the education of children” (Pawar and Moon: 170).

The book brought out the writings of many Dalit women who wrote for Janata Weekly. An article entitled “Fashionable Young Women” by Sheel Shejwal satirizes the basic rules for the bride and bridegroom during marriages. A major column visible in these writings was by women in education. Mahatma Phule, pointing out that there is no progress without education, says:

For want of living, the mind was lost
For want of a mind, morality was lost
For want of morality, attention was lost
For want of attention wealth was lost
The Sudras collapsed from lack of wealth
So much loss from a lack of learning (171)

He says further that “Baba Saheb’s emphasis in all his teaching was education. So in any meeting, he would first speak on education. Now women also began writing in periodicals on this subject” (Pawar and Moon: 171). Parvathi Pachade writes an article on the subject of Education:

Women should not expect to get men’s sympathy in every task they do. They should not continue themselves to the kitchen and the children. They must develop themselves. We must seek out grains of knowledge for

ourselves. Women must remember that their progress can only come from education (Pawar and Moon: 172).

Let us now turn to Bama for her views on Dalit consciousness as explained in her writing. 'Bama' is the pen name of a Tamil women writer. She has published an autobiography, *Karukku* (1992). She belongs to a Roman Catholic family. She was one of the first Dalit women writers to be widely recognized and translated. She was a school teacher in Uthiramerur. *Karukku* is one of the first Dalit women autobiographies by a woman from Tamilnadu. For a long time, Dalit literature was thought to be the product of Maharashtra alone. Literary works, like Bama's *Karukku*, have opened the horizons of Dalit literature to other nearby states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and so on. While Marathi Dalit writers showed their hostile life styles in their literary works, Bama not only showed injustice and inequality in her village but also paved the way for achieving an egalitarian society. A Dalit woman is a Dalit amongst Dalits, doubly oppressed by a patriarchal and caste tyrannical society. A Dalit woman nonetheless has exemplary endurance and the indomitable spirit to bounce back against all odds. The time has come for Dalit writers to challenge their subjugation through their writings.

Lakshmi Holmstrom in the introduction to this book mentions some of the insights of Raj Gauthaman who says that Dalit writing should awaken every reader and develop a consciousness about their oppression. Raj Gouthaman also suggests that the new Dalit writing should be "an Indian version of World-wide Literature of the Oppressed".(*Karukku*:P-10) Hence, as I understand it, the main

function of such writings is to show the reality and raise the consciousness of human rights, social justice, and equality in the minds of the Dalits. The irony is that many of the Dalits themselves do not know the pain, suffering, and agony of their community. The other part of the community lives as if the oppressed life is what God had ordained for them. Baby Kamble questions such beliefs of her own community in her autobiography '*The Prisons We Broke*'. It was believed that goddess Satwai and God Barana visit the house at midnight to write the future of a new born on its forehead. She brings out very interesting arguments of gods practicing discrimination. She sarcastically points out that they might use a readymade sharp object to write the future of a Dalit child who is born to bear the cross of suffering as he or she grows up. She bluntly mentions that religion must have bribed them quite well to do so. "In order to challenge their state or affairs, all Dalits who have been deprived of their basic rights must function as God's word, piercing to the very heart. Instead of being more and more beaten down and blunted, they must unite, think about their rights, and battle for them" (XIII). Says Bama in the author's note to *Karukku*. This shows her dedication, determination, intellectual and visionary aspirations to educate her community. The title too is very carefully thought out and is aptly chosen for the context. Her explanation of the title creates an interest in the readers and it is aptly substantiated by the context of the text. *Karukku* is a Tamil word which means "palmyra leaves". It has very sharp edges like a sword. She explains the intended pun on the title. "Karu" means a seed that connotes "freshness" and "newness". It is metaphorically used as double-edged sword. She refers to it as the words of God,

“for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. Piercing to the division of soul and spirit of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intention of the hearts” (Hebrews 4:10). So, her autobiography is a double-edged sword. It cuts across many boundaries and brings out the ultimate truth. As she observes:

The driving forces that shaped this book are many: events that occurred during many stages of my life, cutting me like *Karukku* and making me bleed; unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating; my own desperate urge to break, throw away and destroy these bonds; and when the chains were shattered into fragments, the blood that was split then; all these, taken together. (Karukku: XIII)

Bama's *Karukku* is an autobiographical statement of a Dalit woman. Generally, a Dalit woman is a Dalit amongst the Dalits. She is thus doubly oppressed by her caste and gender. One edge challenges the oppression and another edge brings out the reforms. These edges that have cut her a lot till then have turned their violent sides now. In Bama's case, her position is further endangered by her existence as Dalit Christian. Hence, *Karukku* focuses on the essential forces that cut across and seam Bama's life, namely; caste, gender and religion. One edge challenges the oppressors and another edge brings out reforms. These edges that had cut her a lot till then have turned their violent side now. In Bama's case her position is further endangered by her existence as a dalit

Christian ,hence karukku focus on three essential forces that cuts across and sears Bama's life ,namely; caste,gender and religion.

Karukku explains Bama's life journey to success. On the contrary, *Karukku* is a painful journey that is open-ended and many questions are left unanswered. It is not a "complete success story" like a connectional autobiography. It is rather a revolution of bitter reality of the society confronted by a Dalit woman. *Karukku* is a reflection of different themes like religion, recreation, education, etc. Through these perspectives, Bama gives us a clear picture of the caste oppression given out in portions to the Dalit Christians not only by the the upper caste society but more so with in the catholic church itself. Bama has always had an inner urge to actively engage herself in alleviating the sufferings of the oppressed. She comes forward to fulfill her aspirations. But very soon she realizes that the catholic institutions are filled with caste prejudice and hatred. The book is about Bama's inner quest for trying to establish the existence of "the police are searching for clues " they are searching for the self-discovery and the resultant courage , which is forces her to move away from the life of a nun to live the life of a Dalit Woman.

Bama has never heard people speak openly of untouchability until her third standard in school when she realizes for the first time, her community's pathetic state is ironically tinged with humour. As she was coming back from school, she finds an elder person from her street holding out a small packet of snacks, in a string without touching it and giving it to Naickers in the village. Bama first could not help laughing out, looking at that funny sight. "The manner

in which he was walking along made me want to double up. I wanted to shrink – exclamation mark with laughter at the sight of such a big man carrying a small pocket in that fashion” (Bama: 2000: 2-15). When she went home, she again fell in a bout of laughter while relating that incident to her elder brother. But Annan (elder brother) did not laugh. He explained to her that the elder from the street was carrying the parcel like that because he was a parayan, an untouchable.

The Naickers were the upper caste men and, hence, would not touch anything brought by the parayas. That incident showed the first seed of fury and revolt in Bama. The very thought that an elder person of her community should be put to such humiliation made her furious. The self-questioning had begun. Bama began to wonder, “What did it mean when they call us ‘paraya’? Had the name become obscene? But we too are human beings” (Bama: 13).

Bama started to look out for means to uplift herself and her community from this trampled existence. Her Annan shows her the right and tells her that education is the only way to attain equality:

Because we are born into the paraya jati, we are never given any honour or dignity with respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lessons, people will come to you of their own accord and attach themselves to you. Work hard and learn (Bama: 15).

These words of her brother really encouraged her considerably. She did what he said: “The words that Annan spoke to me that day made a deep impression on me. And I studied hard, with all my breath and being, in a frenzy almost. As Annan had urged, I stood first in my class and because of that many people became my friends. Even though, I am a parachi” (Bama 15) this shows how important is the role of education and the use of intellect are for the betterment of the self and the community.

Sometimes, it appears as if the brain is not adequately used in the revolt of Dalits. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar advocated Dalits to unite, educate, and enlighten themselves to agitate. Baby Kamble in *The Prisons We Broke* writes how the speeches of Ambedkar had helped them know their state of living. However, Bama never mentions the name of Ambedkar in playing a role in her visionary aspirations to educate her community. Baby Kamble mentions how Ambedkar had been received at her place. “This man is nothing less than a miracle of God, that’s why he’s been able to cross the seven seas you know” (Kamble: 63). His speeches made them realize that they would have ever thought of them though there is no obvious reference to the spirit of what Ambedkar says to be present in Bama’s work.

Bama was a very good observer even as a child “when I was studying in the third class, I had not yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen felt, experienced and been humiliated by what it is”. She writes in the beginning of the second chapter that every Dalit experienced such humiliation and discrimination. They believe that they came to them naturally as

rains in the rainy season and sun lights in the summer. One cannot oppose these acts of suppression without knowing the basic freedom and human rights he or she possesses in such a democratic country like India. This happens only if one is educated. With the support and help of her brother, she understands the importance of Education. Education, thus, works as a path of light in their dark lives of suffering. Bama realizes the oppression by herself knowing the problem very well. She resolves to study well and make wonders like any upper caste student. Bama, on the other hand, realizes their potential through the speeches of Ambedkar. Kumde Pawde in “The Story of My Sanskrit” too had experienced such humiliation in her life. Those humiliations have helped her pursue what a Dalit could not even think of – reading Sanskrit. Besides learning it, she even teaches it. She explains how she has been inspired to do so in her autobiography “this disgust is extremely familiar to me.”

Another important issue in the lives of Dalits which has been discussed in *Karukku* is “the act of naming”. Names do play an important role in everyone’s life. But in a Dalit’s life, it has a very different role. The names sometimes proclaim the caste and class. The names are not fashionable or good to hear. So, they are mocked at by the upper caste villagers. Bama has narrated a lot of incidents in the book related to names wherein she describes how each one is named based on his or her talent and peculiar quality. A lot of affection is evident when the people in the community call each other by their names:

The names you heard along our street really surprise you. People’s baptismal names given at church were one thing, the names we used in the

street were quite another. One child's name was Munkovam, short-temper. A woman was called Midday-masala as one day she ground masala at midday and made curry. A certain child who was very dark-skinned and plump was named Murugan-spring pig. It seems that pigs wandered about, well-fed and plump, by the spring of Murugan; that's why. There was a woman who leaked all over her legs when she revealed herself; she was called Kazhinja, leaky. A small girl who went off to practice swimming in the well, but could only manage to float, was promptly named Medenda, Floater.... I could go on and on. Konnavachi (Starter), Deaf-one, Dumbo, Crazy, Severiyaa (Xavier), Black-ant, Manacchi (Flatnose), Uzhamuki (Running Nose), Green-nose, Needle-bum. All sorts of names are like that (Bama: 7-8).

Naming is a part of the life of the Dalits and Bama has narrated these very realistically and ordinarily. It happens in each and every generation. "My mother in her village is called "Bodi" (shaven-head) because my grandmother used to always shave her head in her childhood. These names continue even now. They call me "Cheemudu Mukku" (Running Nose) because I used to have a cold and running nose always, even in summer in my childhood. This is how the names are coined in villages. No one gets offended." This is the reality and ordinariness that Bama narrates in the book.

Religious disparities are another issue that drew my attention in the book. Dalits always follow the precepts of the church very closely because they are made to believe that they should follow them more strictly than anyone else as

doing so rewards them a better life. They are made to believe that it is God who has made everyone and everyone is equal in the eyes of God.

The homily of a priest on Sunday starts, “You should come to church regularly. He gives everything you need, and He knows your hearts desires”. Such preaching increases their hopes for a better life. Being a Christian and, moreover, an ex-seminarian, I agree with some of the things. Bama has narrated that the church (priests, pastors) sometimes respects the upper caste people more than Dalits. Even the church is not devoid of discriminations. Bama has clearly and boldly narrated how Dalits are treated by some of the priests in her village. The priests, who are meant to be representatives of Christ, never treat Dalits equally. Much of Dalit literature has talked about Hinduism exploiting Dalits, but to my knowledge, this is the first autobiography to bring out the disparities in Christianity. The missionaries who came to India decades ago have induced Dalits to convert to Christianity for money and material benefits. But at the same time, we must not forget the efforts they have made to treat Dalits as human beings. These missionaries were the first human beings to do so. The first letters of alphabet were taught to Dalits by these missionaries. Baby Kumble writes how Ambedkar had been criticized by some of the Dalits as having imposed western and Christian thoughts on them when he appealed to them to get educated and stop daily material jobs for upper caste people.

Education has always had a western and Christian tag attached to it. But it is surprising to see how these practices have turned against the Dalits. Bama dreamt for a better life after becoming a nun so as to educate her community. Her

efforts went in vain. She found no difference over there too. The priests and nuns had been oppressing Dalits like any other upper castes. “Even amongst the priests and nuns, it is the upper caste who hold all the high positions, show off their authority and throw their weight about. And if Dalits become priests or nuns, they are pushed aside and marginalized first of all, before the rest go about their business”(Bama: 69). These things incited the others as well like the school teacher who prevented her from going to celebrate her first communion scoping. “What celebration can there be in your caste for communion?” (Bama: 11) What do Dalit do in such situation? To whom could they complain? Bama, a staunch believer and devotee, was hurt by the orders and practices of the convent which were imposed on the Dalits. She thought that being a nun would help her achieve her heart’s desire to educate her community. But it ended up as a futile attempt. She was discovered with the discrimination within the convent and by the convent clergy.

The rich and upper caste people were always given preference and were respected. This is not what a man or a priest is expected to do. She found that they lived a life of poverty. Is God listening to their cries? God only knows that the priests in the village never help them in their troubles and tribulations. There are incidents in *Karukku* when the priest helped the police and were not willing to conduct mass for them in their victory when they won the judgment in their favour regarding the cemetery issue. She narrated how the church exploited them. The entire autobiography is an account of her spiritual journey from being a child devotee to becoming a nun with a desire to uplift her community. It is her self-

education and revelations that made her show the world that the life of a Dalit Christian woman could strengthen her vision and aspirations. She realizes the importance of education for herself and for her community at large. Her prime motive in joining the nunnery was to help the poor and alleviate their suffering and to educate them.

Bama asserts at the end of the autobiography that children and grown-ups will no longer listen to everything they are told open-mouthed and nodding their heads. They have realized that they have been maintained as the stone steps that others have trodden on as they raised themselves up. They have become aware that they have been made slaves in the name of God (94). We can see how she had Ambedkarite thoughts even if she did not openly acknowledge being influenced by his speeches. Bama polished the other edge of her sword at the end of her autobiography to challenge the upper caste by saying:

They have become aware that they too were created by God. There is a new strength within them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far respected, ruined, obliterated; and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect and with a love towards all humankind. To my mind, this alone is true devotion (Bama: 94).

She almost becomes a revolutionary at the end. She raises her voices asking how long they can deceive us with hypocrisy. Education has helped her know their conditions and proclaim it to the world. This too works like a double-edged sword.

But how easy is it for a Dalit to go to school and study for a minimum of fifteen years to get a job? Can the Dalit parents afford to do that? Do ‘reservations’ help them in any sense? They rather divide them into groups. Bama too has explained their conflict in the book:

God knows what will happen at the end. They fight to the death one moment and the other moment, they join together again. Suddenly and for no reason at all, they will be fighting and wrestling with each other. A hundred times a second there are scuffles amongst them. Shameless fellows. Of course the upper-caste men will laugh at them. Instead of uniting together in a village of many castes, if they keep challenging each other to fights, what will happen to all these men in the end? (Bama: 41)

She gives a clear picture of Dalits in villages which is very much true. There are lots of silly fights between some lower caste people. Sometimes the scenario becomes very hostile and serious and the police have to visit the place to put things under control. Bama uses all these anecdotes and incidents to show how they have been victimized several times. There would be fights between upper caste people, but the police interfere only to find fault with the Dalits always. Such is the ignorance of the Dalits. Bama has insisted on this. Their ignorance is the capital for the upper caste people to exploit them. Baby Kamble mentions Ambedkar’s speech where he begins saying, “You do not worship God; you worship your ignorance!” (Kamble: 64) Everyone banks on this ignorance to exploit the Dalits. Sometimes they do not even listen to educated people.

Ambedkar's speech was debated by Dalits as to whether to follow it or not. His thoughts have faced very horrid criticism. One of the Dalit elders said:

Why do you want us to put our children in school? Are they going to become teachers? Or are they going to become Brahmins? Send them to school indeed! That's pure drivel! Listen, you can't make the river flow backwards. The village land is our mother. We have to carry forward whatever order she has given us. Why do we need foreign knowledge? The yesker's stick is the mark of happiness of the land. We have in us real Mahar flesh and blood. And you preach this Christian knowledge?....That women also keep blabbering the same nonsense constantly (Kamble: 67).

Old habits die hard, especially among older people. Baby Kamble later in the book mentions: "However, they could not hold their own in the arguments with the young men and found themselves completely outwitted" (Kamble: 69). She highlights the kinds of changes that occurred after Ambedkar's speeches.

Besides this typical notion of elders, they face another problem that prevents them from studying is poverty. This poverty prevents a girl child from seeing how school books live. A girl child as Bama mentions is meant for looking after the house. "It was always the girl children who had to look after chores at home" (Bama: 45). Bama states a little later:

Life is difficult if you happen to be poor, even though you are born into the upper castes. When this is the case, the condition of those, who are born into the paraya community, as the poorest of the poor, struggling for

daily survival, doesn't need spelling out... In the midst of all this, how can they be expected to look after their children and make sure they go to school? In the face of such poverty, the girl children cannot see the sense in schooling, and stay at home, collecting firewood, looking after the house, caring for the babies and doing household chores (Bama: 68) .

Everyone has to work to eat. There is no distinction between men and women. Dalit women do a lot more work than men, but the wages they get at the end of the day is lesser than what a man gets. There is a lot of exploitation here too. The concept of pollution is a lot more severe for Dalit women than for Dalit men. Bama narrates how she found these things funny yet painful at the end.

Among all these disparities, the girl child is always loaded with work during the village festivals. She gets some sort of false happiness as Baby Kamble puts it. Bama used to work a lot during Christmas and Easter celebrations. Girl children are made to work like machines during these days. Comparatively, it is a very huge task for Dalit women to be educated because they lack the supports they need from their family. The feeling that their daughter is studying further increases their worries. It is a difficult task for them to get a husband in the same caste. This is one of the reasons why girl children are not encouraged to go for higher studies. "Then they said it would be difficult for me to find a husband in my community if I went for further education. So they wrote off to a few places to find out about teacher training." (Bama: 64)

Teachers play an important role in the Dalit student's life. The Dalit students are severely punished. "I don't want to be beaten by teacher; I want to study well; I want to be clever. We prayed all sorts of things like that" (Bama: 77). There are a lot of discriminations in the school such as low caste, low class, and so on. The triple oppression of a Dalit girl starts in the school. Though Bama was the topper in the class, she had to face a lot of humiliation:

The PT teacher would ask all the Harijan children to stand up either at assembly, or during lessons. We'd stand, they'd write down our names, and then ask us to sit down again. We felt really bad then. We'd stand in front of nearly two thousand children, hanging our heads in shame, as if we had done something wrong. Yes, it was humiliating. (Bama:18)

The irony is that, for most of the students, the teacher was the first role model. Needless to say, even Bama too was inspired by the names who were teachers in the school. They had indirectly planted a seed of seeing and making her entire community foresee a better tomorrow. It was not until she experienced the real things. She was very much disappointed to see them with naked eyes in the convent paradoxically. Bama chose the same field to become a nun and to uplift her community:

It struck me overwhelmingly that these nuns collectively oppressed Dalit children and teachers so very much; why should I not become a nun too and truly help these people who are humiliated so much and kept under such a control? (Bama: 20).

Another important issue commonly discussed by most of the Dalit women writers is of women being possessed. No one knows how far these treacherous acts are true. But in the name of being possessed, women were being brutally tortured. This is such a painful act. Sometimes the women were beaten black and blue to get the devil out of the house. Bama has narrated the incidents which happened in their villages:

This is also an act of ignorance. I saw some women in my village being tied to a tree and whipped. No upper caste woman has ever been possessed according to my knowledge. Surprised by the fact, I asked my Grandmother. She replied that the upper caste women never come out of their houses, and these devils roam around the fields and enter some Dalit woman who always works in the fields (Kamble: 60).

Bama, unlike other autobiographers who seemed to have escaping tendencies, thought to help her community understand the value of education. Sarah Beth examined how the educated Dalits found it difficult to come back to where they lived.

She reasons out that the education has opened new doors for them. They are no more willing to bear humiliation from the upper caste people. Dalit women are always at the receiving end of the most vulgar and abusive language. Dalit women being called by names is a common phenomenon. SivaKami in *Grip of Change* narrates how her father calls her names: “Panchaimmal was once selected to enact a male role in the school play. On stage, instead of saying, ‘the women

from Bombay', she said 'the bitch from Bombay'. The drama committee decided, "Lower caste students should not be given roles in school plays" (163). Bama too narrates the way they were being called "children of whores" (58) by the upper caste people.

Bama in *Karukku* has described the painful life of herself as well as of her community. Her perseverance to get education is exemplary. I have tried to argue that she too has mentioned that it is education that has helped her understand her state of life and it is education that has helped her to show the reality to the world and to aim to come out of it. She has not thought from a selfish perspective. She has aspired to educate her own community by bringing them together, by making them understand the harsh realities of Dalit life, and then by agitating them to come out of such oppression.

Bama contemplates, 'In this society, if you are born into a lower caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Caste difference does not disappear wherever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up. Caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy. It is because of this that we are unable to find a way to study well and progress like everyone else. And this is why, a wretched life style is all that is left to us.

If you are born into low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle... We are forced to suffer pain and humiliation... Are Dalits not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such

attributes as a sense of honour and self-respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack? They treat us in whatever way they choose, as if we are slaves who don't even possess human dignity and if ever a Dalit gets wise to this and wants to live with some honour and self-respect (Bama: 24) .

It was against these odds that Bama completed her Under-Graduation and B. Ed. and decided to become a teacher. She worked in a convent and found that the nuns working there constantly oppressed the Dalit children studying there and treated them with contempt. She painfully recalls the nuns commenting on the Dalit children thus “look at the Cheri children! When they stay here, they eat their fill and look as round as potatoes, but look at the state in which they came back from home – just skin and bone” (Bama: 2000: 17-18). It was then that Bama was suddenly struck with the idea of becoming a nun and truly to help the Dalit children. She took a drastic step of resigning her job as a teacher and extend the religious order. She entered a particular order since she “had read about the woman who founded that particular order how she had done so for the sake of the poor and lowly; lived and died for them alone. I wanted to be like her, living only for the poor and downtrodden” (Bama: 20-21). Bama worked in a Christian Order which is a British-based monthly magazine for traditional Catholics. Originally called the Christians democrat, it changed its name in January 1960 where the Tamils were considered inferior and a Tamil Parayar was the lowest of the lot and held no esteem. The order itself had its own reservation about the Harijan women

and “would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns” and felt “that there was a separate order for them somewhere:” (Bama: 22).

Bama was admitted to the order only after it was confirmed that a convent had asked for her services. After Bama became a nun, she joined the convent with the single purpose of serving the under-privileged. But to her horror, she found that the convent is not devoid of caste consciousness. The upper caste students enjoyed a better status and more respect from the nuns. The nuns in the convent constantly threw insults and abuses against the Dalit students. The Dalit children did jobs like sweeping the premises and washing and cleaning the lavatories. The nuns felt that “low caste people are all degraded in some way. They think we have no more moral discipline nor cleanliness and culture” (Bama 2000:22-23)

She looks back on her own attitude towards Christianity and religious faith. She realizes that religious activities were forced on the Dalit converts right from their childhood. She recalls that they were forced to attend the Bible classes and memorize original oral instructions of religion. Catechisms are usually written in the form of questions and answers. Classes and the morning *pusai* (prayer) were a must for all Dalit children. Absence from the classes was severely dealt with. “The cane fell on us with the sharpness of a whip” (Bama: 2000:71) so ironically fear was instilled in the children to spread the gospel of love! Even the weekly confessions were to be learnt by heart:

I praise to the lord omnipotent. Bless me Sami, for I have sinned, it is a week since I made my last confession. I lied four times; I stole five times,

I have not obeyed my elders; I was daydreaming in the church, I repent these and those sins that I have forgotten saami. This was always the formula (Bama:73).

Religion itself was a formulaic. It was only after Bama left school did “the fear – *bhayam* that I felt towards God gradually left me, and love – *Paasam* grew” (Bama: 2000:87). In spite of all those mechanical drills, Bama still had faith in religion. She believed to be spreading the message of love and brotherhood living in the convent as a nun. She found that there was sea of divide between two; Christian belief and practice. The nuns left the Bible preaching to move theory, literally carrying nothing of it to practice.

Jesus associated himself with the poor and oppressed and fought for justice and fairness. But nobody in the convent seemed to insist that God is righteous and would be angered by injustice and falsehood. “There is a great deal of difference between this Jesus and the Jesus what is made known through daily pieties” (Bama: 2000:90). Bama realizes that she cannot live a life of duplicity, pleading. Duplicity of pleading consists in multiplicity of distinct matter to one and the same thing, whereunto several answers are required. Duplicity may occur in one and the same pleading, and play a dual role. One has to be true to oneself. Having realized that there was no connection between the “Convert’s God” and the suffering poor, Bama’s mind is tormented. Completely alienated from her environment, Bama decides to leave the order. But “how long can one play-act this way? Any way it was not possible for me. I had to leave the order come into

the world” (Bama 200:93). Bama thus “leaves one community (of religious women) in order to join another (as a Dalit woman).” (Holmstrom 2000:1X)

Having come out of the religious order, Bama feels a sense of fulfillment and “belonging” to the community of Dalit women despite the fact that she is economically insecure. *Karukku* is thus a pathetic and moving statement of suffocation and suppression of the trampled and marginalized existence of the Dalits. The book is also revolution of the inner strength and vigor of Dalit women as represented by Bama. Bama’s experiences open up new perspective for Dalit women. We find these centuries of oppression have not succeeded in completely sapping the vitality and inner strength of the Dalits. Dalit women in particular have enormous strengths and vigour to bounce back against all odds if *Karukku* explodes with the realistic description of the subjugated.

Narendra Jadhav’s ‘*Outcaste: A memoir*’ (2002) discusses various stages of his parents’ lives. His family struggled for equality and justice. While his community accepted its status as its fate, Jadhav’s father became consciousness of his oppression and caste discrimination. He rebelled against the oppression of the caste system and traveled from a small village at Ozar in Maharashtra to the city of Mumbai to escape prosecution. At the beginning of ‘*Outcaste*’, 20 years old Damu, the chief protagonist of the story is addressed contemptuously as “Mahar”. Mahar is Damu’s caste, stigma, and destiny. It tells the world that he is the lowest of the low in the Hindu ‘chaturvarna’ system, the system of four castes. He belongs to a lower caste and his touch pollutes. The place is Damu’s ancestral village in western Maharashtra. The date is March 1, 1930. Three years before

this Mr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar had thousand of Dalits at the Choudhar pond in Mahad in a peaceful agitation for water rights, soon after Damu's present ordeals. He will launch a satyagraha demanding entry for Dalits into the Kala Ram temple in Nasik. Damu stands facing the fouzdar, the police chief. The fouzdar ordered him to get the body out. Damu refused and cried out thus:

"I will die but I will not bow down before you. Come on, beat me all you come and kill me. Let the world know that a helpless Mahar was killed during his duty. See, the entire village is witnessing your atrocities for refusing to do a task that talks outside his traditional village duties. Such defiance from an untouchable is not to be tolerated. The Fouzdar abuses and whips him. Damu pleads for mercy but will not give in. Instead, the Fouzdar turns his foul tongue on Baba Saheb Ambedkar for Damu that is blasphemy. Baba Saheb is his God. On that day, he felt very insulted. Damu's reaction is noteworthy:

Damu let out a scream, asking Sonu to shut up. This was a matter between men. A woman had no say in this. 'What kind of tradition is this that treats Mahars worse than cats and dogs!' Damu yelled. 'I spit on these inhuman traditions. I am not going to abide by such traditions. I am a man of dignity and I will not go from house to house begging for baluta. What are all of you going to do? Kill me?' (Outcaste: A Memoir: 10)

He threw away the miserable crutches of traditional village duties which he had been saddled with and returned to Mumbai. He worked in Mumbai before and knew the freedom and dignity of "touchability" and reclaimed human dignity

before in Mumbai. Damu and his wife Sonu did not see the latter's mother for nearly five years. They did not have any work in Mumbai. They had come to Ozar. He hoped that, in his village, he would do some work. So he visited his village and stayed with his parents for a few days. It was only three hours away, to his wife Sonu's village. She recalled the desperation of their lives in Mumbai. She had desperately prayed for some changes in the situation. Her prayer had been answered and some changes were in the offing. The word had come from her husband village that it was his turn to perform the Yeskar duty.

Traditionally, every Mahar household took turns performing this duty for three months as a village servant. A Yeskar went from house to house bearing news of the village. He announced Deaths and tended to the carcass of cattle. He ran as a human pilot in front of the carriages of government officials, signing their praises and announcing their arrival. Any odd job thus came up was assigned arbitrarily to the yeskar who never dared to question the practice in return. He was given a handful of grain and was allowed to go begging from house to house for leftovers.

When he was called upon to undertake his annual duty, he was enraged that his uncles and cousins still expected him to carry out such a humiliating task. His wife Sonu for the first time saw him walking from house to house asking for Baluta. She realized why he was so averse to being a yeskar. He was reluctant to perform yeskar duties. "We must have self-respect. We must have dignity as human beings. How can I take to begging from door to door? Baluta is our birth right. They proudly claim! My foot. Have you seen how they throw the food? I

don't want rights as a dog. I want my human rights". He was determined to establish his identity as a respectful human being. He was reluctant to perform yeskar duties and went back to Mumbai to participate in Babasaheb Ambedkar's social movement.

Ambedkar's social reform movements carried a significant place for Dalit community in general and for Dalits of Maharashtra in particular with educational awareness created by the architect of the Indian constitution. Dalits became socially conscious about the circumstances and social problems of untouchability and caste discrimination during the period from 1920 to 1956. He was influenced by the writings and political activities of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar. He argued the case of the untouchables from the boundaries of the village to the round table conference. Ambedkar launched the social liberation movement for equal rights and opportunities of the deprived and downtrodden section of society. In 1924, after years of struggle in Mumbai, when he got a regular job in the Railways, he met the Tau Master and sought his blessing. He was the only educated Mahar from his village. Tau Master said finally just as he was about to leave. "There is a meeting tomorrow evening at Narely Park. Meet me outside Parel station at six" (Outcaste: A Memoir: 21) Ambedkar's call to Dalits to "educate, unite, agitate" was the slogan chanted at Baba Saheb Ambedkar's rally that day. He felt excited thinking about the potent energy of the social movement. The untouchables finally found a savior. In 1926, when he got married, his wife Sonu was too young to join him. So they returned to Mumbai from his village. The Dalit meeting would be held at Mahar near Mumbai.

Ambedkar's speeches at the Mahar Satya Graha brought out a revolution among the untouchables and their thoughts and behaviors began to change. Following the initiative of the state legislative, the Mahar municipality had passed a resolution to allow the untouchables for full access to all village waterfronts. Under the hostile eyes of the upper caste people, this resolution remained only on paper and the untouchables never dared to exercise their rights. Baba sahib decided to hold the meeting at Mahad for the execution of the resolution for the untouchables.

He explained the untouchables to do away with the humiliating and enslaving traditions of village duties like carrying away dead cattle, etc. "It is utterly disgraceful to sell your human rights for a few crumbs of bread." "We will attain self-elevation only if we learn self-help, regain our self-respect and gain self-knowledge." He talked about cleanliness among the Dalits and the responsibility of parents towards their children to send them to school. "There will be no difference between parents and animals if they do not desire to see their children in better position than their own". It was 19 March, 1927 when he reached Mahad. Tens of thousands of people had assembled there. People of all ages came there to participate in the great event. The plan was that everyone would go marching to the Choudar tank. There was a water reservoir from which upper caste Hindus took water. The procession started with Baba sahib in the lead. They marched in a disciplined manner in rows of four shouting slogans to 'educate, unite and agitate'. The square reservoir was surrounded by houses of Brahmins on all sides. At every door and window of their houses, there were full

of people who looked on helplessly at the huge crowd gathering around their tank and polluting its sanctity. Baba Saheb walked with the thousand of expectant followers, calmly bent down, cupped some water in his palms, and drank it.

“There was a loud excited cheer of ‘Jai Bhim’ as all of us took a symbolic sip of water.” “Then, Baba Saheb proclaimed publicly that we were asserting our rights as human beings. We were making history”. “We were equally human beings. Why should our touch pollute the water. We had cupped the water in our palms and sipped it! Water was still water....” (Outcaste: A Memoir: 23). This consciousness strengthened their fight for social justice and equality and demand for an egalitarian society. “Dalit consciousness in Dalit literature has a revolutionary mentality. It is connected with strength. It is a rebellion against the caste system. The recognition of human being is its focus. Ambedkarite thoughts are its inspiration. Then they returned to Mumbai only to learn that the Mahar had the Brahman priests “purify” the impure water reservoir by pouring 108 pots of curd, milk, cow dung and cow-urine in to it amidst loud religious chants. They realized that the march to the Chaudar tank had brightened the untouchables’ flame of dignity and self-respect. It was the beginning of an awakening. Consequently, on 4th August 1927, the Mahad municipality revoked its earlier resolution of granting the untouchables’ access to the water tank. Baba Saheb took this up as a challenge. It was decided that there would be another protest meeting in Mahad. In December 1927, Ambedkar started a bigger meeting in a Mahad, where he challenged the Hindu authorities. Ambedkar’s speeches at the

Mahad satyagraha brought about a revolution among the untouchables. He announced:

Just as they were Hindus, we are also Hindus. If you say your religion is our religion, your rights and ours must be equal. Is this the case? If not, on what grounds do you say that we must remain in the Hindu fold?
(Outcaste: A Memoir: 24)

In order to keep the social movement up, Baba Saheb denounced Manu Smriti, the sacred law book of the Hindus, stating that it stunted the growth of the untouchables. It destroyed their self respect and perpetrated social, economic, religious, and political slavery. In order to lodge a strong protest, he gave a call to burn Manu Smriti. Ambedkar burnt publicly Manu Smriti, the holy book of the Hindus, which was considered to be the manifesto of caste system. Ambedkar severely criticized the Manu Dharma Shastra. Manu imposed a number of restrictions on Dalits. It was an act that sent shock waves amongst the people of the higher castes.

The social movement inspired by Baba Saheb Ambedkar had full revolutionary thinking developed among the Dalits. Damu knew that he was imbued with new courage and self-realization. Damu first realized that he was an untouchable when he was a child. He recalled about his childhood memories. He said that one day his father was called by some people in the village to chop wood for them. He kept insisting that he would go along with father. At first his father refused saying that the sun was too hot, but he was adamant. Then his father took

him along with him. They walked some distance on their way to the workplace until he began to regret his stubbornness of coming with his father. His eyes were smarting under the glare of the sun and his throat was dry. He wanted to go home but did not dare ask his father. They came across a huge, blossoming tree. Someone had left a large vat of water under it. The water looked cool and inviting. “Baba”, he said to his father, “I want to drink water”. His father looked scared and looked around. “Just wait”, his father said, “someone will come soon”. He did not understand, “But why do we have to wait?” Just then a man came by. “Johar, Maay – baap”, his father greeted him with the traditional reverent greeting of the low castes. “Please, my son is thirsty. Can you let him have a drink of water?” “Are you trying to scorch him to death in this heat?” the man shirked. The man followed him without his knowing. His father said carefully, “I am on my way to cut some wood.” (Outcaste: A Memoir: 46)

The man was dark and his clothes were dirty. He went near the water and picked upon an iron tumbler lying near it. A dog was resting under the shade of the tree. The man came and kicked the dog aside and dipped the tumbler in the water. Damu looked at him expectantly, but the man drank it himself and some of water spilled, matting the dark hair on his chest. He washed his face. Then dipped the tumbler again and turned to me. He said, “Come here and sit there.” Damu sat on the ground and stretched this hand out for the tumbler. The man screamed at Damu, “How dare you try to touch this? You think you can take this from my hand?”

Damu's father pleaded with the man, "Forgive my ignorant boy, Maay-baap. What does he know? He is still a child." Then his father showed to him "Now, keep your hands like this, my boy and drink only the water you get in your palm." He sat down again with his hands cupped and the man poured water into his palm. Some of the water trickled down. He raised his hands closer to the water, and drank. Then he asked his father, "Baba, he drank water straight from the vat. Why can't we touch the water?" His father replied, "If we do, we will be punished because the water will get polluted. And then no one else will be able to drink from it. The child Damu was taught to observe strict rules regarding the river.

Because he was an untouchable in his village, whenever a wedding feast was held at his landlord's house, they would be called to help. At one of the wedding sessions, he was waiting to be given some work to do when some girls from the bride's family were carrying platters full of sweets. He had nothing to do, so he thought he would help them. He picked up one of the platter to distribute around. He started offering sweets to the guests, the landlord's mother screamed, "Bloody Maharin, what do you think you are doing?" Damu managed to say that he had not done anything and he had not eaten anything from here. She said, "You have polluted all our auspicious food, you fool. Who is going to make good for this, that one-eyed father of yours? You scoundrels, your caste will never change; give you an inch and you grab a mile." She had pushed the platter from his hands. The platter fell out of his hands and landed with a loud and crashing sound and the food scattered all around. "Your shadow has contaminated the

food. It is not fit for eating.” So he grew such a Mahar householder who challenged the daily indignities inflicted on him. But as Baba Saheb says, we have to organize and agitate. Damu narrated that his people believed God to be the only remedy. The untouchables would worship the goddess Mariaai in their village. They believed that Mariaai would solve their problems. They had strong faith in their traditional gods. They were offering buffaloes to the goddess as potraj. With the influence of Ambedkar thoughts, Dalits were conscious of their poverty and superstitions and their traditions. This consciousness was connected with struggle.

“It was a rebellion against the caste system for the recognition of human beings in its focus. Dalits launched a Satyagraha and civil disobedience movement until they were allowed to enter Hindu temples.” “We are equally human and moreover, we are Hindus. We must be given entry into temples.” They had participated in Baba Saheb’s movements and redeemed the promise that they had made to themselves stand up against injustice at all costs. (Outcaste: A Memoir: 134)

Education was most important for the Dalits which would help in developing one’s personality and improving one status in all respects. Education had direct association with the socio-economic and political status of Dalits.

As a result of Ambedkar liberation movements, Dalits changed their lives significantly. Damu discusses several changes that occurred during the time of Ambedkar. Ambedkar, in his speeches at the Mahad satyagraha, stressed more on

education, moral education, self-dignity, and consciousness of oppression. Under the influence of Ambedkar, Damu participated in the social movements. Damu's journey started from a small village in Ozar in Maharashtra to Mumbai to escape persecution. In the city, although illiterate and despite the disadvantages of his Mahar caste, Damu earned respect in the various odd jobs he undertook. He began going to the station doing all sorts of odd jobs. Slowly, people started recognizing him and got to know him better. A man named Gangaram hired him to sell news papers. He earned 5 annas on the first day. Then he started news paper business. The news paper business was booming. Every night he went from one press to the other settling accounts and asking often all the people he knew there. They gave him some information about the Bomboy Samachar press. Then he would go to the press offices. A couple of years went away. All of a sudden, Gangaram died. The paper agency began to lose money and he left the paper agency. He was looking for a work to maintain his livelihood. Fortunately, he was quite quickly hired by the Great Indian Peninsula (GIP) railway but only as a daily wage laborer. This meant that he had to go and wait outside the premises every morning. If they had extra work, he would be called in. Someday, they paid 11 annas per day. After that, he found some work in Thane where a new railway line was being laid. There he had to work with cement and concrete. They dug large ditches for the electricity poles and filled them with cement after holding the poles in place. His job was to get the work done and give a report to his boss. The workers appreciated and always cooperated. This project was complete a few days later and his file returned to the Kurla car shed.

He was given some odd jobs like unloading sacks of cement from the truck and taking them inside the ware house. Once when he was carrying water from Kurla station, he met a Gora Saheb and said, “I want work.” Gora Saheb said, “What work?” He said, “I will do any work.” Immediately, he took him and got him examined by a doctor. On 1st November 1924, he became a regular worker of the G. I. P. Railways. He was a temporary worker and with great difficulty, he would earn eighteen rupees per month. When he became a permanent worker, he earned twenty rupees and 8 Annas. He worked with William Saheb. He explained his duties to him very patiently. He learned much from him within few days.

It was around 1925, when the electric train started in Mumbai on the harbor railway track. A power house was being built next to the main track. A three inch-by-three inch hole was dug about a furlong away from this power house. The engineers connected a wire to the over head wire and put its other end in the hole which had water in it. At the same time, they saw the water begin to bubble and spelt out. The Saheb knew then that electricity had arrived. They inaugurated the electric train. After that, he was transferred to the main railway station called Victoria terminals. Gora Saheb named this station after Queen Victoria. His friend William Saheb was also working there. He worked under him for two years at Bori Bunder. Here, he had to fix whatever problems the drivers faced. He cleaned any oil spills and carbon soot that had accumulated on the engine. He was friendly with all the drivers. His payment went up to Rs. 27 month. He worked perfectly with the help of William Saheb. He got promoted to the post of electric motor mechanic. His pay was raised and he started receiving

forty two rupees. Then, he was transferred to the Karla Car shed. In his new job, he had to inspect every train. Those who had worked with him in his previous department looked at him with respect. Anyway, good days arrived finally and he could reach the goal of economic independence. Then he participated in Baba Saheb Ambedkar's social movements. He became Guruji's assistant. There are lots of works to be done. It was a big challenge to organize such a huge conference like Dalit movement.

Ambedkar announced a change of strategy in our struggle. Our efforts towards securing respect, independence and equality with others through the education, we want our children to grow up and have a dignified life. They want to be respected to sent to school. Dalits remain Hindus. Dalits are always treated as inferior. They will never have respect in our society

Years had passed and Damu was blessed with the first child. Later he had six babies including four sons named Janu, Sudha, Dina, Chootu and two daughters Leela and Trushe. All of them would go to school. Baba Saheb called the Dalits to renounce Hinduism because Hindu religion did not allow Dalits to enter the Hindu temples. Why should the Dalit community favour the religion that preaches untouchability and discrimination! Who has given the Brahmin class the authority to decide their fate? They decided to leave Hinduism. Dalits opted for conversion only after being convinced that Buddhism had no priestly class and certainly nobody was considered untouchables. All men and all women were equal and they were treated as such. There were no rituals or rites, or strict disciplines to follow. You only follow your hearts and devotion.

Baba Saheb finally chose the dates for conversion to Buddhism. The initiation ceremony was to be held at Nagpur. All the followers of Dalits and the Buddhist priests were to chant mantras. Babasaheb would be converted to Buddhism and all the Dalits would follow him. Most of the Dalits were going to embrace Buddhism. Dalits left the boundaries of Hinduism and, led by Baba Saheb, entered the new religion of equality, compassion, and understanding. Damu's children were studying well and would fulfill all his aspirations, rising to high positions in their chosen careers and overcome the caste discrimination, humiliation, poverty. Jadhav studied well and he got Doctoral Degree in Economics from America. He reached high position, and then he joined the I.M.F. and in effect representing the country even though he was merely a Mahar, a Dalit Harijan, and a scheduled caste belonging to the lowest stratum of society. His forefathers were village servants. So what? He achieved a high position with the influence of Ambedkar's persona. Janu passed matriculation in 1956 he inspired by Baba Saheb meetings and participated as a Dalit student. He took admission in Siddhartha College. He was doing odd jobs. He applied for the prestigious Indian Administrative Service. He was selected to join the service in 1963 even his father was a class IV employee and belonged to Mahar caste. He was selected to the I. A. S. and he won this honour with Baba Saheb's inspiration.

Dina was a boxer. He took classes while studying in Siddhartha College. He went on to become a successful Boxer. His children reached high positions. They managed to achieve those through hard work and perseverance challenging the

morasses of untouchability, illiteracy and backwardness. His journey was from poverty and suffering towards self-sufficiency and self-esteem with the help of education.

Another autobiography is Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* in which we examine the nature and scope of pain and resistance. It traces social consciousness in its various manifestations. This chapter also analyses the social transformation that took place due to the impact of Dalit social movements and the changes which have come about in Marathi Dalit writing. Sharankumar Limbale's autobiography *Akkarmashi* is distinct in terms of experiences of the writers. He reflected pain and rebellion, protest, social suffering, etc. His autobiography is the milestone in Marathi Dalit literature. It represents Dalit life in a different way. His autobiography portrays written documents of suffering, exclusion and tolerances of the Mahar community of Maharashtra. These documents are instances of deprivation, violation, exploitation, and protest against the upper caste and their own community as well. He also demands the right to live in the world on equal status. His texts transcend the boundaries of personal narrative and operate at once as a social, historical, and political record.

Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* portrays the wretched life of the writer. It also reflects the anguish against the unequal and unjust society. Limbale mentions in his preface that 'the book should be looked at as an act of social atrocity and not merely a piece of art. Limbale lodges protest against the upper caste Hindu society. He protests because he is not accepted by both the Dalit community and the upper caste community. He laments that he is expelled by his

own community for his stand on *Akkarmashi*. His life experiences are entirely different from those of other Dalit autobiography.

As Limbale grows, he is constantly and continuously haunted by the serious thoughts of his social identity. At times, he expresses his anger and becomes emotional. He becomes rebellious because of the existing social circumstances. The pain and suffering of Limbale are not because he is an untouchable or because he is poor, but because he is rejected within his own community, which enrages him further. It pains and troubles him psychologically and disturbs personally.

Limbale's autobiography is a nightmare. His question- 'who am I?' cannot be answered easily because it has connotations. Behind the answer to his question, there is a great irony of fate. Limbale does not question himself. He questions the entire society. Limbale's father lives in a mansion and his mother in a hut, whereas he is on street. In this way, the entire life of Limbale seems to be trapped in *chakravyuha* where there is no escape even after death. Janardhan wagemore pointed out his book, *sahityachintan*. Limbale's situation is like Hamlet. Limbale protests against the upper caste social system and Hindu society. Though his protest looks very noisy and ferocious on the superficial level, it does not reflect the same in his actions. Limbale meditates and ponders over his helpless conditions throughout the entire text. Limbale portrays himself as a helpless inconsistent being. He gains sympathy from the readers.

Limbale's autobiography doesn't talk about Dalit patriarchy. He doesn't cite any specific example of Dalits explicitly in his autobiography. He talks about the upper caste male chauvinism in his autobiography. He also presents a painstaking picture of Dalit women. The upper caste Patils in the village harass, torture, and deceive the Dalit women. They play with their lives and are not repentant about it. It happens so because of the upper caste male dominance which makes the Dalit women in the village suffer so much.

At the outset, Sharan Kumar Limbale mentions as to what made him write an autobiography like *Akkarmashi* in such a way. He makes his point very clear. He says that the entire autobiography revolves around the questions of his 'identity'. It resonates throughout the book. Limbale asserts:

I lived as an *Akkarmashi*, as an untouchable and poor which is what I wrote in *Akkarmashi*. Everything I mentioned explicitly in my autobiography i.e., the way I lived, experienced life from my childhood, the reminiscence of whatever I heard in the childhood are still fresh in me like a fresh wound. I looked at my past with cat's eye. I recollected my life experiences, I felt like telling them therefore I wrote (Limbale: 6).

The pain of a wretched life has been narrated in *Akkarmashi*. The anguish is against an unjust and unequal society. Limbale mentions in his preface that "the book should be looked as an act of social atrocity and not merely a piece of art" (Limbale-8). Through *Akkarmashi*, Limbale has exposed the wrong-doings of all the upper caste Patils of the villages. He declares that he is one of the victims of

this social set-up. He makes his stand very clear when he says that we look at the text as a means of social propagation. Hence, it is essential to tell about our slavish predicaments in order to alert our fellow beings. At the beginning of the autobiography, Limbale talks about his 'bifurcated personality'. He says, "I am bifurcated in terms of everything i. e. in terms of village, language, motherhood, fatherhood, caste and religion." He further elaborates:

I am a person with no fixed identity or fractured identity I have lost my personality. The social system here has treated me like a criminal where my very birth is proved illegal and illicit". Limbale claims that society norms are largely responsible for his predicament. "I lived through out my life like the way a raped woman lives. I lived in rages, the social system treated me brutally (Limbale: 5)

Limbale strongly protests against the rigid, orthodox, and conservative upper caste society. He expresses his profound anguish in the beginning of the text. He realizes that the unacceptable and intolerable rules and regulations made by the upper caste people made him suffer throughout. He laments over his '*Akkarmashi-ness*' of being called an *Akkarmashi*. The pain inflicted upon him by the society troubles and tortures him throughout this life. Limbale lodges his protest against the Hindu social and religious systems. He says the upper caste people can do anything and everything they want on the basis of their religion, caste, power, property, and culture. Nobody questions them. They harass the untouchable women and play with the women's lives. They exploit Dalit women without compunction through cruel sexual abuse. The unruly behavior of the

upper castes disturbs Limbale. He claims that the Hindu caste system is solely responsible for dividing one person from the other. It promotes the feeling of hatred, ego, and inferiority. People with such mentality cannot treat others equally. The upper castes' behavior is egoistic in manner. It is the Hindu social system which is responsible for keeping out the lower caste from the developmental opportunities. The untouchables have suffered for ages altogether because of lack of education, culture, property, self-respect and dignity. Limbale, therefore, strongly believes that the entire Dalit literature is nothing but a saga of pain and suffering. Limbale further elaborates the wrong-doings of the upper castes:

The upper castes have property and belonging to their ancestors. They have played with the lives of the untouchable women. At times, they have also destroyed their married lives. The Patils and Zamindars of the villages have kept untouchable women as their whore. The Mahar women rely on them solely. They are always at the mercy of the Patils. The entire Dalit household calls these houses as the houses of Patils' whore and their sons as the sons of Patil's whore (Limbale: 50)

Limbale expresses his deepest concern over the helpless conditions of the Mahar women. He is terribly disturbed by the fact that he is also a son of one such Patil's whore. Limbale's comments on religion are important and relevant. Limbale criticizes the Hindu religion. Talking about his own household, he mentions the relationship between his grandmother, Santamai (a Mahar woman),

and a man whom he called 'Dada' (a man named Dastagir, a Muslim man) despite having different religions and castes.

Santamai and Dada Dastagir lived together till the end. Dada Dastagir accompanied Santamai till the end of her life. Their religions never became an obstacle in their relationship. They stayed together happily. Limbale further decides that his grandmother Santamai and dada Dastagir loved and liked him equally. Here, at this point of time, Limbale raises significant questions regarding religion. Limbale queries whether man prevents religion or religion prevents man. "Whose width is bigger – religion's or man's? Who's for whom? Whether man is for religion or religion is for man? Is it not possible for a man to live without a religion?" (Limbale: 51). Thus, Limbale questions the basic tenets of religion. He also underscores the significance of valuing each other as human beings and not making distinctions between people on the basis of their caste, creed, or religion. Limbale thinks that man should be recognized as a human being. His other affiliations such as caste and religion should not become hurdles in his path. Limbale's plea is that man should be recognized and valued as man. The life experience of Limbale is entirely different from that of others. Limbale is born out of an illicit relationship between an upper caste father and a Mahar mother.

Hanmanta Limbale, an upper caste Patil, refuses to accept that Limbale is his own son. Limbale writes with utmost anguish:

Why did my mother say 'yes' to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse?

Why did she allow this bitter embryo to grow? Which family would claim me as its descendants? Whose son am I, really? (Limbale: 36)

As he grows, Limbale is constantly and continuously haunted by the serious thought of social identity. At times, he expresses his anger and becomes emotional. He questions himself. He becomes religious because of the existing social circumstance. The pain and the suffering of Limbale is not because he is an untouchable or because he is poor, but because he has been rejected within his own community. His own community boycotts him. This adds fuel to fire. It troubles him psychologically. The pain of Limbale's unacceptance perplexes him, and he is traumatized by the bitter and harsh social experiences. He is utterly confused. Sometimes he behaves in an eccentric manner. The existing social circumstances are responsible for Limbale's suffering and for torturous life. There are many factors in a Dalit's life because of which they suffer. Hunger is one of the most important factors in Dalit autobiographies. Limbale narrates his school experience to show how he suffered because of hunger.

Once as child, Limbale narrates his school trip along with his classmates. During the lunch hour, their teachers distributed the leftovers of the upper caste children's lunch to Limbale and his friends. In order to satisfy their insatiable hunger, Limbale and his friends attacked the leftovers like hungry vulture. When Limbale returned home, he narrated the entire incident to Masamai. Hearing about it, his mother replied, "Why did not you get at least a small portion of it for me? Leftover food is nectar". (Limbale: 3).

Untouchability is another significant factor in Dalit autobiographies. It is also one of the reasons why the upper castes tortured and troubled the untouchables. Limbale thinks that he was born to an untouchable woman and, therefore, he is an untouchable. Masamai is an untouchable. She is also poor. She is harassed and betrayed by the upper castes. Commenting on poverty, Limbale says that poverty makes man do anything and everything. Thus Masmai goes to the Patil and is forced to live with him as his whore because of her poverty. Comprehended to poverty is illiteracy and this leads to superstitious beliefs of many kinds. Limbale narrates that his people believed God to be the only remedy. The untouchable women in the village worshipped 'Mariaai'. They believed that Mariaai would solve their problems. They had strong faith in their traditional gods. Caste is discussed at length in Dalit autobiographies. Limbale's *Akkarmashi* presents a gruesome portrayal of caste discrimination. Dalits have suffered because of their caste. Limbale is the son of an upper caste man Hanmanta Limbale who derives his fatherhood to Sharan Kumar Limbale because he was born to a Mahar woman. In fact, he tells Masamai that Sharan Kumar Limbale is not his son. That he is the son of somebody and, therefore, he disowns him. Masamai is the protagonist in Limbale's *Akkaramarshi*. She is harassed by the upper caste Patils of the village. Her entire life takes a different turn. She keeps physical relations with upper caste people and bears many children. Her marriage to Vithal Kamble breaks up when Hanmanta Patil forces his attentions on her and their caste panchayat orders the husband to desert Masamai, taking their two sons with him. She is then forced to seek refuge with Hanmanta Limbale

and later with different upper caste Patils. Masamai changes men like clothes. All the men in her life deceived her throughout. Masamai, however, uses this as a strategy of survival and lives her life on her own terms. She bears Sidram Patel nine children and takes care of all of them. Masamai leads a very pathetic life, a whore despite numerous odds. She educates Limbale which is something praiseworthy.

But Masamai's action influences her daughter Nagi, who roams with Chandu Patil all over the village. Masamai is unable to control or influence her own daughter. Santamai Sharan Kumar's grandmother also takes a similar position. She lives with a Muslim man, Daba Dastagir. Overall, women in *Akkarmashi* influence one another by their acts or deeds. They also get affected by each others' behaviour.

Women in *Akkarmashi* are portrayed as shameless, unthinking, submissive, immoral, and characterless by Limbale. They are portrayed in a negative light. They are not safe. They are treated as sexual objects that exist to satisfy the needs of the upper caste males. They do not seem to fight against their condition, rather they are shown to submissively accept and tolerate every other's atrocity perpetrated against them. Women characters in *Akkarmashi* almost behave or imitate each other.

Limbale gives account of three generations of women in his autobiography. They are Nirmi, Masamai and Santamai respectively. Women have been given secondary status in Limbale's autobiography. They are shown to

be helpless and poor. Limbale has committed a “character assassination” of his own mother. The untouchable women are shown as selling wine. They are often tormented and taunted by the men in the village. Interestingly, in one of the incidents, when Nagi, Limbale’s sister, roams around with Chandu Patil, Limbale threatens her and beats her up instead of going and beating Chandu Patil. When Limbale complains to Masamai regarding the behavior of Nagi, she replies that Nagi may behave the way she wants. She tells him to mind his own business and not interfere in her personal life. Limbale feels terribly disturbed on listening to this. He feels alienated in his own house. He feels like a criminal at this juncture.

The upper caste men of the village, the Patils, in *Akkarmashi* are opportunistic by nature. They are very crafty and cunning. They are responsible for spoiling the married lives of many Mahar women. The Patils keep relations forcefully with the Mahar women. Hanmantha Limbale and Sidram Patil disrespect the women and treat them as their whores. They have their eye on young and beautiful Mahar girls and women in the village. Thus, the Patil community in the village creates trouble and is behind the social atrocities against the Mahars.

In his autobiography, Limbale portrays himself as helpless. He complains about the discrimination and seems lacking courage to fight back against his adverse conditions in his life. He laments over his wretched and pathetic situation. In such helpless conditions, he cannot lodge his strong protest against the upper caste community. He only ponders over his helpless conditions. He lacks courage and potentials to win over the gruesome circumstances. Limbale

does not seem to be taking any direct action against the upper caste; rather he tolerates and suffers. His feelings do not go hand in hand with his relations.

There are many incidents in *Akkarmashi* which give evidence of Limbale's immoral nature. There is an incident where Limbale's mother-in-law does not allow him to sleep with his wife. He cannot control his sexual desire and asks for money from his mother-in-law for seeing a prostitute. Limbale also suffers from an Oedipus complex. He feels that his mother creates a torturous situation for him that leads to all the consequent suffering in his life. He is perplexed with the pitiable condition of his sisters and their utter poverty. He even thinks of marrying one of his sisters to improve her living conditions (Limbale: 73). This kind of thinking from an educated man is quite unexpected. His thoughts go against Ambedkar's thinking and ideology. He seems to be lacking both self-respect and dignity for which Dr. B. R. Ambedkar fought relentlessly throughout his life.

Dalit pain has its roots in the caste system and they continue to live their lives under various kinds of oppression. Dalit women experience "double oppression of being Dalit and being women. Limbale asserts, "My words are my experiences." According to him, many Dalit autobiographies would be written and the entire Indian Literature would be strengthened. Limbale says that the problems of the untouchable have to be discussed openly. There is a need to bring the problem of the downtrodden to the fore. As he puts it, "The people should know about our lives therefore we write" (Limbale: 13).

When he was attending school regularly, the teacher asked his father's name. He did not know his father's name because his mother was not married to Hanmanta. So he faced a painful experience during his school days. Then he completed primary and high school education. He studied hard and stood second in final school exams. He passed with merit marks. His friend Mallaya and he studied up to B. A. He got a job of telephone operator at Ahmedpur. He became financially independent. His life became comfortable as he had enough money to spend. With the influence of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's movement, he renounced Hinduism to convert to Buddhism because Buddhism has no priest class and certainly nobody is considered untouchable. All men and women are equal.

Siddalingaih's *Ooru Keri* explains the context of the social and economical and cultural dimensions through the lens of his own life in the contemporary social system. Autobiography as commonly understood presents the facts or fiction recounted by a person from the circumstances of his life. He may represent social and economic conditions of his community through his autobiography. *Ooru Keri* means neighborhood roughly. It is similar to *Vasti*, an Autobiography by the Marathi writers Vasant Moon. Both these works recount the trauma, and suffering not only of an individual but also of the whole community.

His autobiography lays bare facts about Dalits. It is revolutionary in nature and ignites the sensitivity of the Dalit community. It is a tirade against the upper caste chauvinists. It is written in the realistic and naturalistic mode in his autobiography. He describes various stages of the writer's life. He explains

poverty and caste humiliation as the most pertinent Dalit issues. Poverty that strikes Siddalingaiah's family is beyond his comprehension as a boy. "It was amusing to watch the two men trundle on like bullocks, while the third followed them swinging a whip and making them plough. A strange agony gripped me the moment I realized that one of the men carrying the yoke was my father" (Siddalingaiah; 2003:2). Some women who came to where we were standing and sighed, "What a plight has befallen poor Dyavanna!" This doubled his agony. In his childhood, he always grows like a Dalit boy. He is socially humiliated and economically oppressed, but he is incapable of understanding as to why his family suffers poverty. He is in the grip of anger and frustration and ultimately awareness leads him to become the most influential Dalit writers of Kannada literature. He first emerged on the public scenes as a student leader in the 1970s, a period when Dalit rights—issues had begun triggering conflict with the upper class people. At that time, the Bandaya movement which stood for all progressive movements sanitized Siddalingaiah's thoughts.

When he was studying, he faced many problems because of his social and economical status. When he studied in primary and secondary standard at Magadi and Manchanabele, he joined a Government Primary School because a teacher called Andamma was working in his school. She had special affection on him because of his poverty. She gave him books and pencils because of their poverty. Poverty that strikes Siddalingaiah's family is beyond his comprehension as a boy. Born of an illiterate couple, Siddalingaiah conquers poverty and social discrimination through imagination. The writer is seen waging a relentless battle

against social chauvinism and economic misery. In this process, they choose a democratic path for the solution of social issues. The writer subverts the basic notion and rises up to an optimistic vision about the Dalit future. The question is whether his narrative mode is within the ambit of the Dalits. He suggests other ways of overcoming social problems through imagination. In other words, Dalits can envisage a better future and nature. Their own culture for social identity, in a way, shows a similarity to Limbale's view that "the central purpose of the Dalit Literature is to enable the development of a new consciousness and identity among Dalits" (Limbale: 15).

Gangamalaiah, one of his father's elder brothers, gave some advice to him and taught him public speaking. He explained how to speak on a given topic. When he studied in childhood days, he went to several free libraries and read up books and journals. He would attend meetings organized by rail blockade agitations by Kannada and Tamil people in Srirampura. He used to listen to them. He was inspired by their speeches. When he studied in his childhood days, National Days were celebrated at the hostel. They insisted the leaders such as S. Nijalingappa, B. Rachaiah, Nagappa Alva and several others. They would be thrilled to hear the speeches. In those days, news of his Oratory spread all over the colony. People asked him to give speeches and enjoyed hearing to him. He gave speeches on the streets where everyone listened to his speeches. It was Ambedkar Day at Town Hall in Srirampura. The Chief Minister Veerendra Patil and the High Court judge Beemaiah and IAS officer Baranaiah and minister Rachaiah were the guests. He heard several things about Ambedkar and gained enough

confidence to speak about him. Some students knew that he would give a speech on Ambedkar ideology. They invited Siddalingaiah to speak. He spoke with confidence about the hostel problems. When he studied during college days, Bangalore University had launched an 'earn while you learn' scheme to help the students. He joined the soap factory to work between five and nine every evening. It was a part-time job that he found very useful. Then Dalit students founded Vicharavadi Parishad. They visited all the Dalit hostels in Bangalore and got to know the problem of Dalits. They would not get proper arrangements in the hostels for bathing and lavatory were in bad condition. Lavatories did not have doors. They visited the hostel and instilled courage among the students. His friends knew the students' problems and explained those to the Chief Minister. Scholarship amount had to be increased. Hostel buildings were repaired and mess hostel were built. Chief Minister called his personal secretary and instructed him to solve the problems. When he was doing M. A. in Kannada, he became direct disciple of Dr. G. S. Shivarudrappa. He had not paid his hostel fees. He was thus not in a position to take his exams. Dr. K. Murali Siddappa paid his fees and made it possible to write exams. Nevertheless, he was awarded gold medal in his Post-Graduation. In spite of such hurdles, he got a lecturer job in the Kannada department and he led a comfortable life with self-esteem. This all became possible with the help of education.

Aravind Malagatti's autobiography *Government Brahmana* tells us the story about painful experiences of his life in different levels. During his childhood days in his village, there were three families know for their affluence.

Those were the Setjis, Marathis, and the Veerashaivas. There seemed to be a competition among these three families. Any death in the village made us happy. One day somebody died in the Veerashaiva family. There was a custom of throwing coins on the corpse during the funeral procession. It must have been a matter of prestige for them. Once the money thrown on the corpse fell on the ground, it was the job of the Dalit, to fight among themselves to pick up the coins on the corpse, during the funeral procession. During marriages and festivals, his community people had to pick up the coins. He explains all caste experiences in all facets of the society. The author reflects on specific instances from his childhood and student days that illustrate the normative cruelty practiced by caste Hindu society on Dalits. He describes the caste system not only between people on the basis of their birth but also among the animals. When he was ten years old, his mother used to tell him:

The only she-buffalo in our lane used to be in our house. It was the offspring of the she-buffalo that was sent as a gift to my aayi by her parents. Aayi was thus proud of owning the only she-buffalo in the lane. There was no he-buffalo in our village to mate with our she-buffalo. But in two neighboring villages, Kuntoji and Basarkod, there were two he-buffaloes. These buffaloes belonged to the village heads. There is no use raising he-buffaloes in the hot plains. They can not be used for ploughing as they lack the capacity to withstand heat. So, common people never reared he-buffaloes. For the village Gowda and Desai, it was a matter of prestige to rear he-buffaloes. Therefore, the village Gowda's and Desai's

he-buffaloes were in great demand. Kuntoji is closer to our place than Basarkod. My aayi decided to take the buffalo to Kuntoji. But it was already dusk. It would be completely dark before one reached Kuntoji. They would not let the he-buffalo mate with our she-buffalo in the night (Government Brahmana: 19-20).

So this tells the past experiences of the caste system not only between the people on the basis of their births but also among the animals. Aravind Malgatti elaborates in some detail about traditions in the Dalits community. It is a custom that the Okuli's festival should be celebrated every year in Sravana, the fifth month of the Hindu calendar. The Okuli of Bidarakundi was famous in the surrounding area. The tradition went like this: Dalit women had to remove their blouses and wear *aduganchche*, a lower garment worn above the kneecaps, hemmed tightly and tucked in to the waist band. A sari was worn to cover the waist and the loose end of it was used to cover the head. The women had to help several long branches of the lucky tree. Standing opposite these women were non-Dalit and non-brahmin men. This group usually comprised the notorious elements of the village. He describes superstitions in his village in the name of the tradition of the untouchable colony. They watch the Eastman colour movie Okuli in the name of tradition. Aravind malagatti asserts in his autobiography that we reject all forms of superstitions. Here, Tharakeswar aptly pointed out that these incidents culminated in the episode, "my ex-beloved" and "some girls flirt with future". Here, he could not marry his lover because of his social status and family as the representative of caste system obstructed them. In these particular cases, the

caste society failed to stop the physical union for the time being, but ensures that the union is truncated and does not get institutionalized.” (*Afterword to Government Brahmana*: 122) Malagatti describes how he was discriminated by fellow students and he talks that it is a capitalist education system. Malagatti admits that there were too great aims in his life where he started his research. The first aim was to marry her and the second was to work as a lecturer at least for a day in Karnataka University, Dharwad. He faced a lot of problems. However, he got a job as lecturer in Government College under Karnataka University, Dharwad. His life became comfortable enough and he achieved self-respect with the help of education.

Vasant Moon’s autobiography *Growing Up Untouchable in India* (2001) also describes the importance of his community in Nagpur. He eloquently describes growing up in a Dalit slum in the city of Nagpur in central Maharashtra Model Mills. Moon’s autobiography presents us with powerful personal and collective memory of caste oppression and struggle in India beginning from the 19th century. He explains the poor condition of his community and how most of his people depend on mills for work. His mother was also a worker in the mill. His mother left her husband and returned to her father with her two children after the death of his Grandfather Sadasiv. His mother faced lot of problems. She married Waman who was a widower. He had four daughters and one son from his first wife. His father was a driver for the Parsis at 250 rupees per year. It was not a small amount at that time, but he was addicted to drinking alcohol. So she left her drunken husband and returned to her father. Before the death of her father, she

had never put a foot outside of the house for work. She was unused to manual labour. (Growing Up untouchable: 22)

She would not have got any household work or cooking because of the caste system which Moon describes with aching poignancy and which is of great uncertainty, impoverishment, and most pervasive hunger. She left her husband and returned to her father and two children. Leaving her young children in the care of the neighbours, Purna set out day after day in search of work. Since Hindu households would not employ untouchables because of the social system, Moon reaches the Dalit political movements to discard the caste-based occupations. Around 1930, Dasharath Patil gave a call for reforming his community and Mahars from miles around stopped carrying away dead animals. In every village, boycotts were imposed on these rebels by caste Hindus. Mahars who went to the market could not make purchases. Mills in the villages were closed to them. In some incidents, Mahars were beaten up. Dasarath Patil proclaimed, "Let us have our own markets". Mahars established the market in front of his house in Vela. Dasarath Patil bought enough supplies from his own pockets. He joined Babasaheb's movement in 1920 and, from then onwards, he spent his whole life in social service.

Moon considers it a paradigm shift to the world of modernity. He recollects the political practices of the Dalit activists like Dasarath Patil. At the time, Dalits tried to appropriate market for their mobility in the monitored Indian society. Moon considered the above-mentioned shifts as redemption from the social backwardness. When he passed Fourth Grade examination and joined fifth

class, his mother was very poor. It was impossible for his mother to manage. He has been portrayed as an agent who fought with the casteist Dalit Indian patriarchy. His uncle Hari admitted him to the Patwardhan High School. His uncle paid the school fees and he brought the books, note books, pencils, and other equipments because of their poverty. During his school days, he did not have sufficient clothes. Still Moon rejected the scholarship of Harijan Seva Sangh because of the casteist implication of the word Harijan. At that time, many of the children, who otherwise would have been forced into joining the labour force, now had the privilege of being able to attend school. There was also an urgent recognition in the community that education might be the ticket to help one come out of desperate circumstances. Moon explains that they were educated against all the odds through a social network that provided timely help through the collective raising of tuition funds and donations of clothes and school supplies from the economically stronger members in the community. Often such help came from school teachers themselves, most of whom were upper caste Brahmans who had been influenced by Gandhi's ideal of eradicating untouchability and Moon writes of the great sympathy and consideration that many of his upper-caste teachers extended to him and to other Dalit students. His discussion of the Gandhian movement, however, also recalled the deep fissures that emerged between Gandhi's conception of a top down reform strategy through moral expectations to upper-caste Hindus to reject untouchability and a more militant anti-caste struggle led by Ambedkar. He called to leave Hinduism and published 'Janata,' a news paper. All the news papers would come to our organization. The Samatha Sainik

Dal people gathered in the evening. One person would read the news aloud so that everyone could discuss it. People began to think about Ambedkar's call to leave Hinduism. The Samata Sainik Dal organized a house-to-house publicity campaign. This was in the mid 1930s before the Scheduled Caste Federation was established. Under the leadership of Waman Godbole, the elders could see the activities of the youth in the community. At least, one boy from each family became a volunteer of the organization. Wamanrao Godbole called the young boys to a meeting. He explained Baba Saheb's thinking and told them to spread the word. "From now on, don't celebrate Hindu Festivals" (Growing up untouchable: 43). To establish the Scheduled Caste Federation, the Scheduled Caste Federation conference was set to be held on 17 July, 1942.

Vamana Rao took double responsibility of the arrangements for the conference and the protection of Baba Saheb. He himself traveled everywhere to organize the youth. Branches of the organization were established in all the neighborhoods. After the Scheduled Caste Federation was founded in 1942, in the same year, a student organization was established by high school and college students. Then elections for the students' organization were declared. Students' elections were formed. Thus, an all-India scheduled caste student federation was established in Bombay in 1942 and a conference was held. In this conference, thousands of students were present for the welcoming ceremony of Mandal. Discussions went on student issues, this organization to fight on behalf of their own problems. The Dalit movement turned to be a Mahar movement. So, many people from Mahar community dedicated their lives to the Ambedkar movement

and also became a Buddhist. In 1946, Nagpur city was burning with movements. Baba Saheb Ambedkar's movement had tremendous effect on the cultural life of the community. Dalits were inspired by Ambedkar's ideology. They wrote poems, plays, balladeers, hymn and sang songs about Babasaheb Ambedkar. Dalit poets raised their voice against atrocities on Dalits. As education spread among the Dalit community, its cultural consciousness began to be transformed. With the inspiration of Ambedkar, Moon completed B.A. Degree. Then he got the employment in the office of the Deputy Accountant General in Post and Telegraph. With the help of education, he became self-reliant and triumphant of hope, self-respect and optimism. The Dalits' works were influenced by the ideology of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The Dalit movements influenced people to participate in political and cultural and literary activities. Dalit writers wanted to change the oppressors with their writings. They produced dramas and opened schools. Vasant Moon wrote many articles and poems published in the magazines for his community. In these movements, many Dalits dedicated their lives to the Ambedkar Movements and also to the Buddhist movement. He had begun a program of giving free milk to the children in the community in 1946. There was a battle between congress party and Mahar youths. The Poona Act was proposed by Ambedkar and the congress party was against the Act. Ambedkar firmly believed that we should fight for social independence ever before we fight for political independence. He published many news papers and magazines for Dalits to spread political awakening.

Another autobiography is Valmiki's *Joothan* which is known to be one of the first Dalit literary texts in Hindi. This is an autobiographical account of Valmiki's life journey from his birth as an 'untouchable' to becoming a Dalit. The word *Joothan* means the 'leftover'. The leftover of the upper caste is the food of the Dalits. It is the price the upper caste pay for Dalit labours. A *Joothan* is that which is rejected. Valmiki's mother had confronted Sukhdev Singh who gave her '*Joothan*'. This autobiography also shows the rebellion of Dalits. His mother's act of rejection and rebellion had implanted seeds of rebellion in Omprakash's heart. Their pain and anger turned to rebellion in some of the incidents narrated in the autobiography. The autobiography *Jootan*, on the whole, discusses Omprakash Valmiki's life journey to study and get educated 'to improve his caste'. His father supported him immensely. His father had a visionary's hope of seeing his son reading the 'four letters' and living a better life. He remembers:

A Christian used to visit our neighbourhood. His name was Sewak Ram Masihi. He would sit with the children of Chuhra around him. He used to teach them reading and writing. The government schools did not allow these children to enroll. My family sent only myself to Sewak Ram Masihi. My brothers are all working. There was no question of sending our sister to school. I learnt my alphabet in Master Sewak Ram Masihi's open air school, a school without mats and Rooms. One day, Sewak Ram Masihi and my father had an argument. My father took me to the Basic Primary School. There my father begged Master Har Phool Singh;

‘Masterji, I will be forever in your debt if you teach this child of mine a letter or two (Valmiki: 2).

Every parent lives with a hope, a hope to see their children live in society equally on all grounds where there is no caste discrimination. They want to see their children coming like other children. They don’t want them to work like them in the fields. Valmiki’s autobiography discusses larger issues of Dalits’ life and issues that are very vast and profound. He narrated untouchability, caste discrimination, poverty, inferiority complex, etc. that Valmiki faced:

Gandhiji’s uplifting of the untouchables was resounding everywhere. Although the doors of the government schools had begun to open for untouchables, the mentality of the ordinary people had not changed much. I had to sit away from the others in the class, that too on the floor. The mat ran out before reaching the spot I sat on. Some times I would have to sit away behind everybody, right near the door. And the letters on the board from there seemed faded (Valmiki: 2-3).

His perseverance to cross all hurdles in life and prove himself self-sufficient is noteworthy in his life. He experienced a thorny life. Despite many shortcomings, he never gave up his dream of starting on his own feet. The support from his father is very impressive. The teachers in the school never encouraged Valmiki:

The ideal image of the teachers that I saw in my childhood has remained indelibly imprinted on my memory. Whenever someone starts talking

about a great guru, I remember all those teacher who used to swear about mothers and sisters. They used to fondle good-looking boys and invite them to their homes and sexually abuse them (Valmiki: 4).

This is the common experience that happens to most of the Dalit women students, but it is boys in *Joothan*. The incident where Valmiki was made to sweep the entire school is very much pitiable:

Obeying headmaster's orders, I cleaned all the rooms and the verandas. Just as I was about to finish, he came to me and said, "After you have swept the rooms, go and sweep the play ground. The play ground was way larger than my small physique could handle and in cleaning it my back began to ache. My face was covered with dust. Dust had gone inside my mouth. The other children in my class were studying and I was sweeping. Headmaster was sitting in his room and watching me. I was not even allowed to get a drink of water. I swept the whole day (*Joothan* : 4-5).

The teachers' severe discrimination of Dalit students discourages them a lot. Kumud Powde and Urmila Pawar, Dalit woman writers, too, have written about their share of suffering at the hands of their teachers. Urmila Pawar treated her teacher as one of her four enemies. Powde's teacher discouraged her by refusing to teach her Sanskrit because she was a Dalit. Caste is the root cause of all these problems. Valmiki's father insisted a lot on improving his caste status through the education of his child. Can caste be wiped away with education? For that matter, can anything on this earth take away the caste you are born in? Caste

is like wheels to a vehicle called life. Blessed is the one who is born in an upper caste family and woe to a person who is born in the lower caste. Caste discourages and makes a person a slave or a boss. It creates imbalances in society. Every problem has its roots in this monstrous caste-system. Valmiki remarks:

He (my father) seldom asked me to do anything by way of help because he wanted me to be able to focus single-mindedly on my education. He constantly said that I should improve my “caste” by getting an education. He did not know that “caste” cannot be improved by education. It can only be improved by taking in the right caste (Valmiki: 58).

Untouchability is the breed of caste system. Untouchability was very prevalent during pre-independent India and early post-independent India. This made the lives of Dalits miserable. The indignities and discrimination they faced were very hostile. Though there were some Dalits who were well off, they were not considered humans at all. Not many Dalits raised their voice to protest. It was only those educated children who used their pen as a weapon to protest and it was the educated or school going children who reached it easily in life. Bama in *Karukku* realized it when she was about ten years old and Ambedkar in autobiographical notes remarks that he relieved it when he was nine years old in Goneagon railway station on his visit to his father who worked there. Discrimination from peers, colleagues, and fellow-students hurts Dalit students a lot. Most of the drop-outs occur in villages due to this reason. Bama had to pass through upper caste houses to go to school. She was blamed for plucking flowers

in their houses many times even though she did not even look at them. Also, some upper caste women made her work in their houses before she went to school. Valmiki also had to work in the fields of upper caste men on the day of his exam:

Study at night... come with me. I have to sow cane.” Fauza ordered. I told him repeatedly that I had to study for my paper tomorrow, but he was adamant. He held me by the elbow and dragged me to his field. He threatened me to do the work or else. My mind was set aflame by his swearing’ (Valmiki: 57)

He was mocked at for studying by both the upper caste and by his own community. His villagers would say to his father, “Why are you making a nincompoop of your son by letting him study? He will belong neither at home nor in the outside world. Educated people are generally quite foolish, any way” (Valmiki: 59).

But he never got discouraged by such statements. He went to many houses to send children to schools. No one responded to him positively. “What is the point of sending him to school? When has crow become a swan?” (Valmiki: 6). He had only one thing in his mind; improving the “caste” (Valmiki:6). His father’s encouragements and his determination paid off and he got a job in the ordinance factory. Though he shifted to a technical job for his livelihood, he never gave up writing and acting in plays. He had to undergo discrimination wherever he went. His name ‘Valmiki’ created a lot of controversy in the minds of Savaranas. When he was studying in Dehradun, he was teased by his friends

for his poverty. He did not have good clothes to protect himself from the severe cold. He used to wear his uncle's sweater which looked big and funny on him. His friends used to make fun of him. He was very much humiliated when his friends called him 'abbey chuhra'. He was mocked at by his classmates and friends on his looks and dress. Poverty laughs at Dalits. Caste, untouchability, and poverty are the kith and kin of Dalits. No Dalit is born from these three evils, but they have to fight and overcome these factors throughout their life. An educated Dalit can be an inspiration for other Dalits. Ambedkar is a living example of this. He inspired many Dalits to take up education seriously, to live a life of dignity, and to raise their voice against the barbaric nature of the upper caste people.

Dalit consciousness played a major role in the making of Dalit writers who analyzed the minutest things in the society to portray those in their writings. The Dalit consciousness believed in change. Therefore, the writing which came out through this consciousness was revolutionary in nature. This consciousness prompted them to fight for social justice and equality and demand for an egalitarian society. Baby Kamble's autobiography *The Prison We Broke* is located in the tradition of direct self-consciousness. It is a head-on confrontation with Brahminical hegemony on the one hand and with patriarchal domination on the other. It demonstrates how Brahminical domination turned the Mahars into slaves, forcing them to live in conditions worse than animals. It also shows the inhuman face of Dalit patriarchy where many of the Dalit men tortured their women inhumanly. Bama's *Karukku* is a reflection of different themes like religion, recreation, education, etc. Through these perspectives, she gives us a clear picture of the caste oppression given out in portions

to the Dalit Christians not only by the upper caste society but more so within the catholic church itself. She describes the painful life of herself as well as of her community. Narendra Jadhav's '*Outcaste: A memoir*' discusses various stages of his parents' lives and how his family struggled for equality and justice. While his community accepted its status as its fate, Damu, Jadhav's father and the protagonist of the autobiography, became consciousness of his oppression and caste discrimination and rebelled against this.

Another autobiography is Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* in which the nature and scope of pain and resistance has been examined. It traces social consciousness in its various manifestations. *Akkarmashi* is distinct in terms of experiences of the writers. He reflects pain, protest, social suffering, etc. His autobiography is the milestone in Marathi Dalit literature. It represents Dalit life in a different way. It also reflects the anguish against the unequal and unjust society. Siddalingaih's *Ooru Keri* explains the context of the social and economical and cultural dimensions through the lens of his own life in the contemporary social system. His autobiography lays bare facts about Dalits. It is revolutionary in nature and it ignites the sensitivity of the Dalit community. It is a tirade against the upper caste chauvinists. Arvind Malagatti's autobiography *Government Brahmana* tells us the story about painful experiences of his life in different levels. The author reflects on specific instances from his childhood and student days that illustrate the normative cruelty practiced by caste Hindu society on Dalits. Vasant Moon's autobiography *Growing Up Untouchable in India* presents us with powerful personal and collective memory of caste oppression and struggle in India beginning from the 19th century.

Valmiki's *Joothan* which is known to be one of the first Dalit literary texts in Hindi gives an autobiographical account of Valmiki's life journey from his birth as an 'untouchable' to becoming a Dalit. This autobiography also shows how the pain and anger of the Dalits turned to rebellion in some of the incidents narrated in the autobiography.

Dalits have suffered for ages. Lately, they have become conscious and have realized their potential. They no longer want to be subjugated to the upper castes. They have the torch of Ambedkar to take them forward. Ambedkar's social reform movements carried a significant place for the Dalit community. Phule also played an important role for the emancipation of the Dalits. When English education was introduced in India and the Brahmins of Pune opposed education for Dalits, Phule came out strongly in support of the Dalits. With educational awareness created in the Indian constitution, Dalits became socially conscious about the circumstances and social problems of untouchability and caste discrimination. The education that the Dalit youths received in the post-independence period gave them the idea for revolution and voice for protest. Now, the Dalits realized what is good and what is bad for them. Because of education, the Dalits became more conscious and now they cannot be deceived by the upper caste people. This also helped them to change their lifestyles and their approach to deal with their problems which will be covered in the following chapter.

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Chapter – IV

Change in the Life-styles of Dalits

Dalits became conscious about the circumstances and social problems of untouchability and caste discrimination as a result of education. They wanted to change their caste structures for which they were involved with various literary activities. Inspired by Ambedkar, they established separate community organizations which played an important role for reforming their life styles. After centuries of suppression, the Dalits sensed the possibility of emancipation under the liberation movement established by Ambedkar who believed that only education could bring about a change in the oppressed lives of the Dalits. Reformers like Ambedkar and Jyothi Rao Phule were the pioneers in spreading the awareness and creating opportunities for education for the Dalits.

Most Dalit women's assertions and liberation movements started with the speeches of Ambedkar. His speeches changed their lives significantly. In the book "We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement", Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon discuss several changes that occurred during the time of Ambedkar who started empowering Dalits from his home. He made his wife Ramabai read and write. He was insistent on Dalits getting educated like upper caste men. He stressed more on moral education and self-dignity in his speeches.

Ambedkar's speech at Mahad Satyagraha brought about a revolution among the untouchables. Their thoughts and behaviour began to change. They began to take part in meetings and conferences in large numbers. Dalit

organizations were formed. Dalits began to speak with vigour at meetings and conferences. They went on processions and became active in the movement. We cannot forget that Ambedkar's liberal voices on Dalits were a motivating force behind this transformation of untouchables. (Pawar and Moon: 158).

Let us turn to the depiction of the change in Dalit life style in Dalit autobiography '*Karukku*' written by Bama. She depicts the differences in life styles between the past and the present in her village. She faced many problems because of her lower caste and lower status. Most of the community people were agricultural labourers. They did not have own land. They depended on upper caste families because they did not have any source of income. Bama was a very good observer even as child- "When I was studying in the third class. I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchables. But I had already seen, felt, experienced and been humiliated by what it is" (Karukku: 11).

Bama describes that every Dalit experiences such humiliation and discrimination in her village because they don't know the basic freedom and human rights. She describes her education in different stages of life and different institutions. She faces untouchability and caste discrimination in her village. Even though her sole motive of educating and uplifting her community wins many laurels to her as a Dalit woman. She clearly describes the pain and suffering that the Dalit people undergo. What is appreciable is her willingness to take responsibility and her dedication towards her life for the upliftment of her community. So she decides to enlighten her community through a powerful

weapon called 'education'. Her brother advises several times to study well to overcome all these problems:

Because we are born into the Paraya Jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lessons, people will come to you of their own accord and attach themselves to you. Work hard and learn (Karukku: 15).

These words of her brother really encouraged her. She did what he said:

The words that Annan spoke to me that day made a deep impression on me and I studied hard with all my breath and beings. In a frenzy, almost as Annan had urged, I stood first in my class. And because of that, many people became my friends, even though I am a Paraichi (Karukku: 15).

This shows her importance in the role of education for the betterment of the self and community. When she studied up to eighth class, in her village, she went to high school in neighbouring town. She was very surprised when she saw the school. The children wore fine clothes. She felt very shy and almost fearful.

It was a big school. The children living in the hostel wore the same uniform. They wore smart clothes and possessed all sorts of finery like jewels and wrist-watches. She thought they were probably from upper caste families. She painfully recalls the news commenting on the Dalit Children thus "Look at the Cheri children. When they stay here, they eat their fill and look as round as

potatoes. But look at the state in which they came back from home-just skin and bone” (Karukku: 17-18).

Bama worked in Christian order where the Tamils were considered inferior and a Tamil Parayar was the lowest of the lot and held no esteem. The order itself had its own reservation about the Harijan woman and “would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns” and fact that there was a separate order for them somewhere. (Karukku: 22). Throughout her education, Bama found that wherever she went, there was a painful reminder of her caste and untouchability.

Besides this typical notion of elders, they faced another problem that prevented them from studying poverty. This poverty presents a girl child from seeing how a school looks like. A girl child, as Bama mentions, is meant for looking after the house: “It was always the girl children who had to look after chores at home” (45). Bama states a little later.

Life is difficult if you happen to be poor, even though you are born into the upper caste. When this is the case, the conditions of those who are born into the paraya community, as the poorest of the poor struggling for daily survival, doesn’t need spelling out. In the midst of all this, how can they be expected to look after their children and make sure they go to schools? In the face of such poverty, the girl children cannot see the sense in schooling and stay at home, collecting fire food, looking after the house, caring for the basics and doing household chores (Karukku: 68).

Bama contemplates:

Any way, I finished there and went to a different college in order to take a B. Ed degree. It was same story there too. Yet, because I had the education, because I had the ability, I dared to speak up for myself; I did not care a toss about caste. Whatever the situation, I held my head high and I completed whatever I took up successfully. So, both teacher and students showed me a certain affection, respect. In this way, because of my education alone I managed to survive among those who spoke the language of caste-difference and discrimination (Karukku: 20).

It was against these odds that Bama completed her Graduation and B. Ed and decided to become a teacher.

Then she completed her education and worked in a convent and found that the nuns working there constantly oppressed the Dalit Children studying there and treated them with contempt. She worked there for five years and fought a continuous battle. She had a lot of spirit and guts at that time. Many of the children were Dalits. So she was happy teaching the children and arguing with the nuns. She enjoyed standing up to the authorities and teaching the Dalit children with some skill and success.

The convent also discriminated the Dalit children. It was then that Bama was suddenly struck with the idea of becoming a savior to the Dalit children. She took a drastic step of resigning her job as a teacher and entered the order. She entered a particular order since she had read about the women who founded that

particular order. She did so for the sake of the poor and she lived and died for them alone.

Bama was admitted to the order only when it was confirmed that a convent had asked for her services. After Bama became a nun, she joined the convent with the single purpose of serving the under-privileged. Once, she finished her B.Ed. and started to work, life became comfortable enough. It was really good to earn enough money every month and to go about independently. She would buy clothes and she could spend on whatever she wanted. She entered the convent to teach poor people because of her education. The convent did not know the meaning of poverty. In the convent, there was food of all kinds. Nuns in the convent enjoyed a very luxurious life. There was a comfortable room to live in and convent life changed her fundamentally. Then she looked back on her own attitude towards Christianity and religious faith. She realized that religion was forced on the Dalit converts right from childhood. She recalled how mechanically they were forced to attend the both classes and memorize. Oral instructions in religion and later written instruction were usually written in the form of questions and answers. Classes and morning prayers were a must for all Dalit Children. In spite of all these mechanical drills, Bama still had faith in religion. She believed to be spreading the message of love and brotherhood.

Bama realized that she would not live a life of duplicity. Having realized that there was no connection between the 'Convent's God' and the suffering poor, Bama's mind was tormented. Completely alienated from her environment, Bama decided to leave the order. But "how long can one play-act this way? Any way it

was not possible for me. I had to leave the order come into the world”(*Karukku*: 93). Bama thus “leaves one community (or religious women) in order to join another (as a Dalit Women)”. (*Holmstrom 2000: IX*). Having come out of the religious order, Bama felt a sense of fulfillment belonging to the community of Dalit women.

In Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* (2008), she discusses that Dalits have been inspired by Ambedkarite ideology. Dalits wrote poems, autobiographies and asserted themselves and voiced their concerns through the act of writing their autobiographies and other genres of literature.

Baby Kamble further elaborated on her personal experiences. She says that she suffered a great deal in her household due to domestic violence. There was nobody to even complain to assert this. She tolerated all those humiliations and sufferings over the years. She said that her life was caught between the blades of a pair of scissors. Kamble’s greatness lied in struggling against these adverse conditions and emerging victorious in a male-dominated social set-up because of the inspiring message of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. She asserted how and why she gave utmost priority and preference to Ambedkarite ideology in her life. She was immensely influenced and motivated by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s writings and social movements. Kamble worked with Ambedkarite movement for social emancipation. Writings asserted this influence. She said:

Ambedkar visited Phaltan when I was child. The speech I heard then is fixed in my mind, ‘get educated, eat less but educate yourselves.’ Unless

you are educated you will not lift yourselves up. Hinduism has until now shut the Dalits up in the darkness of ignorance, in the framework of the four varnas, but through education you can make progress (Pawar & Moon: 295).

Kamble discusses in her book how she was attracted to the Ambedkarite movement in the later stages of her life. Her husband never objected to her association with the Ambedkarite movement. He was also an ardent follower of Ambedkar. She quoted Ambedkar's brilliant statement while comparing Ambedkar and Gandhi in terms of social service and said that Gandhi only showed sympathy towards untouchability and did not do anything substantial for the deprived sections of the society. Ambedkar, however, worked to eradicate social misery from its roots. She feels that only when you are born in that race you can feel the real pain (Pawar and Moon: 296).

Kamble expressed her grave concern over the present fate of the Dalit movement and leadership among the Dalits. In an interview given to Maya Pandit, she said:

Now the educated Dalits are behaving exactly as the upper-caste villagers used to behave then. The educated Dalits occupy top positions in the Government. Their children enjoy the good life. They are not bothered about what's happening to poor people. Whatever they do, they do only for themselves. The poor Dalits are left where they were. At least that's what I feel (Kamble: 124).

Kamble's contribution to the Ambedkarite Movement cannot be sidelined. Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon appreciated the outstanding work done by Dalit women for the growth of the Ambedkarite movements. They interviewed all the Dalit women who were instrumental in the movement. Urmila Pawar's *Amhihi Itihas Ghadawala* focuses on the involvement of women in various Dalit struggles from the early twentieth century drawing on diverse sources. This book also throws light on how the social change took place in society with the entry of Dalit women in the fold. This book takes about the participation and contribution of Dalit women in various Dalit struggles from the early twentieth century.

In one of her articles, she stated that Dalit women have been left behind by the Dalit movement and the women's movement. Vimal Thorat strongly argues for the equal status of Dalit women in India. She says that the so called Dalit movements (R.P and B.S.P) have always neglected the Dalit women. Both the Dalit movement and women movements have consciously ignored the Dalit women issues. She further adds that this patriarchal attitude sidelines women from forums and especially from decision-making bodies. The Dalit movement threw up so many women but articulated women were not invited or welcomed by Dalit forums, especially the political parties. She asserted that the woman should take active participation in every walk of life.

In Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste* (2002), he describes various life situations in different places. From village Ozar to Bombay in his village, he grew as a Mahar who challenged the daily indignities inflicted on him. His forefathers performed the Annual Yeskar duties such as announcing deaths, tending to

carcasses of cattle in the village, running as a human pilot forming at the mouth ahead of the carriages of Government officials, singing their praises, in return for being allowed to beg from house to house, careful not to touch the hand that gave alms. In his village, he was discriminated by caste system. He was persecuted by a revenue officer. He refused to perform Yeskar duty and he escaped from a small village at Ozar in Maharashtra to the city of Mumbai to escape persecution as a participant in Baba Saheb Ambedkar's social movements. He was reluctant to perform Yeskar duties. He was inspired by speeches of Ambedkar. His speeches changed Damu's life styles. He stressed more on moral education and self-dignity in his speeches. Ambedkar's slogan 'Educate, Organize and Agitate' reached most of the Dalits.

When he came to Mumbai for the first time, he was only just beginning to learn the ways of city life. Although illiterate and despite the disadvantages of his Mahar caste, Damu earned respect in various jobs which he undertook. He made friends with some of the boys who spent their days on railway platform. In the village, his mother had earned 2 to 3 annas for a day, but in Mumbai, she was paid 12 to 14 annas for the same work. She thanked God because she got good payments. Damu and his friends boldly entered a corner tea shop. They sat around marble topped table. No one knew that he was an untouchable. He had been initiated into city life. He searched for an add job:

Once again, I began going to the station, doing all sorts of odd jobs.

Slowly, people started recognizing me and got to know me better. A man

named Gangaram hired me to sell news papers. I earned 5 annas the first day, and thus began a new phase in my life (Outcaste: 91).

Then he met the Gora Saheb who was familiar to him. He started the newspaper business. The Saheb paid 8 rupees per month. He did several odd jobs to earn money. He became a regular worker of (G.P.I) Railways. Then he was promoted to the post of motor mechanic. He could learn to operate and inspect the train. Finally, he reached his good days. Later, he participated in Baba Saheb's social movements and he became an assistant of Guruji.

Ambedkar's speeches at the Mahar Satyagraha brought about a revolution among the untouchables. Their thoughts and behaviour began to change. They began to take part in meetings and conferences in large numbers. Dalit organizations were formed. Baba Saheb emphasized on the responsibility of parents for the education of their children. He started co-education also. He talked on child marriages, cleanliness among women, responsibility of a mother to encourage her children to send them to school, morals etc. He was inspired by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's speeches to awaken self-consciousness. He decided that:

I want my children to grow up and have a dignified life, I want them be respected and I am sending them to school just as Baba Saheb had said..... and if they remain Hindus, they will never have a respectable place in society. I will see to it that my children don't have to suffer like we have. (Outcaste: 174)

So we would give his children an education with the inspiration of Baba Saheb's teaching. Then Baba Saheb's called the Dalits to renounce Hinduism because it does not allow the untouchables to enter temples. All the Dalit Community had to embrace Buddhism. "Buddhism has no priestly class and certainly nobody is considered untouchables. There are no rituals or rites. You only focus your heart and your devotion".

Damodhar Jadav was an ordinary person. He changed his mind set and sent their children to school. All of Damodar's six children acquired college education. Damu's eldest son Jadav struggled against untouchability, illiteracy and backwardness. He achieved high position. His father, Damodar Ranjai Jadhav, was a class IV employee from the Dalit community. His forefathers were untouchables. Even he reclaimed his dignity through his achievements.

During his college days, he participated in debates on Baba Saheb Dalit Movements. He did odd jobs. Then he applied for the prestigious I.A.S. job. He was selected to join it in 1963. In the history of their organization, a class IV employee's son had never been selected into the I. A. S. Damu's son won this honour with the inspiration of Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Dina took boxing classes while he was studying in Siddhartha College. He participated in many inter-college competitions. His opponents proved too much for him. He punched Dina hard. So, he took it as a challenge and went on. Then he became a successful boxer.

Damu's youngest son Janu describes his experiences during his school days, when he went to Marathi medium school. The English language was offered

only at middle school level. When he was in primary school, his elder siblings used to practice English at home. His brother Janu taught him English alphabets. It was a big challenge for him to decipher the words by reading them letter by letter.

Baba Saheb Ambedkar taught his father's generation the importance of Education. "Educate, Unite and Agitate" did not only mean a slogan. It became the vow of the entire Dalit community. So his father was always watchful about their studies. They got good marks. He passed Matriculation in 1969. His father was very pleased because he got good marks.

In 1981, the Government of India awarded him a National Scholarship. He set off to the US to do a Ph. D. in Economics, and his University declared him "Best International Student" in 1985. He returned home after his doctorate in 1986. Then the Reserve Bank appointed him financial advisor to the Ethiopian Government. His forefathers were untouchables like a *Mamledar* or *Talathi*. So this was an honour for his family as well as his community. Around 1950, Damu's family was living in Juna Wadala, in a small room on the ground floor with a tiny kitchen and balcony. The bathrooms were at the rear end. They had a dim electric bulb in the balcony. They lived in that tiny room in Wadala. They had proper meals every day.

In 1955, the port trust offered Damu new Quarters in another part of Wadala. The new house was larger and it was connected with electricity. So the children could study. The colony had a self sufficient community and cultural

centre and this also provided a study room. They lived comfortably like they did at Juna Wadala along with other people. With the help of education, they changed their poor living conditions to comfortable and dignified life style.

In the epilogue, Narendra Jadhava's daughter and Damu's granddaughter describes her experiences. She wrote her autobiography when she was only sixteen years old. She studied at Walter Johnson High School in Maryland. She did not think about race, religion, or caste. She did not have any problem except adjusting to the new system. But people asked her, "How did you deal with change"? Lots of her friends asked her: "You are from India? Whoa, you speak such good English!" She was not affected by caste, race, and religion. Damu was an ordinary man he changed his mindset and succeeded in changing his next generation.

Another autobiography is Vasanth Moon's *Growing up Untouchables in India* (2002) which discusses the various stages of the writer's personal life. The nature of social protest has been examined in its various dimensions through this research work. Dalits fight against such caste discrimination, poverty, and illiteracy. During my research, I have tried to trace the social transformation that occurred with the help of education. They have shown tremendous strength and potential in fighting against the harsh patriarchal norms from upper caste. Dalits are inspired by revolutionary Ambedkarite movements and social movements in India. Dalits have received educational avenues created by Indian constitution. Dalits educated themselves and changed their life styles and reformed their community with their writings. Vasanth Moon's autobiography presents us with a

collective memory of caste oppression and struggle in India. Moon's autobiography reveals about his life experience in his village professions and increased mobility. Through the educational opportunities, Moon eloquently describes growing up in his Vasti (neighbourhood), a Dalit slum, in the city of Nagpur in Central Maharashtra. Moon recalls his childhood days when he registered in the first grade at Sitabandi Normal School. His grandfather taught him the English alphabet in the first year. A government school student went there to get training as teacher. In the second grade, Mr. Dhole taught him to write the multiplication tables. He studied up to fourth grade in that school. At that time, the Mahar leaders of Vidarbha came to visit Maharwada. Among them were Laxmana Rao Ogale and Dasharath Patil who were the leaders of Vidharba.

Around 1930 Dasarath Patil gave a call for reform to the community and the Mahars stopped carrying away dead animals. Moon realized the Dalit political moves to discard the caste based occupations. He recollected the political practices of the Dalit activist like Dasarath Patil. He proclaimed that, "Let us have our own markets" at that time, Dalits tried to appropriate market for their mobility in the monetized Indian society (Moon P-12). Dasarath Patil owned hundreds of acres of land and held the Malgujari rights for several villages. He joined Baba Saheb's social movement in 1920 and from then on, he spent his whole life in social service.

In 1935, Ambedkar called for conversion from Hinduism. Some Dalit activists in the community read the Janatha, Ambedkar's newspaper. All news

papers would come to the Dalit organizations. The Samata Sainik Dal people would gather in the evening and discuss renouncing of the Hinduism.

The Samata Sainik Dal organized a house to house public campaign under the leadership of Wamanrao Godbole. There was a library and youth club for hockey, football, and cricket. The boys were skilled at games. At last, one boy in every house became a volunteer of the Dal. Wamanrao Godbole called the young Dal activists to attend meetings. He explained Baba Saheb's decision not to celebrate the Hindu festivals such as Krishna's or Rama's Birthday and Kanoba would not be worshipped, rather the community should celebrate Ambedkar Jayanti and Chokhamela Jayanti. The entire community youth broke the idols of Kanoba.

When Moon started going to the Ambedkarite movements and social reform movements, Dalit organization such as Samata Sainik Dal held its meetings in the fields in front of Maharpura. This branch was established around 1938 by Asaram Paithankar, Sadanand Dongare. The whole community gathered every evening on the field. Panduranga Varade had a flag and a bamboo stick. The Dal Soldiers would take this and go to the Dal field. They would use an iron pole. The bamboo was raised up on the pole, and they would put a rope through a hook on its end to raise the flag. All the soldiers of the Dal would stand in ranks before the flag. They would do it every day in the community. From school children to young man, everybody would come to the Dal. There was also strict discipline, the flag symbolized Dalits' pride.

Wamanrao Godbole had established Dal branches throughout northern and western Nagpur in 1942. The Dalit community established scheduled caste federation. It held meeting in that year. Wamanrao Godbole made a flag with his own hands in the Ambedakrite movements. The songs written by poets about the blue flag were famous:

We will give our life for the blue flag
Millions will bow before the blue flag
If you still plan to fight us, think out it,
We will sacrifice all for the blue flag
Whatever Bhim wants we will do,
We will see our blood flow for the blue flag (Moon: 65)

These songs inspired many Dalits to dedicate all for the flag. There was a parade of the Dal every day. They learned things that were taught to the military staff such as left..... rights.

The scheduled caste federation's conferences were held on 17th July 1942. A large number of youths came to the Dal Meetings. Wamanrao Godbole took double responsibility for organizing meetings for the conferences and the protection of Baba Saheb. Wamanrao's organizational skills were marvelous. He assigned tasks to young activists of the Dal dividing responsibility for the neighbourhoods among them, and he himself traveled everywhere to organize the youths. Branches of the Dal were established in all the neighbourhoods. The Samata Sainik Dal organized meetings and conferences to change the Dalits' mentality. Importantly, Moon narrative does bring to light the various organic working class leaders that the Dalit movements produced. Among them, Babu

Hardas was renewed as the youngest and most determined of the activists of the time. He founded the organization of bidi workers in the central provinces and Beror before 1930. He was the secretary of the union. Radha Bai Kamble, a mill worker and the first woman union leader in the Dalit community, became known as a vociferous organizer of woman textile workers. Previously, she had been a member of the Congress INTUC Union, but when the Independent Labour Party was established, she began to organize under Revaran Kavade. Mahars made up 40 to 45 per cent of Nagpur's mill workers, and 30 percent of these were women. All these came together under Radhabai's leadership. She began to handle all their problems.

The leaders like Revaram Kavade, Dasarth Gaikwad, P. N. Raj Bhoj and Dasrath Patil Kavade met at the Samata Sainik Dal Branch. They gave advice to Dalit youths. Baba Saheb Ambedkar's movement had a tremendous effect on the cultural life of the Dalit community. As education spread within the community, its cultural consciousness began to be transformed. At that time, there were many players, poets and singers in the community and *Qawwali* programs were also held after the founding of the Schedule Caste Federation in 1942. The drama troupe of Uddav was famous throughout the Marathi speaking region of the central provinces. No woman took part in drama troupes at that time. So Uddav Ramtake played woman's role from the age of sixteen onwards. In Uddav's plays, Nathu Shinde and Atmaram Dhok would play the humorous parts. Govardhan Gourkhede of the community played main role. Manik Patil and Sankar Ramteke took other parts. In that troupe, two plays; *Shaving or The Widow's Humiliation*

and *Conversion*; were very popular. The performances took place on the Varanda in front of the Vitthal-Rukmini Temple.

In another play, Yami is a Brahmin Widow. Her father decides that her head should be shaved. Ramteke himself played Yami's role. Gangu barber comes to do the shaving. When he arrives, Yami tells him, "Ganga. Go, go away. Why have you come here?"

Ganga - "To remove your Hair."

Yami - "Who told you to do that?"

Ganga - "Your father sent me."

Yami - "I will not be shaved. I tell you truly, I am determined" (Growing up Untouchables in India:109)

After that Yami's father comes. She debates with him and cites the scriptures. Even so, the father does not listen and leaves, giving Ganga the order to cut her hair.

Then Ganga and Yami join together and run away to the city and get married. The comedy conversion is also very effective. One village watch man, an untouchable, continuously cries out: "Give me Water, give me water, I am dying of thirst". When he tries to drink the water from a nearby well two Brahmans come and beat him. His wife goes to perform prayers in a temple and the priest there tries to rape her. Then he begins to think of suicide. However, he learns Baba Saheb's conversion call and becomes determined to change his religion. The stories which ordinary people can understand were shown on the stage, and the teaching of social reforms came to the lanes and footpaths. The players

dramatized many stories on education and giving up begging and superstitions. At the time of his childhood days, a Brahmin named Anant Ramachandra Kulkarni, propagated Buddhism. His intention was not to convert people to the religion, rather to give Hindus the ideas of the Buddhism.

Wamanrao Godbole brought the news that Baba Saheb was going to convert to Buddhism. Kulkarni also got an idea about this from the new papers. He began to meet with the branches of the Samata Sainik Dal. Wamanrao told him to come to teach the thoughts of the Buddha.

Waman Rao Godbole, Keshavrao Patil, and the other Dal leaders decided to hold a class every Sunday to give people an understanding of Buddhism. During his college days, Moons went to Kulkarni because he had collected many valuable books on Buddhism. He had a small library and, seeing his love for books, Kulkarni made him keeper of the keys for the library. Moon had greedily read all of them. He finished his college education. The community decided to celebrate Ambedkar Jayanthi every year. At that time, he was writing a drama titled “The Welfare of the World”. It was based on Budha’s life. This was his first attempt for writing plays. It was to be performed in the community. He wrote many plays to change the community.

Dalit community had a supervision committee for the Vithal-Rukmini temple. The temple was in such a bad condition that repairing it would be difficult. The organizers of the Dal wanted to change the temple committee.

Finally, all the Dalit youth gathered and held the meeting. They decided to give the work of the temple committee to a new group.

Keshavrao Patil, Wamanrao and some people decided to consider the constitution of the trust and formed a new permanent committee for the Vitthal-Rukmini temple trust. The new members were elected for the trust committee. It had two kinds of bodies. One was working committee and another advisory committee. Activities occurred according to the constitution for many years. During that time, Moon was a member of the first working committee. There were good works of the new youth on behalf of the new Vitthal-Rukmini Temple trust. The construction began in 1950 around the temple. Gymnasium areas were also built and the temple trust committee started taking the place of the Bhagyodaya Club. The boys started sports like cricket, football, and hockey which were started on behalf of the trust. These teams began to play matches against various groups. The trust gave Moon the responsibility of building a library near the temple trust. He brought many books. He decided to build a library on behalf of the Vitthal-Rukmini Temple Trust. He began to demand books from many people. His uncle Hari Patil donated nearly two hundred books. He created a library containing twelve hundred books and gave it to the trust. Daily news papers, weekly and monthly magazines began to come to the library. Their expenses were covered by some senior employed members of the Dal.

When Moon was the first executive committee of the temple trust, he gave his resignation because he did not agree with method of working of the others. When he got employment, he used to send contribution for news papers

subscriptions to the temple trust committee. He continued sending these subscriptions for many days. Then he became Deputy Country Commissioner in 1955. It was very useful to the Dalit community.

In 1953, Moon began the hand written magazine in the community. He wrote some articles for it. At that time, Ramdas Tirpude was a perfect painter. He was assigned the job to design with the inspiration of Ramdas Tirupude and he began to collect books of art. In 1954, when he was employed for a while, he studied painting in Sikhale's art classes.

Hand written magazines were published in every communities. Dalit painters like Ratnakar Bayir and Chandrakanth Megale established the literary traditions of writings. The boys in the Dalit community had no tradition of writing. However, when he decided to start a magazine, many made efforts to contribute for it. Boys from eighth standard wrote articles. Moon himself wrote various articles, poems, and stories for the magazine. The name of the magazine was Shuklender (Rising Moon). It encouraged the newly educated youth and brought the ignorant into the light. There were writings of the students from the lower classes. This was the aim of the hand written journal.

Sita Bardi Sports Club was formed in 1953. The young people from the community began a program of distributing free milk to children in the community. The students from the community started writing magazines and held the meetings on behalf the temple trust. The inauguration of the magazine was

done by a Brahman Marathi Professor A. N. Deshpande. His speech was awakening about the creation of literature for Harijan brothers and sisters.

In Maharashtra, the Dalit Panthers like Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Jyothi Rao Phule had inspired thousands of Dalit people to join the struggle. This intellectual revolution provided a new dimension to Dalit movement. Dalits needed an ongoing struggle and a consciousness of struggle, a consciousness that brings revolutionary change both in the outside world and in their hearts, a consciousness that leads the process of social change. In Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*(2003), the reform movement describes how he was emancipated and rescued himself from oppression. He discusses his life journey to study and get educated "to improve his caste". Valmiki's father had desired to see his children to live a better life:

A Christian used to visit our neighbourhood. His name was Sewak Ram Masihi. He would sit with the Children of the Chuhra around him. He used to teach them reading and writing. The government schools did not allow these children to enroll. My family sent only myself to Sewak Ram Masihi. My brothers were all working. There was no question of sending our sister to school. I learnt my alphabet in Master Sewak Ram Masihi's open-air school, a school without mats and rooms. One day, Sewak Ram Masihi and my father had an argument. My father took me to the Basic Primary School. There my father begged Master Har Phool Singh; "Masterji, I will be forever in your debt if you teach this child of mine a letter or two (Valmiki: 2).

Every parent thought that his children live in the society equally on all grounds and there would be no caste discrimination. They want to study their children like others. Before independent movements, Valmiki faced lots of caste discrimination, poverty, inferiority complex, and so on:

Gandhiji's uplifting of the untouchables was resounding everywhere. Although the doors of the Government schools had begun to open for untouchables, the mentality of the ordinary people had not changed much. I had to sit away from the others in the class, that too on the floor. The mat ran out before reaching the spot I sat on. Sometimes I would have to sit away behind everybody, right near the door. And the letter on the board from there *seemed faded* (Valmiki: 2).

In spite of such difficulties, he proved himself self-sufficient. He even challenged the teachers about their hostile attitude towards his son. His father knew the value of education and it was very encouraging for him. After he went to Dehradun, there was a big library in Indresh Nagar colony. The library had a huge supply of books on Gandhism. He read several books by Gandhi there. One day, when he was sitting in the library looking at some books, Hemlal put a small book in his hand and he said, "You must read this book." The name of the book was Ambedkar's autobiography. He read Dr. Ambdekar's life story. He knew that Ambedkar's life-long struggle had shaken him up.

He spent many days to read Ambedkar's books. Suddenly, his silence began to melt. The reading of these books awakened his consciousness. These

books gave voice to his muteness. At that time in his life, an anti-establishment consciousness became strong in him. After reading these books, he realized that by naming the untouchables Harijan's by Gandhi:

A new word, 'Dalit', entered my vocabulary, a word that is not a substitute for 'Harijan', but an expression of rage of millions of untouchables. A new direction was opening for me. I was also beginning to realize that the education imparted in schools and colleges did not make us secular but turned us into narrow-minded, fundamentalist Hindus. The deeper I was getting into this literature, the more articulate my rage became. I began to debate with my college friends, and put my doubts before my teachers. It was this literature that had given me courage (Valmiki: 72).

He became more active in college events and these protests were an essential part of his education.

Valmiki's father was very happy on hearing his son's decision that he abandoned college education. He joined the Ordnance Factory in Dehradun as an apprentice. His technical education enabled him to be self-reliant as he received a monthly stipend of one hundred and seven rupees per month during his apprenticeship. After one year training at the Ordnance Factory in Dehradun, he appeared in a competitive examination and was selected. He wanted to go for further training. He spent two years at the Ordnance Factory training institute, Khamaria. This experience opened new doors for his future progress. When he reached Jabalpur station on the evening of 1st July 1968, his friend Vijaya

Bahadur and he were received by the students of the ordinance factory training institute. The senior students welcomed them with open arms and brought them to the residence. He was allotted room no. 3 in hostel number-1. He was introduced to a new world after entering the training institute's residence. There he found lot of new things. He did not worry about boarding and lodging. There were about two hundred students in the hostel. It was a lovely place. In the hostel, many cultural activities would go on, like singing, music, sports, laughter, etc.

The hostel was situated in a quiet area. On one side was the Ordinance Factory at Khamaria, and on the other side was the garrison engineer's office. The institute's residential areas were quite far from the hostel. The workshop included engineering and its related subjects. In this new surrounding and new environment, there were up to five hundred students staying there. The rooms were very large and many students shared a room. The students had come from different parts of the country. There were some students who had Marxist learning. He also joined the Marxists and formed a theatre group:

Jabalpur changed me. My speech patterns changed. My manners also changed. I made many friends who were deeply interested in contemporary issues and constantly argued about them. I took part in seminars and cultural functions. I became involved in Jabalpur's literary life. I also began to develop my own views on literature. I was more attracted to social realism than to aestheticist and formalist types of writings. (Valmiki: 85).

He spent two years training at Jabalpur. Then he received a call for applications for draftsman training to the Ordinance Factory training institute Bombay. Most of the students of the institute applied for it. The candidates were to be chosen through a nation-wide competition. He was selected in the written examination and attended the oral test. With the help of his friend, he appeared for the interview. Later, he received a call from Bombay to do another two and half years further training in Bombay. He joined the Bombay Ordinance Factory Training Institute. The hostel was at a scenic spot, at the foot of Ambernath Hill. Among the ordinance factories, this institute and its hostel held a special place. The evenings were lively in the hostel along with gymnastic and indoor games facilities. The hostel also had a swimming pool and library. He was greatly excited when he saw the library and utilized it:

It was during these days that I was introduced to Marathi Dalit Literature. Dalit writings were changing the face of Marathi literature. The words of Daya Pawar, Namdev Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Gangadhar Pantavane, Baburao Bagul, Keshava Meshram, Narayan Surve, Vaman Nimbalkar and Yashwant Manohar were igniting sparks in my veins. Their voices exhilarated me, filled me with new energy. My reading of Dalit literature was beginning to change my notions about what is literature. Sudhama Patil was my helper and guide in this quest. My knowledge of Marathi was gradually increasing (Valmiki: 91).

The technical education and the new world of literature filled him with a new consciousness. After the training of Ordinance Factory institute, he was

appointed as a draftsman at Chandrapur. The chances of finding employment immediately after the training were excellent because finding an employment means an improvement of his economic situation. During the first few days, he stayed with his friends Dinesh Vajpai and Anand Sharma. Afterwards, he was allotted a room in the hostel. Later, his father indicated that he wanted to marry a girl as soon as possible. He married his Swarnalatha Bhabi's younger sister Chanda on 27th December 1973. With the help of a few friends in 1974, he started a theatre group called Meghdoot Natya Samstha. This group became well-known in Nagpur. This group had begun with regular shows and street plays to acquaint the wider public about contemporary issues. He also wrote poems in Navbharat, Yugham, Nai Duniya. He began to write a column in a weekly at Chandrapur called Janapratidin. During his Chandrapur days, he was totally involved in the Dalit movements. Afterwards, he was allotted a double room flat at 31-C, Type – II, Sector -5. It was close to his friend Ajay's Flat.

On the occasion of Ambedkar's birth anniversary, they celebrated it with fanfare in the Ordinance Factory at Chandrapur. He participated in it with great enthusiasm. With the help of Meghdoot Natya Samstha, they organized poetry reading, panel discussion, and art exhibition, and staged plays and street theatre. He wanted to discuss the Dalit problems and contradictions. He began to boycott Hindu religious celebrations. He searched for theatre people who were keen to work for change. He stated that, with the help of education, Dalits can win over the oppression of caste and poverty. For him, poverty taught him patience and caste discrimination led to reformation movements. He had learnt every art by

himself. He asserted that transformation of self leads to the reformation for change.

Various Dalit autobiographical writings depict the experience of the writers in changing life styles of the Dalits. Bama's *Karukku* shows the differences in life styles between the past and the present in her village. She also describes how every Dalit experiences such humiliation and discrimination in her village because they don't know the basic freedom and human rights. Baby Kamble, in *The Prisons We Broke* (2008), discusses that Dalits have been inspired by Ambekarite ideology. She gives an account how her life was caught between the blades of a pair of scissors in struggling against the adverse conditions and emerging victorious in a male-dominated social set-up. In *Outcaste* (2002), Narendra Jadhav describes various life situations in different places ranging from his village Ozar to Bombay, where he lived as a Mahar who challenged the daily indignities inflicted on him. With the help of education, he was able to change the poor living conditions of his family into a comfortable and dignified life style.

Vasanth Moon's *Growing up Untouchables in India* (2002) discusses the various stages of the writer's personal life. The nature of social protest has been examined in its various dimensions through this research work. Moon's autobiography presents us with a collective memory of caste oppression and struggle in India as well as his life experience in his village. Another autobiography is Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2003), where he describes how he was emancipated and rescued himself for oppression. He discusses his life journey and expresses how he got educated "to improve his caste". The change in attitude of the Dalits towards their

living condition changed their life styles. They became educated and they felt the need of living like other human beings. They changed their caste structures and established separate community organizations which played an important role for reforming their life styles.

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Chapter –V

Educated Dalits And Political Development

In the pre-independent movement, Dalits were inspired by revolutionary Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideology. They fought against caste discrimination, untouchability, poverty, slavery and injustice in the society. Dalits were encouraged by Ambedkar's slogan "Educate, Organize, and Agitate". It did not only mean a slogan but also it became the vow of the entire Dalit community and it reached most of the Dalit youth. So they took up education and politics seriously. Educated Dalits wrote about their oppression, anguish, and protest through the writings of Dalit autobiographies. After 1960, Marathi Dalit literature was influenced by a new stream called the Dalit literary stream. This new Dalit literary stream gave importance to the Marathi Dalit writers. Thus the Marathi writers began expressing themselves by writings poems, short-stories, novels, plays, and autobiographies.

Educated Dalits participated in political movements with the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. They established separate community organizations called Samata Sainik Dal and Schedule Caste Federation. The concept of untouchables was the darkest spot in the Hindu society. So the Dalit society had to develop social equality and political empowerment. Ambedkar led an independent labour party to fight for their own problems. They fought against the caste system during the freedom struggle. Many Dalit writers also fought this battle through their autobiographic writings. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste A Memoir* (2002) discusses

various stages of his parents who participated political movements after the death of Damu's father. In 1919, he migrated to Mumbai with his mother and younger sister when he was twelve years old. He worked in Mumbai for several years. He was aware of his rights as a human being and as a participant in Baba Saheb Ambedkar's social movement. He fought against village traditional duties to reclaim dignity of his community. After years of struggle in Mumbai, he got his first regular job in the Railways. He visited the Tau master and sought his blessings.

In 1927, when Baba Saheb Ambedkar led a procession of untouchables in rows of four, the slogan "Educate, unite and agitate" was chanted in Baba Saheb Ambedkar's rally that day. Damu returned to Mumbai from his village. It was announced that Dalit meeting would be held in a place called Mahad near Mumbai. Ambedkar's speeches at the Mahad satyagrah brought about a revolution among the untouchables. He urged the untouchables to do away with the humiliating traditional village duties like carrying away dead cattle. It was on 4th August 1927 when the Mahad Municipality revoked its earlier resolution granting untouchables access to the water tank. Baba Saheb took this up as a challenge and announced that they would hold another protest meeting in Mahad in December.

Ambedkar continued his struggle for social emancipation. In December 1927, in Mahad Satyagraha, Ambedkar said, "If you say your religion is our religion, your rights and ours must be equal. Is this the case? If not, on what ground do you say that we must remain in the Hindu fold?" (Outcaste: A Memoir:

24) In order to lodge a strong protest, Ambedkar publicly burnt Manusmruti (the Holy book of the Hindus) which was considered to be manifesto of caste system. Ambedkar criticized the Manu Dharma Shashtra severely. Manu imposed a number of rustications on Dalits. The movement inspired by Baba Saheb Ambedkar gave to him new courage and self-realization. It gave him power to question, reason and act. He looked back on his behaviour with the *Fauzdar*, he had not done anything wrong in refusing his authority. Baba Saheb had inspired to stand up and reclaim our dignity.

Around 1928 in the month of August, Lord Ganapathi's festival was celebrated in grand manner. A tent was erected in the space between the two chawls and it was decorated with garlands and streamers. Amid loud music and dancing, an earthen idol of Ganapathi was brought in a procession and placed in the centre. For ten days and nights, fervent devotees worshipped it with ritual prayers. Each house took turns and cooked Ganesha's favourite sweet as an offering to the god. Each and every corner had an idol of Ganesha. In some places, there were framed portraits of Baba Saheb. The devotees worshipped Baba Saheb too offering flowers with equal reverence. Every night, many programmes like skills, play, folk dances and competitions were performed. They had to walk long distances to attend these programmes. They were singing folk songs about Dr. B. R. Ambedkar with social themes. They performed various social and cultural activities to fight against untouchability and the caste system to educate their children.

The important part of the Ganapathi festival was that, after dinner at night, people gathered to discuss local issues. They talked about Baba Saheb's thoughts and teachings:

The speakers talked about Baba Saheb's protest march in Mahad Satyagraha for access of water from the Chavdar tank. They also talked about entering Hindu temples. We were labelled untouchables and not allowed entry into Hindu temples. After all, we too are human beings. Is it a sin to be born a Mahar? Baba Saheb has made us aware that we are as human as any other people. We have to unite and agitate against discrimination. The crowd listened attentively and shouted, 'Jai Bhim'..... Then they sang bhajans incorporating Baba Saheb's exhortations (Outcaste: 118).

On the tenth day of the Ganapathi festival, the idol was taken in a procession amidst music and dance. This procession was celebrated in Dalit community also. Actually, untouchables were not allowed to worship Lord Ganapathi, the God of upper caste. After many years, the Ganapati festival was taken on social dimensions. It was good way to unite the masses. The upper castes were certainly not happy about this as their God was polluted by this. Damu often talked to his wife about Baba Saheb's speeches. Whenever he attended the meetings, he took her along with him. All those speeches had an effect on her and those also changed her attitude.

During the festival of Ganapati, upper caste communities spread a malicious rumour that the untouchables were going to symbolically hang the idol Ganapati instead of immersing it. This had inflamed religious sentiments. At that time, police were deployed at every corner and armed policemen rounded up suspicious looking people.

Their procession contained about 3,000 men and women. They were under police protection and police had decided to let them go fired. The other small procession from different areas came back. Everything was going fine with people dancing and singing to the accompaniment of drums around the cart with the decorated idol. Women and passers-by showered the idol with flower petals. It was a great fun and they were all excited.

Suddenly, someone hurled a stone. This created a commotion and people began screaming. Some people threw stones back in the same direction from which the stone had come. Soon it became a fight and the stones were flying in all directions. Then the volunteers brought the situation under control. Some people started running for their lives in the middle of the procession. Some culprits also mingled with the procession. They saw this opportunity to molest young girls. Some saw a group of men misbehaving with girls under the pretext of controlling the crowds. Dalit women became so enraged at their behaviour at last that the police intervened. Finally, the procession continued and they immersed the idol. This procession was the revolution against the upper caste Hindus with the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. It was a political awakening to fight for entering the temples and worshipping Ganapati.

When Damu reached the outskirts of Nasik along his wife for doing works, he wanted to go to Mumbai. Instead, he came back excited and told his wife that Baba Saheb's posters were everywhere. Someone told him that Baba Saheb would come to Nasik to start a peaceful agitation–Satyagraha–to gain entry into the Kala Ram Temple. Damu had decided that they would stay in Nasik and look for work. They would participate in this social movement. Why should Mahars be prevented from entering the temple? Are not Mahars human beings? God belongs to everyone. All Hindus must be allowed into the temple. It was a question of Dalit rights as human beings and they were going to fight for it.

Many groups of Mahars were attending meeting at Nasik. Everywhere, there were posters with Baba Saheb's picture on one side and the temple on the other side. A large number of people had gathered there and all of them wore badges on their left shoulder. He realized that Mahars had come from far-off places. He began mingling with the crowds. He was eager to join them and do something. He went to a volunteer and greeted him loudly: "Jai Bhim! Hail Baba Saheb". Then he went to a small makeshift office in a tent and took two badges after entering their names in the register proudly. He pinned the badges on himself. With the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, many Dalit women devoted themselves to participate in Baba Saheb's social movements. A few volunteers moved among the crowds and explained to them, "We are launching a Satyagraha and civil disobedience until they allow us untouchables to enter the Hindu temples. We are equally human and, moreover, are Hindus. We must be given entry into temples" (Outcaste: 127).

Their sentiments would explore a united cry of 'Jai Bhim': It was just like Mahad agitation. Baba Saheb had carefully chosen the Kala Ram temple agitation. He was guiding them from Mumbai. He would come to Nashik on Ram Navami day. A call was already issued to untouchables all over the state of Maharashtra to come to Nasik and assert their right to worship Lord Ram in the Kala Ram temple. On the day of agitation, there were people everywhere greeting each other with 'Jai Bhim' around 20,000 people had assembled there. The meeting began under Baba Saheb's leadership. Local leaders spoke first about the plan of Satyagraha. When Baba Saheb rose to speak, the great mass of people cheered wildly. He explained the purpose of the struggle and instructed them to make it a peaceful and lawful protest as he said, "We will not die if we are not allowed into the temple, nor are we going to be immortalized by gaining entry. We are fighting for equal rights as human beings, and we are not going to accept anything less" (Outcaste: 128).

After the meeting began, Baba Saheb Ambedkar led a procession. The band followed him. The Mahar Community Association with the army and the volunteers had about 500 Dalit women participating in the movement. This was a big revolution and it was for the first time that Dalit women participated in the movement. They were followed by thousands of orderly protesters walking with discipline and determination. When the procession reached the temple, the gates were closed. A strong contingent of armed police led by Mr. Reynolds, a British police superintendent was guarding the main gate.

Ambedkar spoke to the police superintendent. Then he directed the procession to the river Godavari. Later he announced a peaceful struggle in front of the temple gate beginning the next day. Dalits joined the crowds at the temple's main gate. The temple had four gates with the east gate being the main gate. The atmosphere was tense with hundreds of armed police and protestors gathered at each gate. Mr. Reynolds had set up office in front of the temple and had camped there expecting the agitators to strike in the dead of night.

All the temple gates were blocked. The temple was sealed and nobody was allowed into the temple. Some high-caste people were hiding in houses near by, armed with sticks and batons ready to assault if Dalits tried to forcibly enter the temple, but Dalits were squatted at the main gate. Baba Saheb's strict instructions were to maintain a peaceful agitation.

The agitation continued for the sixth day. At that time, Mahatma Gandhi had defied the salt laws imposed by the British government at the town called Dandi. Gandhi had announced a nation-wide civil disobedience movement against British rule on behalf of the Indian National Congress. Some leaders of Indian National Congress supported the ideal of eradicating untouchability and temple entry movements started pressuring Baba Saheb to withdraw the agitation, but Baba Saheb said to continue the movement till he succeeded in claiming their birth right.

On March 8 1930, the Regional Commission came to review the situation. The temple trust committee took up their case with the authorities.

They claimed that the temple was private property but they don't have documentary evidence of private ownership. The Dalit activists opposed to it. The Dalit activists had evidence that the temple received an annual grant of 1000 rupees from the government. Therefore, it was a public property. After much debate, the Government turned this down and ordered the commissioner's transfer.

On the day of Ram Navami, the priests allowed only high caste people into the temple. The untouchables were not allowed there. They were traditionally allowed to pull the chariot, but the high caste people objected to carry the chariot. The procession was disrupted and a fight ensued. The police supported the priests and used their sticks to push the untouchables. Many protesters including Baba Saheb were injured. All the untouchables gathered near the temple were forbidden and would warrant arrest. The matter went to court and there was a lull with the decision pending. Baba Saheb met the Home Minister and the agitation was temporarily suspended. At the time, Damu participated Baba Saheb's movement to fight against injustice at all costs.

After the Kala Ram temple agitation was over, Damu returned to Mumbai. He was looking desperately for work. Wherever he went, he heard only one thing. It was the great depression. He could not understand, but his mother suggested several times that he should go to Tau Master and seek his help. So he went to Tau Master's house reluctantly. It was Sunday morning in March 1931. Tau Master felt happy when he saw Damu and asked "Where have you been hiding? I heard what a great job Sonu and you did participating in the Kala Ram

temple agitation.” Tau Master explained to Damu about Baba Saheb’s movement. Baba Saheb had just returned from England. He claimed their rights before the king emperor. “We have earned this right. See what Baba Saheb’s movement has won for us!” Damu could not understand and looked at him uncomprehendingly.

Tau Master explained to him that the British government convened a historic Round Table Conference in November 1930. Baba Saheb was one of the two delegates to represent Indian Dalit’s. Damu knew the newspapers of Baba Saheb’s Social Movement. Because he did not have education, he had some difficulty reading the newspapers. On those days, a new Marathi fortnightly started by Baba Saheb, called Janatha.

Tau Master showed him issues of the paper which had details of Baba Saheb’s social movements, as well as his speeches and other issues. He advised Damu to at least make it a point to read the Janatha. He was inspired by Tau Master’s speeches. He wanted to read the newspaper and dedicate his life to Baba Saheb’s social movement. When Baba Saheb was doing so much for Dalits to improve their condition, he was questioning himself – what he could do for his community. At least, he could uplift one family. He had to give his children the best possible education and raise them with the spirit of public service, but he was looking for odd jobs. He needed a job to sustain his family. He must keep trying and trying hard. He read the Janatha Newspaper with the help of some people at the tea shop. He attended public meetings and Baba Saheb’s social movements. No one could stop him from participating in a black flag demonstration against Mahatma Gandhi.

On the occasion in December 1931 cold night, hundreds of Dalits assembled at the Mole Station—the Marine terminal in Mumbai. They were eagerly awaiting Gandhiji's return from London by ship after the Second Round Table Conference. At that time Gandhi had taken an uncharitable stand against the Dalits and he had strongly opposed Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Earlier, at the first round table conference, when Baba Saheb was leaving for London, Gandhiji's followers had protested with black flags. This was going to be their return gift to Gandhiji.

As months passed, the differences between Baba Saheb and Gandhiji became sharper. He could not understand clearly the developments during the talks of truce in the Poona Pact in September 1932. After some time, his distant relative Rama alias RD got a decent job. He took RD to see Tau Master for his blessings. He was waiting for this opportunity because he had many questions on his mind. He asked Tau Master, both Gandhiji and Baba Saheb were well-meaning and both of them were working so hard for the country, why they were against each other.

Tau Master explained to Damu that both were great leaders but they had some fundamental differences in their approach to the problems of Dalits. Gandhi only showed sympathy towards untouchability and did not do anything substantial for the deprived sections of the society. Baba Saheb says, "We want our human rights, not sympathy". Some of our leaders have some differences. In August 1932, the British Government announced their decision in a communal award, which granted separate seats for Dalit's in provincial

assemblies. This was a resounding victory for Baba Saheb. But Gandhiji, who was bound to accept the British Premier's arbitration, went back on his word and declared he would fast unto death if separate electorates for Dalits were not abolished. At that time, Mahatma started a furious campaign which was launched against Baba Saheb.

Ambedkar was called a monster, a traitor, and a hireling. Gandhi strongly opposed it on the grounds that it would disintegrate Hindu society. He began an indefinite hunger strike at Yerawada Jail from September 20, 1932 to protest this award. As Gandhi's health worsened, Ambedkar was under tremendous pressure to save the life of Gandhi. Ambedkar feared that should Gandhi die due to the fast, there would be a severe reprisal against the depressed classes by the upper castes. The Poona Pact was made between the leaders of caste Hindus and Ambedkar on September 24, 1932 as an act of compromise. Then Tau Master discussed with Damu and RD, who asked Damu if he had got a regular job yet? Damu assured that he did not. Later Tau Master recommended him for a job in United Mills. Damu would go and meet the superintendent and join in the United Mills in Parel. After working for many years in the United Mills, he lost his thumb. Losing thumb was another big blow. He was frustrated earlier, doing odd jobs. Making a rupee or two, but he had no words to describe how he felt now. He turned away from one job to another with bandaged hand. He was organizing Baba Saheb's social movements. Tau Master sent him to Upshum Guruji for he wanted some work. Upshum Guruji was Baba Saheb's devoted activist and one of the leaders of the local Dalit movements. Then he joined as an

activist. His job was getting posters printed, sticking them or going from shop to shop collecting subscriptions, and publicizing Guruji's speeches. Thus he became Guruji's assistant. In 1935, Dalit movement had lost momentum because of various reasons. Baba Saheb had accepted a job as the principal of Government Law College in Mumbai and there was some talk of him being made a judge in the Mumbai high court or minister in the government.

After long period of calmness, there came the news that Baba Saheb was going to declare or announce the Dalit's change of religion. Baba Saheb organized a conference in Yeola, a small town near Nashik. About 10,000 delegates attended the conference. Damu was one among the hundreds of activists. Baba Saheb announced a change of strategy in the struggle. He re-divided the efforts towards securing respect, independence and equality with others. Finally, Baba Saheb announced his decision to renounce Hinduism.

When Baba Saheb returned from Europe, he founded a new political party called the Independent Labour Party. Upshum Guruji was elected as one of the secretaries of the party. Damu had become Guruji's right-hand man and he joined the election campaign activity. No one of them had any experience of elections. All activists were committed to Baba Saheb and were willing to work hard. Along with hundreds of activists, Damu also worked tirelessly. They arranged meeting in every town and distributed leaflets doing door-to-door publicity campaign and organizing demonstrations. Finally, several of Dalit candidates won and Baba Saheb was also elected with a thumping majority.

In March 1937 more good news followed the election triumph and there was jubilation all around. The Bombay High Court settled the protracted Mahad case allowing Dalits to use water from the Chavdar tank. This was the political milestone which Dalits achieved in their favour.

Vasant Moon's autobiography *Growing Up Untouchable in India* (2002), describes Moon's political participation at high school level when he was a student in the school. The Dalit community Samata Sainik Dal was established. This branch was established around 1938 by Asaram Paithankar, Sadanand Dongare, and others. Moon started going to the Dal from the third standard on. All the school children and young soldiers of the Dal gathered every evening in the Dal field. The community would discuss all the Dalit issues in the evening. Vamanrao Godbole had established Dal branches throughout the Northern and Western part of Nagpur. When he studied in school, Baba Saheb's social movements spread all over India. At that time, scheduled caste federation was founded in 1942. In the same year, the students' organizations were established by high school and college students. After the registration of their membership in the college, they participated in the elections for the students organizations. In his community, every student had studied in the middle school. The elections took place in the Bhide Girls' School ground. Khapavde and Nandev were standing against each other for the position of joint secretary. During the election campaign, the girl students also participated in the meeting and accompanied together.

Thus untouchable students formed the all India Scheduled Caste Student Federation after the 1942 conference. Branches started in Madras, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Mumbai. The student organization decided to hold a conference on 25th and 26th October in 1946 at the vast field of the Kasturchend Park. D. K. Rantake was the principal secretary of the welcoming committee and V. D. Chahade was elected President. O. Mahipati of Madras, D. S. Motghare, Harbaji Goudane, Begal's Vishvam and others were the invitees of Baba Saheb to the conference on behalf of students' organizations. But Baba Saheb could not attend as he had some other works. Thousands of students attended the welcome ceremony. Discussions went on for three days on students issues for the first time to fight their own problems. This conference was filled with enthusiasm on students' faces.

Moon traces the political connotation in the Quit India Movement. In 1942, the freedom struggle was increased by Congress campaigns. At that time, the schools and colleges were closed and textiles mills were also closed. The young volunteers organized marches and participated with patriotic songs such as "This is my India, an unbroken continent" (Moon: 89) The Dalit community knew Ambedkar's policy of avoiding Congress campaigns. Scheduled Caste Federation was involved in Dalit movements, especially in Nagpur. The Dalit movement would be changed as a Mahar movement. Many Dalits dedicated their life to the Chambhars (Leather Workers) and Mangs (Rope Makers, also called as Matangs) and joined the Dalit movement. A Matang gentleman named Behade was in the executive committee of the Scheduled Caste Federation and Ramratan Janorkar of

the Bhangi (Sweeper) community dedicated his life to Ambedkar's movement and also became a Bhuddhist. Later he became a Mayor of the Bhuddhist Community in Nagpur Corporation. In Nagpur, a man called Mahadev Rao Chakole, Chambers gentleman, showed his courage at that time. A photo of Ambedkar was hung in front of his shoe store for all to see. At that time, most of the Chambers in Nagpur were in Congress. He dedicated his life to the Ambedkar Movement. When Baba Saheb came to Nagpur, he enquired about him and visited his house because he was the true and courageous activist of Ambedkar movement.

In 1946, Nagpur city was buzzing with movements. Every day went by meetings, rallies, gatherings. That year, Hindu-Mahar riots blocked the atmosphere. The Ravishankar Shukla Congress ministry was established in the Central Provinces and Berar because Hindus dominated the police and other departments. Whenever there arose the slightest sign of a riot, Mahar youths were put under house arrest. At the time, the supporters of Ambedkar activists were arrested. The disciples of Ambedkar created tremendous self-confidence in the Dalit community. For that reason, other communities also were awed by the Dalits.

In 1947, the Congress began its Quit India Movement against the British rule. At that time, Ambedkar fought for Dalits. The Hindus wanted independence for the country only to gain power for themselves. Baba Saheb's position was simply that the Hindus and the British government should make clear, before independence, what their share would be. The congress refused to part in the Viceroy's ministry. They fought against fascism of the British in World War II.

But the attitude that “Congress and Gandhi mean the country” was being spread everywhere. Because of this all the newspapers in India depicted Ambedkar as a traitor. The British government said that if Hindus gave support to the British army, India would be an independent country. Ambedkar and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh also supported Savarkar’s policy to help the British government. Jinnah and the Muslim League demanded an independent country, but no one said that these leaders were traitors.

A cabinet mission was held after the 1946 elections. The failure of the Scheduled Caste Federation in the election meant Ambedkar’s demands for separate electorates for untouchables in India. Consequently, Ambedkar started a Satyagraha in front of all the legislative assemblies in India to condemn the Pune pact. In Nagpur, this Satyagraha was taken in a grand way. It began in the afternoon on 3rd September 1946 before the assembly. At that time, many women and men participated in the Satyagraha. The police had encircled the assembly on all sides. The Satyagrahis came before the assembly. They were arrested by the police and sent to jail. When the vans came near the Patwardhan high school, the Satyagrahis loudly shouted “Victory to Ambedkar”. The jails were filled with thousands of Satyagrahis. Most of the community people left their jobs to go to jail. Women and children also joined the Satyagraha. At that time, many Ambedkarite activists felt a jolt. All the Satyagrahis were put in jail and they were being harassed. The jail police made a lathi charge on them and many women and men were wounded.

In 1946, the government proclaimed elections. At the time, the Scheduled Caste Federation was the only party opposing the Congress in Nagpur. On behalf of Scheduled Caste Federation, the candidate was Radha Bai Kamble, a workers' leader who lived in Bardi. She became known as a vociferous organizer of woman textile workers. For the workers' seat, Sakharam Meshram was the Scheduled Caste Federation candidate. Rambhaye Raikar had been given the ticket for congress. For the seat reserved for untouchables, Congress had put up Hem Chandra Khendekar. The Congress leaders wearing Congress caps had guts to campaign in the Dalit communities. The Ambedkarite community had boycotted "Harijans" completely barring them from dining or inter-marrying with others. Many Congressite Mahars had to remain bachelors their whole life because of that.

At the election movement, meetings were held everywhere. Most people of the Mahar community were mill workers. If there was strike in the Mills, these untouchable workers would leave Nagpur to search for work. It was a tactic of winning the elections by getting opponents in his favour. Ruikar called for a strike. The Federation leaders like Rekharam Kavade, Sitaram Hadke, Dasharath Patil, and all the activists decided to defeat this call.

The Samata Sainik Dal had decided to have procession that was held on 15 January 1946. All community people gathered from all over Nagpur. All the Dal leaders and activists saluted the flag of Dal. When the parade of the Dal reached Gaya Khet, thousands of people, men and women began to walk behind it and people gave slogans with a thunder strike throughout Nagpur. The Dal leaders

such as Rao Saheb Thavare, Radhabai Kumble, Revaram Kevade and other heads gave speeches. The people, finally, dispersed at Kasturchand Park and returned to their houses with enthusiasm.

The supporters of Ruikar's went forth for a fight, catching workers and beating them. But the Ambedkarites decided to resist. The women were determined to go to work in an organized manner. The election atmosphere in Nagpur became heated. The newspapers systematically spread emotional propaganda that Ambedkar's party opposed independence. The Hindus decided to teach a lesson to the Mahars. People of weaver, farmer, and writer castes from the Hindu communities stopped Mahar youth and beat them up when they could be caught alone. But no attacker could dare to attack a group openly.

At the time of election, the Mahar-Hindu quarrel started. There was a famous Hindu wrestler named Pochamma who took the opportunity of attacking Ghanshyam another wrestler before the latter was aware of it. Pochamma had grabbed him with one hand and stabbed him in the waist with a knife held in the other. Fearing that Ghanshyam would die, Mango Wrestler and Raghunath Narake took their knives and just like Shivaji had stabbed Afzal Khan, they split open Pochamma's stomach. Pochamma died there. Mango and Raghunath were arrested and Ghanshyam went into hiding. Unable to find him, the police harassed his friends and family. At that time, the quarrel continued to flare up and big riot developed. On 3rd May 1946, the weavers and farmers united and decided to attack the Mahar Community at Indore.

The Hindu goons entered Pavpavali, Bhankheda and Military Park, Shaniwar near the cotton market to beat up Mahar youths. People started to run wildly when they saw their campaigns retrieving. Some young activists like Harichand Sakhare, Ghansyam wrestler, Tulsiram wrestler, Sampat Ramteke and Hussain Gajbhiye and many other young men fought for their own life. While they were being beaten, the cries of “Jai Bhim”, “Victory to Ambedkar” came from their mouth. After this a curfew was imposed. Everyone was forbidden to leave his house. The police began to search, entering house after house only for the Ambedkarites. Mahar youth went underground. The aged and senior people who stayed in their houses were arrested. Finally, the young girl, married women, and very old women and men remained in their homes. The police began to fire on them. Some young federation activists lost their lives. Later, the community was inspired by Fago Ustad’s courage. The Mahars of Pottertown came running from their houses.

Mahars continued to go to work in the mills. At that time, the youth took sticks in their hands and stayed forth. Just behind them, led by Radhabai Kamble, many women and youths followed her. Beyond the Brahman and Marwari houses outside of the community was the Oilpressers’ ward, but they did not have the courage to obstruct them.

After Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination in 1948 by a Maharastrian Brahman, not only was a ban imposed on the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, but on all Semi-militant organizations as well, including Samata Sainik Dal. Many activists burned the files of *Bahishkrit Bharat*, *Janata*, *Dalit Bandhu*, and

other Ambedkarites journals. If they were found, the police would harass them. The only newspaper of the Dalits, the *Janata*, came from Mumbai. In Nagpur, around 1946, there was also a weekly named *Dawn* under the leadership of N. K. Tirpude. These newspapers would come to the Dalit organizations for political awakening.

Another autobiography Siddhalingaiah's *Ooru Keri* (2003) explains how the writer participated in many organizations during his college days. When he was studying in eighth standard, he participated in rail blockade agitation. Kannadigas and Tamils were living together in Srirampur. The Kannada writers organized this party and they attended and gave inspiring speeches. Siddhalingaiah used to go listen to them. The senior writers gave speeches and explained what Kannada meant. People were inspired by their speeches and launched a movement. They planned to stop a train going from Bangalore to Mumbai. Thousands of people gathered for this rail blockade agitation. Their main demand was that the Mahajan report be implemented at that time. The man who died in the rail blockade agitation was Govindaraju. He was a Tamil who had been working for a long time for the Kannada course in Bangalore. During his study, the National Days were celebrated in the hostel. The students would get up early on such days and go in a procession in the streets of Srirampura. Those who knew patriotic songs would teach those to the students. Among other patriotic songs, a Kannada song was sung by the boys and girls together.

Later, there would be ceremony where the leaders like S. Nijalingappa, B. Rachaiah, Nagappa Alva, R. Bharanaiah, K. Bheemaiah and

Siddhartha Arakeri gave their speeches to encourage the Dalit boys. The hostel students participated shouting slogan, “Red and white, ready to fight” (Siddhalingaiah: 64) Ten thousands Dalits came in a procession from Chikka Lal Bagh to the Town Hall. All the hostel students marched in it. Men, women, and children took part in the procession. Leaders like B. Basava Lingappa and N. Rachaiah were actively involved in organizing it. They gave speeches about hostel problems on behalf of the Dalit students. At that time, Siddhalingaiah had read several books about Ambedkar and gained enough confidence to speak about him. He had organized students in the hostel and spoke on Ambedkar’s thoughts.

All the Dalit students got together and founded a society called Vicharavadi Parishat, under its banner. They planned a procession of Dalit students. The Vicharavadi Parishat organization visited all Dalit hostels in Bangalore and got to know about the students’ problems. The Dalit students suffered various problems. They would not get proper food and water and hygiene was bad. Two hundred students had to use a single lavatory. Students contended with one another to use the lavatory in the morning. The lavatories did not have doors. Students lived in dread of hostel wardens. Some wardens were autocrats, who pocketed students’ money and deprived them of their food. The students of Vicharavadi Parishat visited every hostel and this instilled courage in the students. The students were impressed upon them and got to know the importance of the procession. They planned to take out the procession. About four thousand students gathered near Mysore Bank. It was the first protest procession taken out by Dalit students in Bangalore. The people were awestruck to see the procession.

The procession reached Cubbon Park and a public meeting was held there. The police officials took the initiative to arrange for their delegation to meet the Chief Minister Devaraj Urs. Siddhalingaiah's friends asked him to explain the students' problems to the chief minister. He explained to the Chief Minister confidently that scholarship amount had to be increased, hostel building repaired, and new hostel built. At the end of the meeting, they had coffee brought in for the delegates. The Chief Minister called his personnel secretary J. C. Lynn and instructed him to quickly sort out whatever problems they had complained about. Their problems were solved one by one.

At that time, Siddhalingaiah had become the Secretary of the Students Union of the Dalit hostel. Biligiri Rangaiah was one of the directors of Syndicate Bank. He told the students of the two hostels to arrange a meeting and invite the higher-ups of Syndicate Bank. Besides the bank officials, other directors, senior managers came there. Shivanna, the Finance Minister of the state, K. K. Pai and D. M. Nanjundappa were the Karnataka government financial advisors who came as chief guests. Siddhalingaiah had to make the welcome speech. Another student gave introduction about Biligi Rangaiah who had organized the function by giving them financial assistance. During the college days, he participated in election to the students' union. He contested for the post of Fine-arts Secretary. He won the election by the supporters of Kannada Dalit Students. Hindu, Urdu, and Tamil students also became his supporters. Later, Dalit students organized a racist's convention and representatives from various parts of the state took part in it. He had presided over the convention himself.

This convention took place in the hockey field of Central College. Its objective was to fight for the creation of a casteless, classless society.

Later, he explained Boosa incident. At that time, B. Basavalingappa became a controversial minister in Devraj Urs' cabinet. He once criticized that Gandhiji did not know the meaning of truth. This amazed many people. On another occasion, he told the Dalits to throw Hindu gods' pictures into gutter. This shocked the traditionalists. His opponents demanded that he resign. The agitation did not cool off even after Basavalingappa had offered a clarification. The upper caste people and some leaders in his own congress party opposed him. The Dalit Students all over the state were in favour of Basavalingappa because Basavalingappa had told the agitated students to support him.

The responsibility of heading rallies, organizing Dalit students, and taking out a procession fell mostly upon him. The general caste people opposed to Basavalingappa because the feeling that he was anti-God, anti-Kannada, and anti-Gandhi had got into their minds. When he was organizing students at the hostel, Kalegowda Nagawara arrived there. Basavalingappa and Kalegowda Nagawara were very old acquaintances. Earlier, Basavalingappa had written a letter to Kalegowda and called him over to Bangalore. He came to Dalits' hostel to guide them. At that time, a secret meeting of Basavalingappa's supporters took place at Olympus Hotel. The opponents were likely to attack the meeting. Dalit students took out a procession to express their support for Basavalingappa. Their opponents were trying to clash with them. At that time, the students were in the

public meeting and they were informed that they should quickly leave for their hostels and rescue themselves.

Basavalingappa's aim was to shake a stagnant society. At last, he had to resign from his ministerial position because of pressure from the traditionalists and his political rivals. His resignation made him very popular among the Dalits. During the summer holidays, he attended a camp of the Communist Party of India at Krishna Bhavan in Malleswaram. The Communist Party of India supported emergency. So his mind leaned towards the party. One day, he saw the agricultural labourers marching in a procession from Mysore Bank towards Cubbon Park. They took a rally shouting slogan "Indira Gandhi Socialism, Sanjay Gandhi Car Factory". The slogan inspired him to get close to the Marxist Party.

Baby Kamble's autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) explains how she associated herself to contact with Ambedkar's movement and participated in many cultural programmes. She was a dedicated activist of Ambedkar's movement since she was a child of seven or eight. Kamble's hut was right in front of the Chawdi. Both shared a courtyard. Ambedkar's activists such as her father Pandharinath Kakade, Nane Ahiwade, Laxman Kakade were all educated people.

The activists used to bring two newspapers; Dalit Kesari and Daily Sakal; to the Chawdi and read them aloud to the people sitting in the court yard. Baba Saheb published a newspaper called *Bahishkrut* in which his speeches were

reproduced. The readers explained the issues of the social and political matters to the people to grow up political awakening. Ambedkar taught them Buddhist philosophy. He wanted to transform the society in the light of this philosophy. During her childhood days, she participated in many cultural programmes along with the community students. They used to compose radical songs to be sung in cultural programmes. The Dalit students exerted their rights as human beings by forcibly seeking entry into temples and hotels by the influence of B. R. Ambedkar. The hostel students discussed and planned to enter the temple. The Dalit students chose to enter Vithal Temple in Shimpi lane which was next to Brahmin lane. The Brahmins came to know their plans. With fire in their blood, the Dalit student activists tried to forcibly enter Viththal Temple. They shouted slogans for Ambedkar's victory. Some young girls also participated in that movement. The Brahmins surrounded the idol of Vithal to protect it from the polluting touch of the Mahars. They wanted to stop the Mahar boys from entering the temple at any cost. The Dalit activists were equally adamant. Some boys dashed the ring of the Brahmins and managed to touch the idol. This caused a furor. There was a great commotion everywhere. The Brahmins scattered and started chasing the Mahar boys with lathis. The Brahmin priests in the temple announced that the Mahars had polluted the temple. They also declared that God Vithal's face had become contorted and that tears were flowing from goddess Rukmayi's eyes. Soon the news of the Mahars having polluted the divine couple Viththal and Rukmaye spread all over Phaltan. In fact, it reached all the eighty four villages in the state of Phaltan. The priests organized the chanting of

scriptures and purification rituals to wash away the pollution with milk and *gomutra*. Finally, after one and half months of incessant chanting, ceaseless worship, and substantial grants from the king, the Brahmin priests managed to cleanse the deities of pollution. They restored the original expression on Lord Viththal face and stemmed the flow of tears from Rukmayi's eyes. In this movement, Rani Lakshmibai had established the first women's club and Mahila Mandal in Phaltan. She was very young among them. It was only the Brahmin women who occupied all the positions in this Mahila mandal. The Rani Sahba decided to allow Mahar women into this Mandal. She called Dalit activists like Shrirangappa, Nana Member and her father for a meeting. After the meeting, all these male activists enrolled the women from their locality as members in this Mandal. A women meeting was conducted by the Rani Sahib. She asked Dalit women to attend the meetings in Mangalawar Peth. The women leaders used to take women from all the houses to these meetings. All the young women were excellent speakers. They would wear 'white saris' as devoted activists of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The meeting was held in the dining hall. All the Brahmins and Maratha women had occupied the chairs. They did not allow Mahar women to sit on chairs. Mahar women stood on one side. At the same time, the Rani Sahiba started to move towards the stage accompanied by her other followers. Thakubai, one of the Dalit women leaders, rushed forward. She shook the Rani by her shoulder and told her, 'your women are not allowing our women to sit on chairs. Our Ambedkar has told us to demand our rights. I am going to forcefully remove your women from the chairs and seat my women there'. The Rani Sahiba was

taken aback for a moment, but she immediately arranged chairs in the front for all of them. The Dalit women attending meetings was a new activity. By now, they had become more aware because of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. After attending such meetings, Dalit women's knowledge began to increase and also they became closely involved in politics. Baba Saheb would explain them in the public meetings:

We should learn to do business. The high caste in the village will not buy milk from us. In fact, they will not buy anything from us. Undeterred, we should practice business in our own locality. We should not allow the village to earn at our expense. (Kamble: 133)

Therefore, she started doing good business and earning money for them. They became determined to work harder. She was the first participant in the movement that was inspired by Ambedkar's thoughts. She sent her children to school. Once they get educated, they can organize themselves and find out various ways of directing the struggle. Baba's words showed her the way. She decided to begin her struggle through writing. She followed Baba's advice to start an Ashram Shala for orphans from the backward castes. Then she became the president of Mahatma Phule Dnyan Vikas Prasarak Sanstha to help the poor students.

Omprakash Valmiki, in his *Joothan* explains his political involvement in the movement in 1964. With the help of a few friends, he started a theatre group called Meghdoot Natya Sanstha. This group began with regular

shows and street plays to acquaint the wider public about contemporary issues. It was the movement of Janatha Party. The country was resounding with the movement. By that time, he had written some good poems, and people began to recognize him as a poet through his poems in *Navbharat*, *Yugdharm*, *Nai Dunia*. He also began to write a column in a Chandrapur weekly called *Janapratidinidhi*.

When Omprakash was staying in Chandrapur, he was involved in the strongest current of the Dalit movements. The self-fulfillment that he experienced in connecting with the Dalit movement was truly from his experience. He was deeply involved in the Dalit movement. Further, many of his friends moved away from him. They had moved away from the right path and were bent on destroying his talent and creativity. Later, he attracted Buddhist philosophy on human freedom and it had sympathy and wisdom that takes a person towards transcendence. He always dreamt of carrying out social work among the Dalits and during his time in Chandrapur, he was able to put his plans into practice. The social works done by Ambedkar and Jyoti Rao Phule had inspired thousands of people to join this struggle. This intellectual revolution provided a new dimension to his writings. His friend Jagdish Rahi was also involved in the Dalit movements. At that time, he published a magazine named *Jharna* (frozen waterfall) at Chandrapur. Many Dalit issues came out in the society. Rahi was a very close friend of Valmiki. He was also a good singer. They had worked together for Dalit movements.

Educated Dalits and the Dalit panthers had organized a huge rally in Bombay in 1978. Dalits demanded that Marathawada University's name be

changed to Ambedkar University. The Dalit panthers and activists from all over Maharashtra were gathered in front of Bombay's Legislative assembly. The Maharashtra State Assembly passed the bill for the change of name. The Savarnas protested against the bill on a very large scale. Riot and destruction of public property took place in several towns and cities. There was a great tension in Anandpur, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Sholapur, Bombay, Nasik and Amravati. The impact of the riot was felt the most in Marathwada. The Dalits were forced and hundreds of people died. The change of the name became a self-hood issue for Dalits. There were incidents of violence in Nagpur. A procession was also conducted in Chandrapur.

The Maharashtra government withdrew the name change bill. The Dalits were disappointed by this decision of the government, but they did not lose heart. However, they were working relentlessly to keep the issue in the fore front. Their entire energy had been channeled into the movements in the battle for Dalits, with the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who had fought in his life and unleashed the flow of self-confidence. Amongst the Dalits, he had established the Republican Party to participate in political process. After his death, the party had splintered into several groups. Every leader declared himself to be Babasaheb's heir, and had joined the race to become the party's president. Every leader created his own party. At that time, Dalit panthers gave a new direction to the Dalit movement. The leaders and activists of the Dalit panthers were trying out a new experiment by combining Marxism and Ambedkarism. It brought a new mood to

Marathi Dalit Literature. This literature was more progressive than canonical Marathi literature.

Ambedkar's birth anniversary was celebrated with grand manner in the Ordnance Factory colony, Chandrapur. Valmiki participated in it with great enthusiasm. The community organized poetry reading, panel discussion, art exhibition, and stage plays and street theatre. The Savarna members in the organization could not participate in Ambedkar birth anniversary celebrations. The Dalits boycotted the religious celebrations. They searched for theatre people who were keen to work for a change. Dalits staged many plays and one of these was *Mumbai Nagri* by Daya power.

Valmiki invited Mr. R. Kamal to Chandrapur for a meeting. He was the author of a magazine called *Nirnayak Bhim*. He published Valmiki's writings in almost every issue of the magazine. He was a very vibrant, electrifying personality who was spreading Ambedkar's message in the Hindi speaking regions. Mohan Das Naimishray also came to Chandrapur on invitation of Dalits. They gave lectures on Dalit problems in Maharashtra. Valmiki's activities were no longer confined to Maharashtra. He attended many functions in Madhya Pradesh on Dalit problems. Valmiki was more active in the Dalit movement. The more suspicious people around him were the Savarnas as though he was working to destroy their hegemony.

Later, he explained narrow-mindedness of Brahman teachers. It was January 1984 when an incident took place in Malkapur in Amravati district.

In a Marathi text book which meant for class seven, there was a lesson on Ambedkar. All the students ripped out the lesson on the orders of a Brahmin teacher. There were some Mahar Students in the class and they felt that ripping out lesson was wrong. The Dalit students quietly picked up the torn pages from the rubbish and took with them to show those to their families. The news spread and protests began. Someone sent a detailed account along with the torn pages to *Lokmat's* Nagpur bureau. Lokmat published the story along with the photographs of the torn pages. Rallies and protest meetings began all over Vidharbha as soon as the story came out. This incident became a symbol of Dalit oppression. A huge rally was staged at Bhadravathi where thousands of people came to the rally. Valmiki too addressed the rally. Most of the Dalit Speakers spoke in Marathi, but Valmiki spoke in Hindi. This was a new experience for him. At this movement, he was fully dedicated to the Dalit movement. Day by day, the movement spread to many places. Savarnas threw stones on Dalit marches and rallies. The police were indifferent. The board of education did not take any disciplinary action against the teacher. Dalit meetings were conducted in many places. Most of his time was spent in Dalit bastis. There was a village near the Ordnance Factory called Sumantha. In Bhadravati tehsil, Dalit leaders started many programmes in the Dalit bastis. They opened many schools. Umesh Meshram ran a school and library at Bhadravathi. The library had plenty of books on Ambedkar and Buddhism. He invited Valmiki to give speech. Ballarpur Paper Mills sponsored a drama competition every year. This competition for Hindi and Marathi plays was important not only for the theatre people but also for the audience in Ballarpur

area. Meghdoot Natya Sanstha made a name for itself in this competition by staging plays *Aadhe Adhure*, *Himalaya ki Chhaya*, *Sinhasan Khali Hai* and *Paisa Bolta Hai*. Dalits had won many prizes. Valmiki was awarded the best actor and the best director prize several times. The Dalit writers, intellectuals, and activists in the Dalit movement had to struggle constantly with their inner conflicts.

Many Dalit writers joined the struggle for social emancipation through their autobiographic writings. Marathi Dalit literature which was influenced by a new stream called the Dalit literary stream first set the example in the country in such type of writing. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste A Memoir* (2002) discusses various stages of Damu who participated in political movements after the death of his father. He fought against village traditional duties to reclaim dignity of his community. It was a question of Dalit rights as human beings and he was going to fight for it. He also joined in Ambedkar's *satyagraha* for getting permission to enter the Hindu temples. Obtaining Bombay High Court's order to use water from the Chavdar tank was the political milestone which Dalits achieved in their favour. Vasant Moon's autobiography, *Growing Up Untouchable in India* (2002), describes Moon's political participation at high school level. The Dalit community established Samata Sainik Dal and the Dalit students participated in the college elections for the students' organizations. Moon also traces the political connotation in the Quit India Movement.

Another autobiography, Siddhalingaiah's *Ooru Keri* (2003), explains how the writer participated in many organizations during his college days. When he was studying in eighth standard, he participated in rail blockade agitation as their main demand was that the Mahajan report be implemented at that time. Baby Kamble's

autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) explains how she associated herself to contact with Ambedkar's movement and participated in many cultural programmes. She was a dedicated activist of Ambedkar's movement since she was seven or eight. Omprakash Valmiki, in his *Joothan*, explains his political involvement in the movement in 1964. With the help of a few friends, he started a theatre group called Meghdoot Natya Sanstha. This group began with regular shows and street plays to acquaint the public about contemporary issues. Valmiki's activities were no longer confined to Maharashtra. He attended many functions in Madhya Pradesh on Dalit problems.

Education made the Dalits realize their own stand. They demanded for social equality and political empowerment. The educated Dalits participated in political movements led by Ambedkar to eliminate the concept of untouchables from the society. They established separate community organizations called Samata Sainik Dal and Schedule Caste Federation and fought against the caste system during the freedom struggle. Educated Dalits wrote about their oppression, anguish, and protest through the writings of Dalit autobiographies.

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Conclusion

Dalit autobiographies are strong means to fight against the social inequalities and injustice. Dalit autobiographies written by various Dalit writers broke the traditional upper caste autobiographical writing which depicts the romanticized version of life. When the mainstream autobiography ignored Dalit lives, the Dalits autobiography paved the way for the Dalits to talk about their pain, suffering and their day to day life experiences in their autobiographies. The fact is that lack of education made the Dalits inefficient to fight against oppression because education transforms the character and personality of a person and enlightens a person to understand the problems better. An educated person uses the advantage of his knowledge, skills and values accumulated through education for better reasons than one.

The movement to spread the importance of education for Dalits was practically started by Ambedkar. He educated them morally first and emphasized the idea of academic education. For Dalits, to get educated is a herculean task. They have to face a lot of humiliation and discrimination. Such a hostile atmosphere in schools has always discouraged Dalits to step into, what is supposedly called, “the temple of learning”. Dalits wrote autobiographies to break away from the traditional upper caste autobiographical writing as they talked about their pain, suffering and their day-to-day life experiences in their autobiographies. However, the Dalit male writers have depicted the Dalit women in quite a negative light in their writings as submissive, meek, immoral, sexual

objects, etc. Thus, the Dalit women writers wrote their autobiographies in a more assertive and rebellious when compared to Dalit male autobiographies. My research area includes the autobiographies of both male and female Dalits writers. I have included the opinions of those writers who speak through their stories while examining the status of the cross-section of the Dalits in our society.

Chapter I forms the introduction of my thesis which mainly discusses the backdrop of the social changes among the Dalits. It briefly discusses what an autobiography is and how it is an assessment of social tyranny. It also gives an account of how Dalit autobiography is a medium for the Dalits' revolution. It also throws light on the fact that *Dalit* literature is one of its most significant recent trends and a matter of literary debates wherein the Dalit autobiographies are contextualized within certain larger socio-historical process.

Chapter II focuses on the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits. It examines how the Dalits get economic independence socially and culturally. Initially, the Dalits had no land and no education. They suffered from poverty, illiteracy and slavery for ages and were exploited. The Dalits were inspired by the revolutionary Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's thoughts. They became educated and got financial independence and left their traditional professions, and moved from one profession to another.

Chapter III examines how the Dalits have become conscious of their oppression, and caste discrimination, injustice, atrocities, etc. Ambedkar social reform movements carried a significant place for the Dalit community in general.

With educational avenues created by the architect of the Indian constitution, the Dalits have become socially conscious about the circumstances and social problems of untouchability and caste discriminations. The period from 1920 to 1956 was influenced by the writings and political activities of Ambedkar, who argued the case of untouchables from the boundaries of the villages to the round table conferences, and fought for equal rights for the entire Dalit society.

Chapter IV examines how the Dalits have changed their caste structure with the help of education. The Dalits wanted to change the oppressed with their writings and producing dramas and opening schools. The Dalits participated in cultural and literary activities, and established many organizations such as the independent labour party and communist party. These organizations struggled against all the caste system and reformed their life style.

Chapter V throws light on Dalit empowerment. The major places in Dalit autobiographies are political agenda and political developments. The Dalits fight against caste discrimination, untouchability, poverty, slavery and injustice. Dalits have been encouraged by Ambedkar's slogan "Educate, Organize, and Agitate" which has reached most of the Dalit youth. So they take up education and politics seriously. Educated Dalits write their oppression anguish and protest through the writings of Dalit autobiographies.

The conclusion focuses on the summarized view of all the chapters of my thesis. It also includes the analysis of my research and my suggestions for further research as well as the limitations which are beyond my approach. The ability of

the marginal group to write literature comes under immediate contestation, and Dalit writers have been forced to fight for the right to speak as well as to redefining the boundaries of what can be said. Dalit writers have attempted to negotiate this challenge of securing narrative authority by emphasizing the ‘experience of discrimination’ and ‘Dalit identity’ as two necessary criteria for both writing and critiquing Dalit autobiography.

In my opinion, the Dalit autobiographies should not be simply the narration of a Dalit’s life-story. They should also be used by Dalit writers as a means of political assertion. The Dalit autobiographies serve as a dissident space within the literary public in which the Dalit writer can speak out against untouchability and contest the institutional narrative that caste no longer functions as a social force in modern India. They also serve as means for Dalit writers to reclaim narrative authority over the construction of the ‘Dalit self’. I must say that the Dalit society is not inferior as it is claimed by the upper castes, but is different or oppressed or inventive in the face of extreme exploitation. Dalit writers have been inspired to write because of the popularization of education, the spread of democracy, science and law, as well as the organizing and the struggles of Dalit youth. All these things became possible due to Babasaheb Ambedkar who emphasized that education would help the Dalit overcome the dependency on the caste Hindus. I also find it to be true that education can transform the mind of the people and make them aware of their rights in order to live a normal life in the society I also suggest that the people of the Dalit community must be educated and this can help them. To cross the barrier and achieve which has never been

achievable. During my research, I have tried to find out the possibilities where autobiographies provide a space for Dalit writers to regain control over the constitution and meaning of Dalit selfhood and join in a show of strength with the larger 'Dalit community'.

Research in a given area has always been a challenging task and no matter how thoroughly we examine things, we find that there are still areas which have remained untouched. Though I have included the works of a number of Dalit writers and the source materials for examining closely the views of the writers, due to the restriction of time limit, I could not complete all of them. I hope that my research will lead to further exploration of the complex issues outlined in this thesis.

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