

**FEMINIST DALIT VOICES IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF KUMUD PAWDE
AND BABY KAMBLE**

Dissertation submitted to Nagaland University, Kohima Campus in partial fulfilment for the
Award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

Submitted by

KEVISENO SEYIE

Registration No. 57/2020

Under the supervision of

Dr. I. TALISENLA IMSONG



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND EDUCATION

NAGALAND UNIVERSITY

KOHIMA CAMPUS, MERIEMA-797004

2021



NAGALAND

UNIVERSITY

(A Central University, Established by the Act of Parliament, 35/1989)

Department of English

Kohima Campus, Meriema, 797004 Nagaland, India

NU/ENG/2021

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **FEMINIST DALIT VOICES IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF KUMUD PAWDE AND BABY KAMBLE** is a bona fide record of research work done by Keviseno Seyie, Regd. No. 57/2020, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2019-2021 submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English. This dissertation has not previously formed the basis of award of any degree, diploma or other title and the dissertation represents independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my supervision.

Plagiarism test has been conducted and 4% similarity test has been detected which is permissible under the UGC regulations 2018.

Dated:

Kohima

Dr. I. Talisenla Imsong

Supervisor

Department of English

Nagaland University

Kohima Campus, Meriema.

ABSTRACT

The present dissertation aims to establish a Dalit Feminist Standpoint in the autobiographical narratives of Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Kumud Pawde's excerpt of *Anthasphot* "The Story of My Sanskrit". It examines the issues of dalit women's marginalization, their subjectivity, dalit patriarchy, caste slavery, education and employment and lack of voice in the Dalit movement, Dalit Literature, Indian feminism, and in their everyday lives. Dalit Autobiography presents a different approach to the conventional forms of autobiography by associating and locating the writer within the community. The first aspect of dalit autobiographies is the representation of social life and secondly, it is the firsthand narration of that social experience. Both the works of Kamble and Pawde are important in establishing the groundwork of Dalit feminism in India. Their distinctive reflexive style of feminist dalit writings sets them apart from Dalit male discourse and Indian feminist writings. The research looks at the select life narratives of dalit women as a tool to explore the perspectives and represented lived experiences of Dalit women. The research is primarily theoretical and traces the road to dalit feminism through the autobiographies of two prominent dalit feminist writers in culminating the voices of Dalit women for the first time behind the curtains of Casteism and Patriarchy. The research seeks to examine the articulation of the female voice after culturally being imposed to be silent through Dalit women autobiographies. Dalit Feminism marks the awakening of oppositional consciousness as distinct from mainstream feminism and Dalit literature. The research may help other marginalised sections or culturally oppressed groups to comprehend their creative potential through narration of their everyday life experiences and guild them through resistance literature.

Keywords: autobiography, casteism, dalit consciousness, feminist writing, patriarchy, resilience.



NAGALAND

UNIVERSITY

(A Central University, Established by the Act of Parliament, 35/1989)

Department of English

Kohima Campus, Meriema, 797004 Nagaland, India

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, **Keviseno Seyie**, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **FEMINIST DALIT VOICES IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF KUMUD PAWDE AND BABY KAMBLE** submitted for the award of the Degree of **Master of Philosophy in English** is a bona fide record of research done by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. I. Talisenla Imsong**, Associate Professor, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during the period of my research (2019-2021). All the ideas and references are duly acknowledged and it does not contain any other work for the reward of any other degree or diploma at any university or institution.

Date:

Keviseno Seyie

Place: Kohima

Regn.No.: 57/2020 N.U./M.PHIL./ENG.

Countersigned by:

Dr. I. Talisenla Imsong

Dr. Jano S.Liegise

Supervisor

Head

Department of English

Department of English

Nagaland University

Nagaland University

Kohima Campus, Meriema.

Kohima Campus, Meriema.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, I thank God, the provider of all things, for the completion of this dissertation. My heartfelt gratitude is due to my supervisor and mentor Dr. I. Talisenla Imsong for correcting the necessary errors within the lines, her guidance and support, patience and encouragement right from the beginning till the completion of this dissertation. I could not imagine having a better mentor and advisor for my dissertation.

I owe to the Dalit women writers in the select texts for this research. Despite their oppressive environment, they have exhibited their endurance and resilience. They have been a source of inspiration to me.

I also acknowledge and thank my family and friends who have contributed their modicum knowledge, advice and encouragement towards the preparation of my dissertation.

Date:

Keviseno Seyie

CONTENTS

Candidate's Declaration

Supervisor's Certificate

Acknowledgement

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction	1-4
1.2 Dalit Literature	4-8
1.3 Objectives of Dalit Literature	8-9
1.4 Dalit Autobiographies	9-14

CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Perspectives and Historical Overview of Dalit Feminism

2.1 Feminism	15-16
2.2 Black Feminism	16-18
2.3 Dalit Feminism	19-26
2.4 Dalit Feminist Consciousnesses	26-33

CHAPTER 3: Projection of Dalit Social Reality and Concern

3.1 Introduction	34-35
3.2 The Social Reality of Caste and Gender Discrimination	35-40
3.3 The Social Reality of Education	41-47
3.4 The Social Reality of Employment	47-51

CHAPTER 4: Narratives of Pain and Suffering

4.1 Introduction	52-54
4.2 Narratives on Caste Consciousness and its Implications	54-59
4.3 Narration on Poverty and Hunger	59-61
4.4 Narratives on Gender and patriarchal Consciousness	61-70

CHAPTER 5: Reflection of Cultural Marginality:

A Comparative Study	71-83
----------------------------	-------

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

Works Cited	94-98
Bibliography	99-100
Webliography	100-101

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Dalits are a group of people who have been exploited for generations in the name of caste and religion. The Aryans who practised the religion of Hinduism introduced the caste system in India. Their Holy books such as the Vedas and the Puranas glorified the system of caste hierarchy and supported its workings. The Indian society was divided into four caste viz., Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Dalits were excluded from the four-fold Varna system and were seen as forming a fifth Varna, also known by the name as Panchamas. The Brahmins holds the view that the caste system was God made and not men made and Manu, the codifier of Hinduism, legitimized the hierarchical workings of the caste system in his book, *Manusmriti*. Since then, India saw the rise of caste system and the Hindus embraced its hierarchical social standings in the society.

The Panchamas whom the Shudras even considered inferior and lower than them have been oppressed more than the Shudras for ages. They were considered untouchables, polluted and even the mere shadow of them was a sin for the upper caste people. Being treated as outcaste by their own people, the dalits were not only denied the right to freedom but also the basic rights of living. Waman Nimbalkar in his book *Dalit Literature: Nature and Role* writes, “Dalit is a sole heir of darkness. One who is harassed, oppressed and afflicted” (8). Gangadhar Pantwane, a professor of Marathi explains who is a dalit-

To me, Dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, Holy books, separatism, fate and heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in Humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. (Joshi 79)

They have been discriminated socially, politically, and economically in a democratic country even after the independence of India in 1947. It remained a challenge to the ideals of democracy-equality, liberty and fraternity. The prolonged internal struggle to

maintain equality and freedom in the Indian society by the dalits have been neglected and rejected. Casteism continued to dominate over them in every sphere, leaving no room for development. They were considered untouchables and forced to live outside the cities and villages in poverty. The sole purpose of their existence was to serve the higher castes until their death. They had no land, no right or freedom, and lived a life of servitude for being born a dalit. As stated by Bama in her book *Karukku*, “In this society, if you are born in a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste difference does not disappear. Wherever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every corner and drives us into a frenzy” (23). The problem was not in their profession but in their birth, which decided the fate of any unborn child. The Dalit Panthers of Bombay in their Manifesto clearly differentiated the dalits as, “members of Scheduled Caste and Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion” (Dalit Manifesto 62).

The denial of humanity to an entire caste of people at birth and the existence of Untouchability unlike anywhere in the world perpetuated the hierarchical gap to a striking stand incorporating more hideous and horrific treatment towards this group of people. The atrocities and injustices were carried out in the name of caste and religion. As Uma Chakravarti writes, “By the fifth century untouchability has also been incorporated into the caste system and is testified to by the Chinese traveller Fa Hien, and this too became a part of the expending caste system” (Chakravarti 55). They were regarded as polluted, untouchables and impure because of their past lives. The Hindus placed much emphasis on the reincarnation of the soul and according to their sacred scriptures; the dalits were believed to have been sinners in their past lives so their present life was to live in servitude and under the authority of the upper caste scribed as their earthly punishment in order to redeem themselves. Amongst dalit, it is the dalit women who faced the worst kind of violence. She is thrice subjugated as women “as Dalit women, and as a women who performed stigmatized labour” (Rao 11). Dalit women faced patriarchy at home and caste discriminations outside of her community. She is a dalit among the dalits.

Caste is sanctified by Hinduism. Hinduism restricted and enforced rigid and horrendous rules on the dalits and because of the continued oppression based on religion, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in 1956 which was followed by a majority of dalits converting into other religions. Ambedkar contended that “there is no democracy and equality possible in Hinduism” (Satyanarayana and Tharu 11). It belongs to the upper castes alone and there was no freedom and equality in Hinduism, it was a system to dominate the weaker caste through the means of religion.

During the British rule in India, the dalits availed education and became aware of their ancient history, oppression and suffrage which led to the emergence of Dalit movements under the leadership of Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule who emphasised on the education and liberation of the dalits from caste rule. The primary aim of the movement was to unite the dalits together and create a new space for them in the society. This was the first step towards the liberation of the dalits since ancient history. The movement encouraged young dalits to get education and during the first half of the twentieth century, the first generation of the dalits got educated. Dalitism as a movement drew great inspiration from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, the Black movement in America and Marxist ideology. With the growth of dalit consciousness and dalit movement, dalit literature began to emerge. Dalits include the scavenging castes of Chamars, Madigas, Mahars, Mangs and Mallas in North India, Pallars, Parayas and Pulayas in South India, Adivasis, tribals, peasants and other sub-caste.

The word “Dalit” literally means ‘crushed down’ or ‘depressed’ and it was a name the untouchables have given themselves. The term was then popularised by the Dalit Panthers and today it has become an expression of hope and identity. ‘Dalit’ is a “democratic identity of the socially oppressed untouchable caste groups” (Satyanarayana and Tharu 11). They have been crushed down so they are not able to move forward. As Sharan Kumar Limbale puts it,

Harijans and Neo-Buddhists are not the only dalits, the term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, land-less farm labourers, workers, the suffering masses and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word, it would not only refer to

the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to be included. (Limbale 30)

Ambedkar, the great social visionary and social reformer belonged to the Mahar caste of Maharashtra and the progress and development that the dalits could achieve today, all lies in his visions for a better dalit future. Any talk on the Dalits empowerment can be traced back to his contributions and sacrifices. He took up the social cause of reforming the society that was bricked with Hinduism ideology and principles. He challenged the caste system and calls it a “graded inequality in which castes are arranged according to an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt” (Chakravarti 7). He took the dalit cause of misery and pain and turned it into a political and national problem of India’s Hindu society. Ambedkar changed the fate of the dalits and institutionalised their constitutional rights in the Constitution. He influenced dalit writers to take up literature as a weapon to fight against casteism and all its drawbacks and create a platform where the dalits are united by turning their experiences into narratives that will encourage the masses. A Majority of the dalit writers turn to the Ambedkarian ideology and his critique of Gandhian nationalism as well as the dalit perspectives of colonialism. Ambedkar was the one amongst the dalits who change the fate of the dalits. He unified them together for a social cause- the retrieval of Dalit’s humanity.

1.2 Dalit Literature

The age old anger and protest against caste prejudices and social oppression made way for dalit literature to pave in, addressing issues and pain narratives that have been silenced and forgotten by the Indians for centuries. As Literature is said to be a reflection of life, dalit literature reflected the lives of the dalits in all its manifold aspects. It questioned the idea of caste slavery bringing new subjectivity to dalit literature. Dalit literature like Black literature emphasised more on the community than the personal. The personal revolves around the community highlighting the general masses to the personal. Realism is the core focus of dalit literature. Dalit literature was influenced with the teachings of Gautama Buddha, Karl Marx and the Black literature of the African Americans and Dalit Panther, one of the most important organisations of Dalit literature was started with the influence from the African Americans, Black Panther. Dalit literature has the proponents of dalit consciousness as

it is the consciousness that generates dalit writings. G. N Devy writes, “the writers in dalit movement show a clear awareness of belonging to a distinct literary culture and society” (126).

The twentieth century was considered to be an era of social reform and celebration of human rights, and the emergence of marginal discourse around the world following Heidegger and Derrida’s idea of decentring the centre by bringing marginal discourse alongside the mainstream discourse. It was at this era that dalit literature emerged following the events and turn of the century. The Black Americans revolted against the Whites in requesting an equal representation of the blacks in the social, political and economic sphere. They were liberated and given equal human rights. The arrival of the Britishers in India opened the doors of western education and all these revolutionaries of the new world made it possible for the dalits to fight against the caste hegemony of the upper caste and planted the seed for the foundation of the liberation of the dalits. It ignited a social cause and consciousness in the minds of the dalits with the internalization of modernisation and western education.

The Dalit literary movement began in Maharashtra and Dalit literature forms the backbone of Marathi literature. The term ‘dalit literature’ can be traced back to the first Dalit Literary Conference in 1958. During the 1960s and 1970s, Dalit literature began to flourish and every genre of literature like poetry, fiction, drama, prose, short stories and autobiographies were explored. Autobiography became the most important literary form of writing in dalit literature. However, the real flowering of dalit literature began with the emergence of the Dalit Panthers of Bombay in 1972 when a group of young writers including Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle and J.V. Pawar storm and lifted dalit writing to a higher stand (Satyanarayana and Tharu 13). The new militant dalit organisation was influenced by the Black American movement, the Black Panther. It presented a new point of view and language that was entirely different from the mainstream literature. They began to present the true insight of the dalits and “these descriptions of slavery and oppression, as well as the open and hidden forms of caste discrimination in the contemporary world, were unlike anything that had been written before” (Satyanarayana and Tharu 13).

Dalit literature was influenced by the Black literature of America and Marxist writings that transformed world literature by presenting the marginalised and the oppressed section of the society. Elenor Zelliot observes,

In the early 1970, two Maharashtrian movements achieved enough prominence to be noticed by the English Press, The Dalit Panthers and Dalit Literature. By substituting the word 'Black' for 'Dalit' the reader can immediately understand that a phenomenon comparable to the American Black panthers and the Dalit school of literature represent a new level of pride, militancy and the sophisticated creativity. The Marathi word 'Dalit' like the word 'Black' was chosen by the group itself...Dalit- those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, karma and justified class hierarchy. (Zelliot 260)

Dalit literature is different from the mainstream Indian literature. While the latter focused on the aesthetic beauty of life, dalit literature focused on the realistic presentation of life. As Sharankumar Limbale puts it, "Dalit literature is a new literary stream of the post-independent period. Not only it is new, its form and purpose too are different from those of savarna Marathi literature. Therefore, it cannot be appraised using traditional aesthetics" (Limbale 115).

In his essay on dalit literature, Baburao Bagul argues that "the established literature of India is Hindu literature" (Dangle 289) and the lower caste are excluded because it is Hindu literature concerning the lives of the upper caste. He explains, "Writers who have internalised the Hindu value-structure find it impossible to accept heroes, themes and thoughts derived from the philosophies of Phule and Ambedkar" (285). Arjun Dangle in his book *Poisoned Bread* observes- "Dalit literature is not simple literature, it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hope and ambitions of a new society and new people" (Dangle 266).

Dalit writers often wrote in their own regional language to present the authenticity and reveal realistically the horrors of their lives they were forced to live in, maintaining the

realness and using language as a means to keep their cultural identity intact. It helps them communicate their way of life, culture and society keeping their roots intact. Moreover, English as a medium of writing was less in favourable for the dalits because education was not provided to them. However, the educated dalits have started to translate the regional language into English in order to serve a higher need and purpose. According to Festino,

In terms of form, also in consonance with life narratives that defy established generic forms of autobiography, these narratives go beyond the limits of Hindu propriety as they used a style of language that is sometimes considered as being coarse or crude and, therefore, a challenge to canonical Indian literature. The idea is that if Dalit narratives constitute a literature of dissensus, they should reject upper caste standards not only through the subject matter addressed but also through the language employed, which should be truthful to the Dalit reality. (Festino 29)

Baburao Bagul's collection of short stories, *Jehva Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (When I concealed my Caste) was considered to be "the epic of dalit" writings. These stories brought the dalits together in universalizing their problems under caste violence and power and ignited the dawn of social and moral consciousness. The dalit writers emphasised that they should write their own stories and narrate their dalit consciousness. It became a firsthand narration of experiences retold through the lens of the victims of caste hierarchy. Dalit literature is a stamp of authenticity revealing hunger and poverty as one of its recurring themes and the usage of coarse and rustic local dialects.

Apart from Marathi dalit writings, dalit writers have expanded dalit literature in Hindi as well, such as the writings from Valmiki *Joothan*, Sheoraj Singh *Mera Bachapan Mere Kandhan Pe*, Ajay Navaria *Udhar Ke Log*, *Unclaimed Terrian*. The revolutionaries P. Lakshminarasu and Periyar Ramaswami have marked the beginning of dalit literature in South Indian languages like Malayalam, Kannada and Tamil.

Dalit literature being born out of a social necessity became a powerful writing trend that storm the mainstream Hindu literature. B. Krishnappa writes, “Dalit literature is not the literature of those whose stomachs are full” (Krishnappa 109). It is for the weaker, depressed class of society whose voices and pain are unheard. It is a weapon the dalits used against the injustice meted out towards them in the name of caste which demarcated them from all social, political and economic sphere. They used literature to voice out against the horrors and intolerable conditions caste has brought upon their lives which segregated them from the rest of the Indians. It addressed the oppressed, untouchables, victims of caste supremacy and marginalised women. Literature thus becomes an important means for the dalits to liberate themselves and tell their stories of caste slavery. It paved the way for recognition and social identity of the dalits, enforcing unity and freedom of the self.

1.3 Objectives of Dalit literature

The primary aim of dalit literature is to give voice to the voiceless, to bring about social change in the society and give hope to the hopeless. Through literature it creates a platform where social awareness can be carried out and like the former dalit leaders have emphasised on, Dalit literature encourages its people to educate themselves as education was the only way out of poverty. Dalit literature is not about the fantastical or imagery world where creativity becomes a medium of producing literary works, it is a documentation of real experiences with real victims and locations. So, creativity or imaginary tale has no place in dalit literature. It acts as a mirror to showcase its real plight and misery that the Indian literature have ignored and neglected in its creative writings.

The prime objective of dalit literature is to make their voices heard and call for social and political reforms. In order to achieve that means, majority of dalit writings have already been translated into English to achieve the global level of circulating their story to the world. Since dalit literature is for a social cause protesting against the injustice and hypocrisy of caste and religion, the details of its work are free from fanatical notions. The translation of Dalit literature into English is an empowerment for the dalits.

Dalit writing is a post-independence literary phenomenon. The idea of equality, freedom and liberty were deliberately discussed but no actions were taken in order to implement it. The new dalit writers took upon themselves to present their own community experience of being a dalit in his/her own language, style, environment, and issues. Dalit literature was a vibrant form of new literature with its own style, themes and language and garnered considerable discussions and debates both from India and abroad. Dalit literature is different from Indian literature. Mainstream Indian critics criticised Dalit literature and devalued it negatively. Meanwhile, Dalit critics hold that a non-dalit can never write and contribute to dalit literature because they have not experienced what they have undergone through. The dalit consciousness leads to the formulation of dalit writings. Their story can be narrated and written only by a dalit.

Dalit literature acts as a means to awaken dalit consciousness and achieve liberation and equality. Dalit literature has been changing with the passage of time and it “has shifted away from the old approach of viewing caste as a problem of the past to that of viewing caste as an issue of present times” (Satyanarayana and Tharu 14). It has also moved from viewing caste that not only affects the lower caste but the whole society. Another objective of dalit literature is to present the experiences of their dalit women both written by the male or female and bring out the double oppression she faced in order to survive. The new generation dalit writers are beginning to reject ideas of uplift and reform. The dalit identity which was once a symbol of shame and anguish is now being celebrated and glorified.

1.4 Dalit Autobiographies

Autobiographies and Poetry constitute the most prominent form of literary writings in Dalit literature. Autobiographies are regarded by the dalits writers as the best form of literary genre to articulate the sensibility and present the authenticity of its experiences. According to Roy Pascal, “Autobiography is historical in method and at the same time the representation of the self in and around its relations with the outer world” (Pascal 8). Autobiography as a genre of literature is a metaphor of the self and its journey from the unknown to the known. James Olney describes autobiography as, “a monument of the self as it is becoming, a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition” and to build “a metaphoric bridge from subjective sub-

consciousness to objective reality” (Olney 25). Autobiography is a powerful narration of the self that lays great emphasis on “self introspection, sincerity, frankness and integrity” (Sharma 86). It provided the historical and cultural background of the writer. It studies the psychology of the writer in generating its experiences in written forms.

This is a genre that wholly focussed on an individual’s personal feelings, experiences and emotions. However, in Dalit autobiographies, the personal experiences are mirrored through the community. The community becomes more important than the self because the personal revolves around the community. Shabina Nishat Omar writes, “An essential feature of the dalit autobiographical narratives is that they do not isolate the individual from his/her whole historical environment, family, community and society at large” (Omar 61). The first aspect of dalit autobiographies is the representation of social life and secondly, it is the firsthand narration of that social experience. Critics argue that dalit autobiographies are quite different. “In these stories, the individual’s life acquires significance because it speaks of and for a community. It represents a group experiences and is more like a testimony to that experience” (Satyanarayana and Tharu 18). Many autobiographies came up in Marathi literatures which were mostly written in regional languages. The use of regional language is one of the most distinctive forms of dalit autobiographies. The real life account of the dalit’s pain and sufferings are highlighted through this medium which present a more articulate form of narrating the fact. According to Sharmila Rege,

Dalit life narratives challenge the bourgeois genre of autobiography and pull at the boundaries of what are considered the parameters of the life-world. These narratives have established the selves as a distinct genre which emerged from the creative dialectics between exploring and interpreting self and society and the conflict within these. These narratives came to represent not the journey of an individual voice, emotion and consciousness but rather a social and community-based chorus of voices. (Rege 16)

Through autobiographies, the dalits can connect himself or herself to the autobiographer because the level of atrocities and subjugation they are enforced to live are more or less the same. They suffer under the same caste slavery. Moreover,

autobiographies unite the dalits sensibility for the liberation of the dalits. “In consciously violating the boundaries set by bourgeois autobiography, dalit life narrative became testimonies that summoned the truth from the past: truth about the poverty and the helplessness of the pre-Ambedkarite era” (Rege 17). Dalit autobiography thus brought something new in context, “Dalit life narratives historically created the genre of testimonies in which the individual self seeks affirmation in a collective mode” Some of the most important dalit autobiographies that have been translated into English are Bama’s *Karukku*, Baby Kamble’s *The Prison We Broke*, Vasant Moon *Growing up Untouchable in India*, Narendra Jadhev *The Outcaste*, Kumud Pawade *Antasphot*. These autobiographies have revealed it to the world that even though the Government of India abolish Untouchability, there are still continuing effects of untouchability in modern times and moreover being put to practise in rural areas by orthodox Hindus. It also unmasked the hypocritical lie of the Hindus in claiming equality of all and diversity in unity by unmasking how behind the scene they are the proponents of caste based discriminations and holding on to their ancient ways of basking and exploiting the lower caste.

One of the striking features of dalit autobiographies is the presence of numerous dalit women writers who took to literature to protest and fight for their own gender. In the 1980s and 1990s, Dalit women came together to start a movement voicing their issues against patriarchy outside and within the dalit households. The movement marked their own identity and reached the conclusion that dalit men and women have different problem. Autobiographies written by men do not give women the space to invade their works; they appear as guest appearances having less voice and presence. They are often portrayed as the ideal mother or the self sacrificing sister enduring pain and sufferings but have no say in the books. They remain passive characters and the gratification of her status remains stagnant like a statue. Lahiri quotes Urmila Pawar words in his article, “Dalit Women Speak Differently” as “Men have written about their mothers and sisters in their autobiographies, about how good they are and how they have sacrificed their happiness for these men; but they do not mention what their wives went through. What the wives done is seen as wifely duty but is never written about it” (Lahiri 16). Dalit men wrote about themselves and it is the reason why dalit women started to write their own autobiography because no one can narrate it better than they themselves. They are double victimized because of their gender and caste

and often remain a mute spectator in male writings. They remained a shadow that was needed for the household to remain its prestigious name, for a woman's infidelity is an important concern for Hindu families. Dalit women envisioned a greater responsibility outside of their kitchen walls in penning down their experiences as a woman being born to a dalit family. Dalit women writings differ largely from their male counterparts as they dig down to the very roots of patriarchy and domestic violence in the dalit household as well. As stated by Shabina Nishat Omar,

In the post-Independence period many autobiographies were written by women and most of these were more candid and overtly expressive, ranging from tales of social exploitation, family harassment, domestic politics, discrimination to the intimate man-women relationship. Female writers were searching for an idiom of self articulation and the autobiography was the fittest vehicle. The traditional Dalit autobiographies were written with a sense of fulfilment where most writers choose to end their narratives with a deep sense of contentment when they crossed their peripheral existential frontier and entered the mainstream. Later Dalit autobiographies expressed deep angst and concern for the figure of the mother who suffered due to caste stigma and the ensuing depravity. (Omar 62)

Baby Kamble's *Jina Amucha* published in 1986 was translated into English in 2008. She belonged to the Mahar caste that was the forefront at the dalit movement which arises in Maharashtra as well as in other states. Her autobiography is a social document of a dalit's women life that was transformed after her encounter with Ambedkar and his thinking. Kamble states that she has to hide her notebooks in which she wrote her autobiography even from her husband who considered women as inferior and must be restricted to domestic works. In her autobiography, Kamble narrated not only the experiences of the Mahar caste but also of being a Mahar woman. She observes the double consciousness of the Mahar women who tried to imitate every bit of the Savarna women so that they would be considered upper caste. She is outspoken and not only reveal the glorification or miseries of her people but

also critically examined their vices and failures of the dalits to make a change in their own well being. Kamble analytically shows how women tried to suppress each other within the same family and how their spouses treat them by cutting off their nose. Kamble affirms, “I made a firm resolve, at a young age to lead my life according to the path sketched by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the light of my life. His principles have exercised a strong influence on me” (Kamble 32). Kamble encouraged her fellow readers to break the prison of hunger, illiteracy, untouchability, patriarchy, social injustice related to caste and gender and it is by breaking these prisons that the Dalits, including the dalit women can assert their identity and place in the society.

By writing their own autobiographies, Dalit women have asserted their identity and highlight their own problems which have not been shaded even by the male writers. Dalit women have also been able to challenge the dominant perspective and power over their life. Through narration, they found their own voice which can contribute as well as uplift the dalit women in its own way. In its truest sense, dalit women autobiographies take a gaze back at caste, dalit men and upper caste men. Shabina Nishat Omar in her article, “Dalit Literature: From Oppression to Emancipation” Writes,

When dalit women began writing autobiographies they bespoke the problems of not just caste oppression within mainstream society but also patriarchal oppression within their caste. Thus they were doubly exploited and doubly marginalised. The focus of dalit women’s autobiography is the negotiation of the “I” and “we”, the individual and the community. (Omar 62)

The marginalization of women and the need for them to speak about their own experiences of caste and gender garnered the statement that dalit women write differently. The source of their suffering relies greatly on their gender as women from a generation of impure sinners that are not considered to be without any humanistic trait. Festino writes, “Dalit women’s narratives are written not only for introspective or aesthetic ends, but also an equally important for communicative ends” (Festino 33). It is to bring together the womenfolk who suffer equally under a dictated society that uses caste for their selfish ends. Domination and subjugation of the female gender as the weaker sex was exercised by the males in order to validate themselves as

the superior gender capable of taming and using her body as they pleased. They used literature as a weapon to fight against all the injustice that has been meted out towards them in the name of caste and gender and to give voice to the voiceless dalit women and recognition of their oppression through literary expression.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives and Historical Overview of Dalit Feminism

2.1 Feminism

Feminism in its simplest sense is the demand for equality of both genders in the social, political and economic sphere. It challenged the already established institutions that restricts the participation of women and dismantles ideas and systems that enhanced the inequality of the sexes. It gained momentum in the 18th century and campaigned for equality and freedom of women. Feminism is a body of social and political theory that strive for the liberation of women. It advocates for equal participation and rights of women in all established institutions and political sphere. As stated by Bell Hooks,

Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. More importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a ready-made identity or role one can step into. (Hooks 26)

Feminist movements garnered and brought women together fighting for their liberty and humanity from the shackles of patriarchy, gender oppression, gender inequality and gender stereotypes. It advocates equalitarianism in all established institutions and fought for the advancement and liberation of women. Some of the pioneers who influenced the movement of Feminism are writers and stands as the founders of Feminism like Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1927), Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Ellman's *Thinking About Women* (1983), Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969). The history of feminism consists of three waves. The first wave appeared in the 19th century, the second wave in the 1960s and 1970s and the third wave from 1990s to the present. The first wave focussed on women's suffrage. Mary Wollstonecraft published the first feminist treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) advocating for the rights of women in the social and moral equality of the sexes. The second wave focused on the economic equality of the genders and major feminist treatise were written advocating the recognition of lesbian women, how women have been presented in literary traditions by male and predispositions of such writings. The Third

Wave feminism was influenced by postmodern and postcolonial thinking. It looks at the diversity of feminism and sexuality.

The feminist movement led to the development of feminist theory which looks at the demarcation of gender in different forms around the world. It opened a platform for women to exercise their intellectual ability to raise issues and concerns that permeates their very livelihood. Feminist theory is varied and diverse and has evolved with the environment in which women suffers from diverse problems. Feminist theory encompasses varied ideas and addresses issues affecting the very lives of humanity in different theories under the branch of feminism. Feminist used different theories to succumb with the gender experiences they go through and explain gender inequalities from different perspectives. There are different types of feminist theory- Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist-Socialist feminism, Multicultural feminism, Postmodern feminism, Ecofeminism, Global feminism, Postcolonial feminism, Lesbian feminism, Psychoanalytic feminism, Black feminism, Dalit feminism etc., each dealing with diverse issues and concerns.

2.2 Black Feminism

Postcolonial feminism emerged as a response to Feminism during the 1980s and argues that issues such as racism and colonialism do not affect western societies and women. Women in the colonised countries are misrepresented and the oppression they face is different from the Western countries. Postcolonial feminist tries to decentre the marginalisation of the 'other' and criticised colonialism and imperialism in its writings. The concept of 'sisterhood' that emerged during the second wave of feminism in the west triggered the birth of postcolonial feminism as it was based on the idea that all women undergo through the same plight and suffers the same problems all over the world. Postcolonial feminist criticised the concept of 'sisterhood' in its writings and formed a new literary theory to represent their issues and concerns,

U.S and European women's studies have challenged the seemingly hegemonic ideas of elite white men. Ironically, Western feminism has also suppressed Black women's ideas. Even though Black women intellectuals have long expressed a

distinctive African-influenced and feminist sensibility about how race and class intersect in structuring gender...As a result, African-American, Latino, Native American and Asian-American women have criticised western feminism for being racist and overly concerned with White, middle-class women's issues. (Collins 5)

According to Crenshaw, the second wave of feminism was predominantly disposed to the white upper and middle class women of the society and disregarded issues like racism, classism and socioeconomic discrimination of the Blacks, and Black women took upon themselves to expand feminism by including their issues by using the term 'womanist'. Black Feminism argues that, Black women have different experiences from their male counterparts and white women and they are thrice marginalised because of their gender, race and colour. The identity of their womanhood lies in their colour, sex and race and they cannot be categories under the concept of 'sisterhood' because their experiences and reality are diverse. "As a historically oppressed groups, U.S Black women have produced social thought designed to oppose oppression...Black women and other historically oppressed groups aim to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice" (Collins 9). Bell Hooks, a black feminist lays down the basic requirements needed of a feminist work,

The value of a feminist work should not be determined by whether or not it conforms to academic standards. The value of a feminist work should not be determined by whether or not it is difficult reading...If feminist writing and scholarship aim to promote and advance feminist movement, then matters of style must be considered in conjunction with political intent. There will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are understood only by a well educated few. (Hooks 111)

Alice Walker, one of the pioneers of Black feminism in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* (1983) was the first to use the term "womanism" and assert that it is, "feminist, Afrocentric, healing, embodied, and spiritual" (Razak 100). Womanism amplifies to the women of colour suffering under racism and sexism. Black feminism

emerged because of the need to represent black women as oppressed by both racism and sexism and encounters this dual subjectivity not only from outside but within the household of the black community. With the empowerment for change and the collective Black consciousness, they resisted and question their oppression. This led to knowledge and through which they can connect with the other black women through activism and literature.

Collins in her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* states that, “our experience as African-American women provides us with a unique angle of vision concerning Black womanhood unavailable to other groups...It is more likely for Black women, as members of oppressed groups, to have critical insights into the condition of our oppression” (Collins 35), and write their story of marginality and challenge social structures because they are the victims of this social set ups. Their oppression led to their movement and they sought to fight for their own interest and rights.

Another important feature of Black Feminism is the emancipation of education and knowledge among the oppressed groups. As Hooks explicitly writes in her book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* that, “Encouraging women to strive for education, to develop their intellects, should be a primary goal of feminist movement. Education as ‘the practise of freedom’ will be a reality for women only when we develop an educational methodology that addresses the needs of all women. This is an important feminist agenda” (Hooks 114). She asserts that only through education the movement and activism will reach out to the general masses and questions how feminism “have not stressed the need to make education, especially basic literacy, a feminist agenda” (Hooks 107). Black Feminism paved the way for a distinctive identity and self assertion of the black women garnering support and recognition from literary spheres and through their movement and theory they turn their oppression into a political one influencing many feminist theories around the world. Black Feminism influenced dalit feminism on grounds that they were doubly oppressed externally and internally and race and caste were the main reason for their oppression including their gender.

2.3 Dalit Feminism

The exclusion of the dalit women in the Mainstream feminism in India gave rise to Dalit feminism. During the 1980s and 1990s the women's movement in India gain momentum with the distinct participation of the Dalit women,

In the mid 1980s young Dalit feminists in Mumbai formed the 'Mahila Sansad' and by the mid 1990s 'Samvadini-Dalit Stree Sahitya Maanch', a forum of the dalit feminist literary movement has emerged. By the 1990s, there were several independent and autonomous assertions of dalit women's identity; a case in point is the formation of the National Federation of Dalit Women and the All India Dalit women's Forum. At the state level in Maharashtra, The Maharashtra Dalit Mahila Sanghatana was formed in 1995, a year earlier, the women's wing of the Bhartiya Republican Party and the Bahujan Mahila Sangh had organised the Bahujan Mahila Parishad. (Rege 85)

Dalit Feminism change the course of the dalit women in seeing themselves as women with feministic traits and vigour and established their distinct caste identity. Social reforms mostly concern the issues of women in any society as such the Dalit movement launched by Ambedkar aimed at the renunciation of several social, brahmanical and religious systems that had deteriorated the female gender and advocates for their participation in the social, political, religious and economic position. Dalit women according to Gopal Guru needed to speak differently because of their differences in treatment and needed a separate identity distinct from mainstream feminism and dalit literature in order to club them in unity and represent them. As Uma Chakravarti writes,

Dalit feminist have formulated the position of the three-way oppression of dalit women:

(i) as subjects to caste oppression at the hands of the upper caste;

(ii) as labourers subject to the caste-based oppression, also mainly at the hands of the upper and middle caste who form the bulk of landowners;

(iii) as women who experience patriarchal oppression at the hands of all men, including men of their own caste. (Chakravarti 135)

Black and Dalit literature focused on the historical, political, social, cultural marginalization of their community which gave rise to their commutative voices as a group of people marginalised because of their colour, race, caste, gender etc. Both Dalits and Black literatures are literatures of marginalisation and protest. It is the narrative of pain, sufferings and bondages. They are the experiential narratives of living under the bondage of slavery and untouchability. Ambedkar however declared that untouchability was more horrendous than slavery because slavery is a physical trait and untouchability is a mental slavery. Both the Blacks of America and the Dalits of India were excluded because of their colour, race and caste owing to historical, religious, political, cultural entities that existed and became victims of social and economic discrimination and represents structures of repression. Ambedkar and Martin Luther King as the leader of both Dalit and Black movements and symbolism of their assertions universalised their cause of oppression, protesting structures of repression and acknowledgment of their humanity and identity validated their cause and concerns into a global one.

The discussion on dalit feminism goes back to the role played by both Ambedkar and Phule in understanding the plight of the women and pioneered dalit women's consciousness and fashioned Dalit womanhood. Although they belong to different times, they understood the unimaginable plight of the dalit women and the role they play in the family and society. Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai, who were the first reformers for the dalit girl child, devoted their life for the education of dalit girls and open schools for the untouchables in 1848. Jyotiba Phule understood that women were responsible for the transmission of cultural traditions and beliefs and therefore, his earliest reform was the emancipation of girl's education. He, like Ambedkar saw that education was the key factor of fundamental change in the society and an educated mother would educate her children. Ambedkar opened the eyes of the women to the

intricate relations between caste, gender, and patriarchy. He influenced the women's movement and brought radical changes to the society. Majority of the dalit women writers incorporate his teachings into their works and his contribution to the dalit community generally and to women in particular.

The Dalit movement have focused more on Dalit men and mainstream feminism saw all women facing the same problems and oppression. Dalit feminist critiqued such ideas and assert that 'caste' and 'gender' should be viewed as equal, link to each other. Kimberle Crenshaw a leading Black feminist "introduced the word Intersectionality as a tool to acknowledge the 'difference' to existent feminist philosophy" (Arya and Rathore 10). The similarity between the Black Feminist and Dalit Feminist also lies in the fact that their root cause of oppression is neglected in the larger working of First World Feminism and Third World Feminism by excluding race and caste.

So-called Third World Feminists have adopted the idea of 'difference' as well as that of intersectionality based on their difference based on location. But the very idea of intersectionality, which is the theoretical ground for 'difference', has long been rejected in the works of mainstream feminists, who reject internal differences between Third World women as they assert their won difference from First World feminist. Sharmila Rege offers a critique of 'difference' from a Dalit feminist standpoint position and argues that feminist 'difference is incomplete unless the difference from a caste perspective, i.e., Dalit difference is added to it. (Arya and Rathore 10)

The Dalit movement saw an increasing number of women from different villages coming together to fight for their freedom and liberty. The active role played by the women anticipated the movement to a higher cause. They were determined to fight for their birthright, the right to live like a human. Their involvement and call for reforms ignited changes and abolish laws that hampers and bondage females. Dalit women showed strength and unity whenever Ambedkar called for the religious conversion. Their strong willed and hope for a better future for their children was evident as they demanded for the free and compulsory education of the girl child, representation and participation of women in the legislative assemblies and prohibiting child marriages.

The strong sense of assuring a better future for their children came out from the women community who deliberately made huge sacrifices in order to send their children to schools. They had to go hungry, work harder than their usual shift, go begging for loans and money. They had to take huge risks in providing education for their children and despite their efforts, some of the dalit children were refused to be enrolled in educational institutions for fear of being polluted or raising higher than the upper caste children etc. The strong sense of dalit womanhood came out of their conscious spirit trying to make the world a better place than they have found it.

Even within the Dalit movement, gender superiority and biasness could not be avoided. As Urmila Pawar writes in her autobiography *The Weave of Bamboo* that, “Even in the Dalit movement, the secondary treatment given to women in the home was reproduced in programmes and practices. She recalls being invited as a speaker for meetings and then being made to wait outside the hall while activists received the male leaders” (Rege 394). Though the Dalit women participated in the Dalit movement and revoke and implemented some gender rights, the large scoop of marginalisation was still evident, “There was no place for the woman question in the dalit movement and the women’s movement was equally indifferent to the dalit question” (Pawar 218). This led to the question of their individual identity and assertion in the society as a group of women doubly marginalised and oppressed. Omar writes, “All across the world, especially in the Indian sub-continent, the act of writing is for a woman essentially an act of breaking her silence because of her repressive patriarchal/racial society has taught her to be culturally silent. The feminine is essentially the marginalised consciousness that operates on the periphery of patriarchal discourse” (Omar 61).

Women studies in India neglected caste system in their framework and resigned to the oppression faced by the savarna upper caste women through the mode of feminism in India. “Indian feminist discourse, which ought to bring gender-studies to all Indian women, at least in theory, has suppressed the caste question to such an extent that ‘feminism’ itself has been seen as modality of subjugating women from Dalit communities” (Aryan and Rathore 2). The exclusion of the dalit women’s problem in the mainstream feminism has rather urge them to find a separate distinct identity for themselves as Festineo quotes,

However, as Tomar (2013) observes, the fact of being excluded even from the Indian Feminist Movement has turned them into fighters rather than victims. They have thus founded Dalit Feminism or better, Dalit Womanism, in order to define their conditions of experience. The term 'womanism' was coined by Alice Walker; it is much more appropriate to the condition of Dalit women than the more restricted term Feminism because it refers to racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic and political conflicts. (Festineo 29)

The problems faced by the dalit women were not inculcated into the larger framework of Indian feminism and it was "unmarked by caste" (Rege 6). Mainstream feminism neglected the sufferings of the dalit women and considers it to be not a major feminist studies that needed recognition. Women movement refused to study the plight of the dalit women because they believe all women to be equal. Sharmila Rege, quotes the words of Kamble in her book *Writing Caste/Writing Gender* as, "The separate roads to feminism were mapped and conceptualised as feminisms-brahmanical and non-brahmanical" (Rege 89). Uma Chakravarti makes the stand between the upper caste women and the dalit women clear in her book, "Upper caste may face gender oppression but they also gain the privileges of belonging to a higher caste and will defend those privileges. Caste is extraordinarily successful in dividing women, in erasing a possibility of sisterhood" (Chakravarti xi).

Dalit Feminism emerged with the integration of dalit consciousness amongst the dalit women who wanted their own platform in order to self-represent themselves. As a powerful mode of self-representation, dalit women wrote differently than their male counterparts who could never analysed the psychological and physical pain of a dalit woman. They needed to represent themselves and with the evolvement of dalit feminism, many literary genres were written which stand in contrast to dalit male writers. Their writings were informative and delved in the emotional aspects of a woman. Dalit women writers took to analysing their personal experiences to further enhance the commonality of interpersonal contextualization of dalit women. Fiction is not attempted by the women writers as their own personal life is itself a story to be told, analysed and reflected in order to construct their identity as a woman and as a

dalit, “Kumudtai argues that just as the analysis of the lives of communities and individuals in society cannot exclude caste so also the analysis of the women cannot ignore exploitation based on gender. Dalit women, she underlines, are the victims of this double exploitation. In order to understand and analyse why and how this is so, emotions are less important than ideas and thoughts” (Rege 304).

The disease of untouchability has spread like a contagious vermin throughout the nooks and corner of the Indian society. Apart from being touch by a dalit, even seeing them eye to eye was considered pollution. Trichi Neelavathi in her essay, “Will Educated Women take the Initiative” states, “There is no anatomical difference between one human being and another. Neither is there any difference in terms of emotions and feeling. How can we justify ourselves when we classify one man as high and the other as low? Tell me, does any other country suffer from this demon called untouchability?” (Neelavathi 84) She asserts that untouchability has prevented the form of relationships and builds walls to prevent their humanistic traits from letting on. Animals like cows, buffalos, dogs, donkeys that hallows in the dirt exercise more freedom than the dalits. They are free to roam the streets, drink from the canal and excrete wherever they wanted. Whereas a dalit, born with all the human senses have no rights to even walk the streets freely. A dalit woman was forbidden from wearing a blouse and gold ornaments. Maragathavalliyar in her essay, “The Sufferings of the Adi-dravidas” says, “Can the rich do without the adi-dravidas? They cannot. Only if the poor wet the earth with the sweat of their brow, can the rich live in comfort and talk about ‘upper-caste’ and ‘lower-caste’ (58). The social hierarchy strengthens the demarcation between poor and rich making the rich in control of the poor.

Another important feature of Dalit Feminism is the celebration of Dalit womanhood. They celebrate the strength and valour of dalit women and their ability to overcome their oppression of external and internal controls. Dalit feminist writers like Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Sharmila Rege, Bama highlights the unimaginable pain and sufferings of the dalit women but also glorify their resilience and will power, the sacrifices they made for the education of their children and their strong courageous spirit. Dalit women writers write about the painful memories of their past, their present plight and hope for an equal society for the future. On their writing style, Jaydeep Sarangi writes,

Dalit feminist writers used language that is militant and blunt. Their language is mostly colloquial and it gives a counter code to elite aesthetics defined by the upper caste and upper class citizens in India. Unconventionally militant similes, metaphors from their social ethos and analogies used seem to befittingly paint their social experiences, experience of the self, as well as that of fellow subaltern populations, as devoid of dignity and identity under the alien sky. (Sarangi 79)

Memoirs, letters, diaries, autobiographies are taken as one coherent narrative writing for dalit women writers where the self is thoroughly analysed in order to replicate one's personal experiences to the general women masses. They used autobiographies in general, in order to inform that their stories are not fictionalised but are more of a social protest against the institution of caste, gender, and patriarchy. The representation of a female body and addressing it as a form of subjectivity is another form of male dominance in literary spheres. It is the women themselves who can really represent herself despite the efforts of male writers who tried to detail her experiences standing from an aloft position. There is a stark ideological difference between the dalit women writers and their male counterparts. As Pawde writes that usually "male-centric criticism about women's life narratives" is "merely emotional outbursts" (Rege 305) clubbing their experience as emotional rather than reasonable.

When it comes to reforms and revolutions, women played an important role in such movements but the credibility of their sacrifices are not given due recognition. Despite their due efforts, the hold of patriarchy was so strong that husband suspected the intentions of their wives in such matter and during the interaction of both genders in such mixed movements, just because a woman happen to meet gaze with the eye of a stranger, the husband suspected her to such extreme like she was unfaithful and might be harbouring affections from somebody during this kind of outdoor activities. Such was the mind of the husbands who feared a women's infidelity more than his own death. Women were subjected to a life of scrutiny and had no voice when it comes to domestic abuse and violence. She silently takes in all of her husband's hatred and abuse, and still finds the will to move on and love him because the understatement of the Hindu religion was such that, women cannot remarry after their husband's death.

And a life of widowhood was more depressing than to live with an abusive husband. They had no choice in life rather than to live under the shadow of their husband no matter what it took.

Shyamala Gogul's collection of dalit women's writings in Telugu and the translation of women writings to English by K. Srilata in his book called *The Other Half of the Coconut: Women Writing Self-Respect History* brought the history and voices of forgotten dalit women. Feminist critics like Gail Omvedt, Uma Chakravarti, Pratima Pardeshi, Wandana Sonalkar, Sharmila Rege, Anupama Rao deconstructs caste and gender through a feminist lens and provides a historical and theoretical framework for its understanding. As Rege writes, "Following the recovery of these dalit feminist voices, it is apparent that 'we' know very little of what have been presumed to be the 'silent years' of dalit feminism. Dalit women's testimonies that came into public circulation from the 1980s interrogate this presumed silence" (Rege 94) and brought dalit women's voices to the forefront and channelized its strength and identity.

2.4 Dalit Feminist Consciousnesses

Dalit literature is a result of Dalit consciousness and prior to that Dalit Feminism is a result of the dalit women's consciousness. The Dalit movement was responsible for ushering in ideas and knowledge among the dalit women and they began to recognise the larger workings of Indian Feminism and the exclusion of the dalit women's problem into its structure. Indian Feminism like Western Feminism was narrow and excluded the most depressed and oppressed community in the Indian scenario-the Dalit women. By inculcating on the concept of 'sisterhood' and 'common oppression', mainstream feminism refused to acknowledge the marginalization of dalit women and casteism and focus on the oppression and subjugation of the savarna, middle caste women. As stated by Hooks, the emphasis of 'sisterhood' was seen as "the emotional appeal masking the opportunism of manipulative bourgeois white women. It was seen as a cover up hiding the fact that many women exploit and oppress other women" (Hooks 44). Dalit women were also exploited by the very concept of 'sisterhood' making their oppression in common parlance with the upper caste women. It was a blanket statement. As Rege writes, "the focus of a dalit feminist standpoint is squarely placed on social relations, which converts difference into oppression" (Rege 97).

During the 1990s a new stream of writing emerge where the dalit women writers began to document their experiences in written forms.

Dalit feminist writers delved on the themes and subject matters of domestic violence and patriarchal domination, themes that have been ignored by the male writers mostly in autobiographies that require the use of memory and experience. The writing style between male dalit writers and women writers differed thus bringing in the diverse knowledge of what they faced as oppressors and oppressed. Shweta Singh in her article, "Representations of Dalit women in Dalit men's and women's autobiographies" writes that,

While the men might choose to forget their own immoral behaviour as perpetrators of violence at home, they project themselves as the victims of caste and class politics. However, the women while focusing on domestic violence may not focus enough on the complicity of other womenfolk, especially the elderly in the same acts. The autobiographies are different not just because they reveal different experience and different world-views but also because they unravel the bigger questions of memory, experience, gender-relations and familial structures which are the same across all societies and classes. Dalit autobiographies help us to think about the genre itself and its deployment by the two sexes. (Singh 43)

Dalit women writers interrogate the workings of both caste and gender in order to established their caste identity to feminist standpoint. Some of the important works on dalit feminist theories are Gopal Guru's "Dalit Women Speak Differently", Uma Chakravarti's *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens*, Sharmila Rege's *Writing Caste/ Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios*, "Dalit Women talk Differently- A critique difference and towards a dalit feminist standpoint position", Anupama Rao's *Gender and Caste*. The dalit feminist writings were more realistic than the male writers for they include the perspective of women from a patriarchal standpoint. Some of the major features that dominate women's writings are caste oppression, gender consciousness, patriarchal domination, everyday affairs, women's

problems and sufferings, realistic depiction of authentically depressed women, domestic violence and abuses.

One of the drawbacks of early feminist writings was its translation process. Majority of their works were written in their own languages and when it was translated into English by translators other than from their own caste, the level of authenticity of experiences and meagre details lost its touch. However, due to the translations of dalit women's books their works and ideas are reaching the common masses and their problems have raised questions on womanhood in India and abroad. The literacy gap between the genders is starkly distinguishable as the girl child is often considered a second choice in the pursuance of education. Their illiteracy is what draws them back from their participation in the literary spheres. This is the reason why dalit feminists strive to educate and agitate on these matters through their narratives in order to empower and embolden the women.

Dalit women writers take the genre of autobiography as the most prominent genre to detail their experience and call for reforms and action. However as Sharmila Rege writes on Kumud Pawde, "Kumudtai explains that Antasphot is not an 'autobiography' but a critical narrative of her experiences, in fact, she feels that all dalit life stories are critical narratives and not autobiographies" (Rege 305). The Dalit women writers take the term 'narrative' to depict their narratives of oppression and deprivation and also for "communicative ends" (Festineo 33) educating and empowering the dalit women on the forces of their oppression. Dalit women writers also write on their rich culture and traditions and look at how women play an important role in the transmission and retrieval of such customs, keeping the memory of their culture alive.

Baby Kamble's autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* is an important book in enhancing feminist sensibilities and garnering historical and societal truths about its treatment to women at the lowest rung of the society. Her autobiography provides the historical base of feminist consciousness among the dalit women in the 1980s. Her narratives provide an insight into the patriarchal household of the dalits, the domination and depravation that comes along with it and it is one of the earliest feminist voices capturing the voices within the dalit household. Kamble was a follower of Ambedkar ideologies and engaged herself in the activism launched by Ambedkar and her works depict the principles and teachings of Ambedkar.

The Prison We Broke is a feminist critique, a historical, social and political outlook on the dalit community and dalit women in particular. Though her book falls under the genre of autobiography, the narrative depicts the community at large. The self is incorporated with the community in order to arrive at the conclusion that within the boundaries of caste and gender, a dalit cannot swap its identity away from its community. Their identity stems from their community. In her autobiography, she revisits the community in which she was born and raised to, the ghettos they lived and the sheer meagre amount of food they had to break and share within themselves. She recounts the live experiences of the Mahar community and the Mahar women in the 1990s. The poverty they faced was unimaginable so much so that they had to devour the flowers, stems and buds of the cactus in order to spend the night in peace.

Patriarchal domination and control were deeply integrated in the mindset of the dalit community and it is the elder women who also contribute to this mechanism by taking a self revenge on the humiliations and oppression she was once forced to live with. Women are also perpetrators of patriarchy and play a vital role in the transmission of this rigid system into force. What Kamble tries to achieve was to educate the dalit women of her oppressors and explain that women also oppresses women. As Kamble writes on the plight of the newly wedded wife who had to live a life of servitude to her husband's family is chain by social and religious conventions thus making her a slave to the repercussions of traditional customs and culture. Kamble writes, "Women are still slaves. And it is not just dalit women; I see around me many women from both upper and lower caste" (Kamble 96), she not only speaks for the dalit women alone she universalised the problems faced by both upper and lower caste women due to patriarchy though the former is excluded from caste oppression. In her narrative, she brings out the worst kind of exploitation and tortures dalit men imposed upon the women leaving her with not only a physical scar but a psychological trauma that she carries for life. The double exploitation of the dalit women is normatively dealt by Kamble in order to assert her individual identity as a dalit woman in the society.

Kamble also narrates the hypocrisy of the upper caste when it comes to their use of the term 'pollution' from the dalit community. Upper caste were terrified of being touch by a dalit but when it comes to sexual violence and rape towards the dalit women, the stigma dies away. They were not in fear of being polluted by touching and caressing a

woman's body when it comes to his sexual desires. Their control over the dalit women was justified through casteism and religious sanctification that enables them to dominate and commit whatever crimes they wanted because they were above the law. As Maragathavalliyar states in her essay on the future of a dalit women that, "The path to a better life remains closely guarded by men" (Maragathavalliyar 72) both from the upper caste and the dalit men. Kamble's autobiography also celebrates the strength and pride the Mahar women possess when it comes to reforms and change. It was the women community who embraced modern education and enrolled their children into schools.

Bama is a celebrated feminist writer of the dalits and have published autobiographies that depicts the culturally and traditional role women were forced to live in based on her gender, caste, religion. She takes female sufferings as her subject matter and her works deals with feminine struggles and problems from the upper caste and within the dalit community. Bama is the pen name of Faustima Mary Fatima Rani and hails from the Paraya Roman Catholic community of Tamil Nadu. She has published *Karukku* (1992), an autobiography; *Sangati* (1994), a novel; *Kisumbukkaran* (1996), a collection of short stories. She explores the female psyche in her works along with the psyche she was forced to grow up into a community without humanity and compassion for the depressed lower caste. She has become the voice of the voiceless and writes with deep feminine sensibilities that captures the harsh reality of dalit women from her childbirth to that of adulthood. Her work *Karukku* won many awards and is felicitated for her realistic portrayal of the women's suffering both from India and abroad. She used literature as a weapon to highlight the despicable nature of the dalit women's suffering and shades light to the darkness.

Bama delves into the hypocritical mechanisms of caste and religion and how it interlocks together to suppressed a dalit's individuality as a human. She represents the voices of depressed dalit women living under such regimes. Her novel *Sangati* reveals the demarcated gender roles and the function of patriarchy and also delved in highlighting the male ego and pride they possessed through torturing the females. The strength and power of a dalit woman is applauded who would risk her life to support her family and is not afraid of the consequences that come along with it after selling her 'Mangalsutra', as she writes "*Sangati* is a look at part of the lives of those women

who dared to make fun of the class in power that oppressed them. And through this, they found the courage to revolt” (Bama vi). She presents the courageous spirits of the dalit women in fending off their religious annotations and symbols for their survival.

Urmila Pawar’s autobiographical narrative *Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman’s Memoir* translated to English by Maya Pandit was published in 2008. The narrative is important in influencing Dalit feminism with feminine consciousness and sensibility. It celebrates the strength of a dalit woman when faced with adversities and discriminations in life. She narrates the experiences of the dalit women in the contemporary period with issues like education, employment and women’s involvement in the dalit women’s movement. She looks at how caste had shaped the society and how caste and gender interlinks together to make the dalit woman the most oppressed person in the workings of this system.

Like other dalit feminist writers, Pawar looks into the dalit household to highlight gender subjugation and depravity right from the childbirth. She narrates how her birth was premeditated even before she was born because her parents wanted a boy. She had to carry this guilt of shame all throughout her life for disappointing her parents and upsetting their spirits. As she writes, “I was the youngest child in the family. Yet I was never indulged. In fact, I was an unwanted child, because I was a girl. When I was born, my cousin Govindada wanted to throw me on the dung heap. When I grow a little older, many would beat me” (Pawar 64). Due to being a girl, she was never serve the same portion of food like her brothers and had to stay indoors doing household chores while her brothers go out to play. The same ordeal implies to a married women who had to seize her hunger to make sure her husband eat his filled and the leftovers were what she grudge upon. Even in the simplest notion like food there was disparity between the two sexes.

Pawar narrates the incident of Jat Panchayat’s decision towards a dalit woman who was sexually harassed and exploited by a dalit man and after learning that she has conceived, the patriarchal institution intervenes in and instead of the man getting punished for his crimes, the poor woman was assaulted, kick and slap all throughout her body. Patriarchal control and power validates the masculinity of the male and celebrates its domination. The woman was punished because of her gender and there was no one to help her. As Pawar writes, “If a woman was suspected to have erred, she

was brought before the panchayat for justice and punishment. She was publically judged and her other relatives would beat her up as well” (Pawar 100). She had to face such adversities because of the patriarchal set up. Even in her personal life she narrates how her husband began to get agitated with her involvement in social gatherings, meetings and movements and opposed her further education. She saw the implications of the male ego that keeps patriarchy alive. She remarks, “Gradually, it became clear to me that everything that gave me an independent identity: my writing which was getting published, my education, my participation in public programs irritated Mr. Pawar no end. Gradually, he became to be full of resentment” (Pawar 246). She tasted the domination and control between a husband and a wife from her affairs with her husband. She had to fight for her gender identity and freedom even from her husband who was swapped away with patriarchal ideologies.

Urmila Pawar worked for the upliftment of dalit women and saw that it was only the women who could bring changes to their female community. She was actively involved in the women’s movement and gave speeches encouraging the dalit women to fight for equality of the sexes. Even in the Dalit movement, she saw the biasness between the genders and as she points out, “Women’s issues did not have any place on the agenda of the Dalit movement and the women’s movement was indifferent to the issue in Dalit movement” (Pawar 260). There was gender hierarchy in the dalit movement which agitated Pawar for she was mocked because of her gender even within her caste. She documented the role and participation of the dalit women’s contribution to the Dalit movement.

She was an activist, social reformer who placed the marginalisation of dalit women to the forefront and liberated the cause for the equality of the dalit women and inspired dalit feminism through her works. Her works provides a historical, sociological and political base for the construction of dalit feminism. Her struggle to work for the advancement of dalit women had indecisively uplifted dalit women and ushered in self assertion and dalit women’s identity.

Dalit feminist writers write with a conscious mind asserting their rights to equality of the sexes and demand for their individuality without the labelling of ‘caste’ and ‘gender’. They seek to educate the women through their works and give an insight to their oppression and subjugation not only from the upper caste but within the dalit

household as well. It impacted the women's understanding of seeing herself as a distinct individual, as a woman enriched with powerful feminine traits and values. As a powerful mode of representing depressed dalit women, dalit feminist works have attain recognition and attention from various spheres and their voices are being heard for the first time. Dalit feminism had strengthen the very spirit for which Dalit literature was created- to give voice to the voiceless and recognition to their depravity in all spheres of life.

Chapter 3: Projection of Dalit Social Reality and Concern

3.1 Introduction

Kumud Somkuvar Pawde was born to a Mahar Caste family of Nagpur and married Motiram Pawde, a social reformer and activist. Kumud Pawde is a Dalit activist and writer. She is the first Ambedkarite scholar of Sanskrit and became the first dalit professor of Sanskrit. She is best known for her autobiography titled *Anthasphot* which discusses the issue of the exploitation of women. She is a founding member of the National Federation of Dalit women and the President of All India Progressive Women's Organisation which was established in Nagpur in 1974. Kumud Pawde is a follower of Ambedkar's teachings and ideology and converted to Buddhism. She actively campaigns for inter-caste marriages and provides guidance and assistance to such marriages.

Kumud Pawde is a modern dalit writer who refuses to heed against the moral and social sanctions that caste have imposed upon their lives. The affirmation of her stand against caste depravity comes from her education and the influencers around her life. The staggering inflicts of caste hierarchy for generations has dismantled the very foundation of equality and freedom in India for which it was build. The question of freedom and equality is questioned and debated by the dalits in the 20th and 21st century, in order to understand its impact on the Dalits. Dalits were not treated as humans with flesh and bones nor were they considered a species with brain, emotions and feelings. The degradation of their community to that of an animal who has no right or freedom were taken as a form of power the upper caste enjoyed resulting in their position as learned sections of the society. No reforms were carried out by the educated misogynistic caste to abolish the system of caste due to their egoistic nature and pride they concealed in regarding themselves as the descendents of higher monopoly and power who came to the world for a holy purpose, i.e., to enslave dalits as their servants. It was their duty to tame and control them and traditions were to be respected. Right from childhood, a dalit was forced to believe they were inferior and incapable of doing other respectable works apart from manual works like sweeping, scavenging and burying dead animals. They were considered dirt for the society in which they were born to. Right from their birth to their death, a dalit never ceased to

move away from the stigma caste shaded upon their lives. It was a lifelong endurance of pain, hardships and suffering, and even death could not overthrow caste hierarchy.

The excerpt of *Antasphot*, “The Story of My Sanskrit”, is not only an important essay in pioneering dalit feminism in India but also in asserting one’s identity and empowerment in the field of education and employment. She asserts that *Antasphot* “is not an autobiography but a critical narrative of her experiences, in fact she feels that all dalit life stories are critical narratives and not autobiographies” (Rege 305). She choose to study and teach Sanskrit which was regarded as the language of the upper caste and in which the Vedic and the Puranas were written, thus defying two-fold discrimination on grounds of gender and caste. She narrates the painful and agonised experiences of being born a dalit woman and fighting to master the Sanskrit language which was considered the holiest language of Indians, in which dalits were not even allowed to read, listen or study because of the stigma associated with their status in the society. So, Pawde’s story thus becomes a protest of what the dalits have been deprived of in the name of caste.

Kumud Pawde’s outlook at the despicable and contemptible lifestyle of the Dalits at an early age forced her to improved her condition and fight against such resistance. She was an aggressive child and fought her way out of the darkness through education and self perseverance. She refused to let her caste identity tie her down to her grave and challenges the institutions that force such systems. One look at Pawde strike as an empowering dalit woman who have thrive to defeat the odds ahead of her way to gain her humanity, self respect and identity in the society. The conquest and retrieval of individuality as a woman who has been neglected at all corners pose as a new beginning, a new chapter towards a democratic modernised India.

3.2 The Social Reality of Caste and Gender Discrimination

As stated by Bama in her autobiography *Karukku*,

In this society, if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste difference does not disappear. Whatever 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. (Bama 23)

Discrimination based on caste is a fervent issue arising everyday in the Indian society. Caste discrimination continues to shake the very foundation of equality, liberty and justice in India. The mentality of caste hierarchy has been rooted deeply into their psyche that even with the implementation of new rules and laws in modern India, caste discrimination does not go away. It is consistently static and repulsive to change. As stated by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu in their article, “An Introduction to Dalit Writing”, “Caste may no longer be called caste, but it is everywhere. It goes by other name and is practised by everyone. One of the most important contributions of the new dalit writing is its analysis of such everyday and subtle forms of power” (Satyanarayana and Tharu 16). Caste was used as a tool for the upper caste savarnas to control the dalits because they fall at the last wrung of the society and it was a divine duty for them to control and used them as they pleased. It is the caste system that made the dalits to live a life of servitude dedicating themselves to the supremacy of the savarnas and giving in to their control as they feared the judgement of the Gods. The caste system made them to live in poverty; they were restricted from basic necessities and were forced to live outskirts of the village among the garbage and waste. It was not only the means of production and the ways of life they controlled they “have also tried to dominate the means of symbolic production. This symbolic hegemony then allows them to control the very standards by which their rule is evaluated, so that the perspective of the lower castes has no place in it” (Chakravarti 7).

All dalit writings have references to caste discrimination and narrate their dalit experience of being born as a dalit and the consequences they have to undergo through in order to assert themselves and their identity. As Pawde argues that, “just as the analysis of the lives of communities and individuals in society cannot exclude caste so also the analysis of the lives of women cannot ignore exploitation based on gender. Dalit women, she underlines, are the victims of this double exploitation. In order to understand and analyse why and how this is so, emotions are less important than ideas and thoughts” (Rege 304).

In *Antasphot*, Pawde brings to light the sufferings of the dalit married women who fails to bear children to her husband and had to face public humiliation and abuses

from her husband's family and relatives. The plight of women was intolerable because of the injustice she was obliged to; Kamble's husband maternal aunt had to sacrifice her happiness and comfort in order to save her families' reputation by staying with her abusive husband who married for the second time. After her parent's death, she left him and every year during the *Vatsavitri* festival, she indulged in fasting for her husband's prolonged life and in her reincarnation, to marry him and have children together. Kamble was against this penance that she had put upon herself and tried to talk sense into her. Her argument was that women too were human and were not meant to live in such despicable life. Women need to be freed from the chains of patriarchal ideology and gender slavery. During the festival again, Kamble return from work to see her aunt eating her meal and a sense of satisfaction filled her because through sheer education and uplift of women to women, such patriarchal injustice and penance can be avoided. Patriarchal power and dominance is such that a woman herself falls into the system through sheer choice of will as the system is deeply imbedded in her thought and mind.

On gender and caste discrimination as the two fold incentives in which dalit women suffers from, Kamble retells the words of a speaker from the Khanjawala caste during a Dalit Women's Convocation,

There is a difference between the high caste woman and the low caste women in India. We have to suffer a lot even to get the basic amenities in life. Take the problems of latrine or drinking water. Even these problems haven't been solved yet. You are used to posh flush toilets. How can you understand what we have to endure? We have to go to the field of a high caste landlord for relieving ourselves. We are all the time afraid. Will he come? Will he abuse us? Then we leave some women on guard and hurriedly finish what we have to do. This is the condition in which we live. We live in the hutments outside the village, like insignificant worms in drainage water. Have you ever given us a thought? Our women are raped. Raped not only because they are women, but also for revenge. For showing that they are a piece of property. Poverty is not the only reason,

friends, of this oppression. Our caste is the reason why we suffer, why we are exploited. (Rege 316)

Dalit women are the most oppressed at every nook and corner of the society. Her body is seen as not belonging to her but a public entity, serving the sexual needs of both the upper caste and the dalit men. She is double marginalised and oppressed. She has no voice, no power to withstand such threats and abuses. The only way out of such oppression is death. Death only frees her from her earthly bondages and sufferings. It is due to the ill destined fate that lies ahead of dalit women that most girls commit suicides due to domination, subjugation, violence, sexual control and the effects of caste system. However, with the enlightenment of education and empowerment of women through movements and inspiration from B.R Ambedkar, the dalit women's life has improved to some extent. In the words of Uma Chakravarti in her book, *Gendering Caste through a Feminist lens* asserts, " Given that the oppression of both caste and patriarchy mark the lives of dalit women in particular ways, it is not surprising that this situation has led dalit women to take position that they need their own women's organisation" (Chakravarti 83). Complying with the necessity to form an all round organisation, the Dalit's Women Federation, a national-level organisation was set up in 1990. Dalit women stood at the forerun in embracing change and modernity.

Pawde remembers the mothers of her classmates who warn their daughters, "Be careful! Don't touch her. Stay away from her. And don't play with her. Or I won't let you into the house again" (Pawde 75). It is the usual routine of every dalit girl overhearing this kind of statements from such a young age and breeding caste consciousness from an early stage. The intermingling of caste was strictly enforced so as to maintain the hierarchy in the society. Being polluted was a great offence to the upper caste. She was seen polluted although she bathed with Pears soap, used fragrant hair oils and wore sparkly clean dresses. The feeling of disgust and discrimination she faces from an early childhood made her aware of the society around her and made her to be introspective and productive. Caste consciousness within the society breeds ignorance and hatred towards each caste as the caste system was a form of political and social power.

As a child, Pawde became aware of her surroundings and the harassment her people were forced to live in. She began to question these hypocrisy from an early age and wonders what they have done wrong because they were not allowed to drink or take water from the same well or sit together in the same bench with the upper caste people. The mere shadow of them was considered dangerous for the upper caste and being polluted through their shadow or physical body was an offence so heavy that the dalits were often killed or beaten, their houses burned or ransacked for breaking this strictly regulated law. Pawde looks at the increasing number of suicides among young girls in Maharashtra and the murder of dalit women for having intercaste love affairs. For sixteen years after her marriage, Pawde was the main attraction at any gatherings for marrying someone upper from her caste.

Gender and caste discrimination goes hand in hand, when Kumud Pawde first came up with the idea of studying Sanskrit, the whole neighbourhood laughed and mocked at her. She was first criticised because of her caste, then her gender. The main reason she resolved to take up Sanskrit was to break the chain of caste hierarchy and gender stereotyping because a dalit woman mastering Sanskrit was an impossible task. However, even after attaining such social reputed position as a professor of Sanskrit in the society, she explains, “Caste...is never really forgotten even in the overt efforts made by some to put aside and forget it” (Rege 326). Caste consciousness is everywhere and has transformed into different forms with the dawn of time.

Pawde narrates an incident in her life that greatly impacted and made her introspective of her caste and as a fellow human being. During a thread ceremony of one of the upper caste children, her curiosity led her to their house. The Vedic chants sounded alien to her and as she stood by the wall listening and watching the ordeals of it, a savarna mother came throwing verbal abuses at her for watching it and to drive her away gave her a laddoo, breathing fiery disgust through her nostrils. Pawde shouts back, “What do you take me for-a beggar? Giving me a laddoo! Can you see injuries on anyone just because I watched them?” (Pawde 76). The incident impacted her overall understanding of caste discrimination around her and she resolved to break the code that confines and regulates her. This set her mind on learning the Vedic chants that she was debarred from listening because only then, could she retrieve her humanity and self respect. However, the journey of her Sanskrit was met with discouragements and

criticisms from all sides. Some Savarna professors were ridiculed and ashamed to see a Mahar girl taking up Sanskrit and deliberately tried to make her college life miserable so that she can rethink about her societal background and the community she was born to. As a lecturer, she saw the same fate befalling the dalit students who were refused admission and other incentives because, “the dalits were getting too big for their boots because of scholarships and reservations” (Rege 323). Pawde looks at education as the gateway to breaking social codes and restrictions and improving the social and economic conditions of the dalits.

Intercaste marriages or love affairs were strictly enforced and regulated by the upper castes because of the fear of pollution of blood lineage in the family tree hence keeping caste system alive in the contemporary period. As stated by Ambedkar, “The real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else would serve as a solvent for caste” (Chakravarti 139). Caste system played a crucial role in determining which caste a person can be married to. Marriage in the Hindu religion was sacred and breaking of such religious codes were an insult to the very principles and laws the religion was built on. Intercaste marriages were forbidden and the consequences of going against these rule was death or public mutilation. Pawde married into the Kunbi caste which was higher than her caste and as a result she had to face criticisms all throughout her life. The main denial of her existence and marriage came from her father-in-law, who was the epitome of traditionalist Hindu mindset. The society looked at her as a vermin, infested with pollution and germs. Pawde realised the power caste system had over the human mind and she “resolved...to work for the promotion of intercaste marriages” (Rege 335). She realised that religion had a huge role to play behind the denial because it infested the mind with traditionalistic views and beliefs and there were no room for pity or humanism. As she writes, “Religion breaks people by breaking society into caste fragments. The result, broken people embrace a religion of humanism and so-called religious people shout from the rooftops that a law needs to be passed, that bars conversion” (Rege 336). Kumud Pawde therefore became a prominent figure in celebrating intercaste marriages and promoted and protected such affairs through legal constitutional laws.

3.3 The Social Reality of Education

The excerpt, “The Story of my Sanskrit” is crucial in understanding the overall life of a dalit student and in determining gender studies in a society which regards women as the second choice for educational endeavours. The journey of her educational route was filled with loopholes and criticism from the public. She is an advocate of equality and liberty of the dalits throughout her life as she retells her story from where she started and how she overcame the oppression and injustice in the educational sphere by believing in herself and refusing to let her caste pull her down. Pawde was drawn to Ambedkarian ideology and his emancipation for education and learning that Ambedkar was refused to take up Sanskrit, she became more motivated to break the social barriers that confined her community. Sharmile Rege, a dalit feminist activist opines,

Education, it is argued, is the only path to progress and an appeal is made to men in the community to educate the women for the sake of the next generation... Only an educated generation can contribute to the prosperity and progress of the community and then alone can the name of our caste come into the forefront of the nation. (Rege 61)

Majority of the Dalit writers focused on the emancipation of education and the crucial need of the hour to educate the dalit children in order to par them with the current society and improve their economic and cultural livelihood. They narrate their experiences of facing caste bullying from their classmates, teachers and the administration and the strong will within them that overcame such situations. They used the literary platform to critique Caste hierarchy and motivate the younger dalits to strive for advancement in the educational field. Despite Pawde’s effort to eliminate the caste stigma revolving around her, the educational and social systems challenges her to a position where she no longer sees herself as an educated dalit who was more than qualified for the position as a lecturer, as it is her caste which determines the possibility of her acceptance. The merit of her qualification lies in her caste. The political offices governed by the upper caste refuse to accept the fact that a dalit have now mastered the language of Sanskrit which was considered the language of the refined pure breed Hindus. Chakravarti states that, “The denial of knowledge was a

crucial part of the ideology of the caste system and it was one of the most elementary formulations of inequality in traditional India. This denial had another crucial dimension. It refused to consider the knowledge and skills of the lower castes and women as knowledge” (Chakravarti 21). Pawde represents the few modern dalits who cracked the shell of caste restrictions in the educational system by being the first dalit to master the language of Sanskrit as well as teach it. She broke the lifelong protocol surrounding her caste that restricts them from even speaking or learning the holy language.

The higher caste used language as a barrier to further implicate their control over the dalits. Sanskrit was seen as a tool to justify that the dalits, belonging to the unrefined and polluted sects could not speak or learn it because they were not deemed holy or pure in the sights of the Gods. It was not the language for the unrefined, infiltrated breeds of impure blood generations. The religious books hinted out the differences and restrictions governing the Sanskrit language. It was this disgust and ignorance from the upper caste that made her to take up Sanskrit in the first place.

In her excerpt, Pawde mentions her fear on being praised because of her achievement. She is uncomfortable at hearing compliments and praises because she is aware of what lies behind the sweet pitch tone or as she explains, “made up of the fragility of a honey-filled shirish blossom” (Pawde 72), she receives from her colleagues, friends and the public. Their praises were ornamented in such a way that their true feelings or opinions were shadowed away. The more that she hears, she feels like she is “being stung by a lot of gadflies” (Pawde, 71). The reason for her deniability of such compliments is because she grew up in a society that mocks and insults whatever a dalit chooses to study or master in that matter. Pawde has grown used to them, quietly refusing to acknowledge their compliments and that is why her acquaintance gets angry and deems her rude and ill mannered. She cannot pretend to be contented at their remarks or digest their fulsome praise because she is aware of the hot fiery ambers of fire burning inside of them.

Pawde questions, “Doesn’t anyone ever learn Sanskrit? That’s not the point. The point is that Sanskrit and the social group I come from, don’t go together in the Indian mind” (Pawde 71). The traditions that have been followed for generation by the Hindus were to restrict any living dalit to learn or speak the language. So, the whole

mockery she faced was because of defying traditionalistic protocol- “That a woman from a caste that is the lowest of the low should learn Sanskrit, and not only that, also teach it-is a dreadful anomaly to a traditional mind” (Pawde 71). Any Dalit who have acquired this anomaly becomes a sort of fascination to others, an attraction based on “mixed acceptance and rejection” (Pawde 72).

“Acceptance and Rejection” as Kamble puts it are the two forms of attraction. The former type of attraction comes from her caste community who see her as a symbol of defying caste hierarchy and everything associated with the stigma of casteism. They take pride in seeing her accomplishment amidst the scrutinised mentality that lies with the achievement. It is a celebration for the dalits, a celebration of liberating themselves from viewing language as a barrier of inflicting caste subjectivity at the major level and a radical step towards a liberal India. She is attracted to her community because she was the first dalit to ever master the Sanskrit language. Her achievements proved that every dalit was possible to master any language or areas that were once deemed impossible or “encased in the shell of difficulty” (Pawde 72). It was now open to all, irrespective of caste and religion. Pawde is accepted and praised for defying the very root cause of their oppression i.e. language. Language was considered as the key root in differentiating the anatomy between the upper and lower castes.

Pawde explains that the other attraction based on rejection is “devastating” (Pawde 72) because both the speaker and the listener are aware of the false praises emanating out of hatred and not on goodwill or profound feeling of appreciation. It feels like “hot spears” (Pawde 72) has been thrown to the person who is fully aware of the fulsome praises. Pawde claims, “The sensation is that of walking on a soft velvety carpet- but being burnt by the hot embers hidden in someone’s breast, and feeling the scorching pain in one’s soul. The one who’s speaking thinks the listener can’t understand- for surely a low-caste person hasn’t the ability to comprehend” (Pawde 72). Their words were well polished and beautifully structured in order to comprehend a low caste person like her, yet she feels the rejection and exclusion from their tone and facial expressions. The upper caste questions her legitimacy, “In what former life have I committed a sin that I should have to learn Sanskrit even from you? All our sacred scriptures have been polluted” (Pawde 72).

The common concept of terming the dalits as “polluted” for generations resides not only in their blood lineage but in their educational endeavour as well. Everything they study or take up is always polluted because they are dalits in the larger sense. There is no escape from the ‘pollution’ they carry within them no matter how respected or educated they become. This is the reason why Pawde’s assertion of being a dalit is unforgettable and is looked upon as a role model for the youngsters who wants to move ahead. On her statement of her caste, Pawde explains, “The result is that although I try to forget my caste, it is impossible to forget. And then I remember an expression I heard somewhere: ‘What comes by birth, but can’t be cast off by dying—that is caste’” (Pawde 73). It is a crime to be born a dalit in India, not because of having committed a crime physically but a crime for being born into a dalit family because their whole life is bondage, premeditated, restricted and are not considered humane with humanistic traits and features.

Pawde looks at her students in a different light, apart from the two types of attractions. The kind of attraction she receives from her students were pure and without any biasness or reference to caste hierarchy. Their thoughts and mentality was not swap by the rigorous establishment of casteism as she encounters in her lifetime. They have no caste consciousness within them. The outlook of admiration from her students was a kind of assurance to Pawde that indeed beyond the overseas of Caste, there lays a ray of hope for her community in a modern India where the levelling of caste distinction would no longer limit their abilities and capacities. That sheer amount of assurance she receives perpetuated her beliefs and strengthened her spirits.

Pawde’s journey into Sanskrit tested her patience and will-power. The profound enthusiasm she has for the language was further enlightened by Gokhale Guruji, her school teacher who did not see her in terms of caste, gender or religion basis but saw her as an enthusiastic student who wanted to pursue her interest of study. He was a role model for Pawde and the first person to look at her differently, for Guruji belongs to the upper caste. He held her hand and showed her humanity. He was a traditional orthodoxical man who looked stern and confronting to traditional rules and practices. However, Pawde was taken aback when he showed her kindness and refused to acknowledge her caste. He took upon himself to tutor her privately for an essay competition and opened his home and knowledge to her. She recalls, “If Guruji had

not shown me that warmth, but had instead shown the base feelings appropriate to his orthodox nature, would I have learnt Sanskrit?" (Pawde 79). Guruji remained a light bearer that torched Pawde's heart and soul. Guruji, though orthodox in appearance and traditional in mind stands in sharp contrast to the modern educated elites of the Indian society who preaches on equality and justice but are not willing to embrace it. Guruji was a symbolic figure that represented the few individuals who taught and practiced what they teach- for him, humanity comes first. Guruji as an upper caste, stood as the only person in Pawde's life who heartily wishes for the success and improvement of Pawde's life irrespective of her caste because true humanity comes from the heart and not through traditions, culture or religious myths and beliefs.

Education was seen as the way out of a miserable dalit life because it provided them with an understanding of the world and the society, their rights and freedom. It enlarged their minds and made them conscious of their problems in a constitutional democratic country where religion was the prime suspect of inequality and injustice. The disparity in the economic production further mobilised the control of the poor sections of the society as without money, property and education, the dalits living conditions were consistently low and remain static. B.R Ambedkar, an intellectual dalit was fortunate to receive his education abroad and through his conscious and radical mind, he was able to retrieve the spirits of the dalits which were slowly getting drained and wasted. He understood that education was the only ticket out of their miserable life. As highlighted by Shabina Nishat Omar in her article, "Dalit Literature: From Oppression to Emancipation" that,

His revolutionary ideas stirred all the Dalits from the lethargy and stoic resignation of their abject misery and servility and inspired them with an existence, a new meaning and a new sense of self worth. Dalit Literature is thus a literary expression of this renewed consciousness of the power and essence of individual existence within a collective culture... Dr. Ambedkar believed that only education could bring about a change in the oppressed life of the dalits. He established many schools and colleges exclusively for Dalits in Maharashtra. Realizing the importance of education, hundreds of Dalits send their children to study in

these Dalit institutions. The institutions produced the first generation of Dalit literates who eventually started their own magazines and printing presses. Education gave dalits a lot of self confidence and propelled them to fight against their oppressors. (Omar 56)

A Dalit's woman choice of career and education become an interesting topic for the society as it regulates one's life with keen interest and profound enthusiasm. The stigma revolving around the mastering of Sanskrit language was intense as she was mocked by her own community as well, "Is Sanskrit such an easy language? It's very difficult. Did our forefathers ever learn it?" (Pawde 77) The community from which she comes from also saw it as something beyond their intellectual capacity for they saw themselves as incapable of learning the holiest language in the Hindu religion. It was the language of the upper caste prescribed by the religious books and chants and it was also used for the implementation of caste mobilization to strengthen its earthly powers and control over the Dalits. The Dalits being controlled and regulated through such extremes for generations believed such religious connotations and barred their children from learning Sanskrit. However, Pawde's father stood against such superstitious notions and encouraged her daughter to master it. He was not an educated man but believed in the teachings of Ambedkar and saw that Dalit have every right to pursue his or her academic interest. When Pawde confronted him about her interest he replied, "Why shouldn't we? After all, we're independent now. Those days are gone. Learn Sanskrit" (Pawde 77).

Pawde compares Gokhale to the so called modernistic intellectual professors at the University, who with their far flung education and multiple degrees were critically predisposed to caste system and its workings. They are the moderators of change and equality in a democratic country like India but falls under the same category as their predecessors and through their position continued to torment the very educational life of the dalits. Gokhale, though he appeared traditional in his outlook was far more modern and intellectual than the Head of the Department of Sanskrit who wore modern dress and preached on equality but do the opposite of what he lectures on. It is not the outlook of a person through which someone can judge his or her character but it is the humanity within that speaks for itself. Pawde asserts, "This man had been

exposed to modernity; Gokhale Guruji was an orthodox. Yet one had been shrivelled by tradition, the other enriched by it, like a tree weighed down with fruit” (Pawde 81). Taking up Sanskrit as her major subject garnered interest from her community and from the professors as well. She was applauded for her achievements from her previous lecturers and community who saw that a new dawn has been set in the Indian horizon where a dalit can now master the language of Sanskrit. Pawde’s contribution to her community is marked with glory and hope towards a more liberal and just society where one could exercise their freedom in undertaking their choices of studies without any restrictions. She was the moderator of change and withstood all kinds of discouragement and criticisms that came from every corner in order to achieve her dreams. It is through her perseverance and self assertion that her journey of mastering Sanskrit came to its destination.

3.4 The Social Reality of Employment

Reservation in India is laid out in Article 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution that allows the Indian government to set up quotas for social, educational and economic backward classes of the society. Under the leadership of Dr. B.R Ambedkar as the chief architect of the Constitution of India in 1947, he institutionalised the Dalit’s rights and the reservation of jobs and seats in educational institutions for the SC/ST/OBC. It was undertaken in order to empower and advance the Scheduled Caste/Tribes, Other Backward Classes (OBC) and include their participation in the government decision making body. The demarcated difference between the upper caste and the lower section of the society was evidently visible as the gap between the rich and the poor began to increase. Generation and generations of excluding and rejecting the lower sections in the dark resulted in their backwardness and poverty. Reservation of jobs granted license to the lower sections of people in India and elevated them to raise their social, political, educational and economic positions. Through the reservation policy, the lower sections of the Indian society could stabilise their position and pursue their academic interest. It ensured them financial stability and provided quotas and seats for government jobs and elections. The advancement of the dalits and other lower sections lives improved through grants, scholarships and reservations.

Despite the government's initiative to elevate the status of the lower sections of the Indian society, the stigma of caste nepotism could not be avoided. The government reservations and scholarships granted to the scheduled caste is also seen as a mockery to them as the upper caste mock at their deprivation and need for a rich father-in-law to take care of their needs. They take their chances in firing out ironical comments and verbal abuses to remind them of their caste and behave accordingly. As Pawde started receiving scholarships from the government she is reminded of her place in the society, "She's having fun and games at the expense of a scholarship. Just bloated with government money!" (Pawde 80) As a student and as a professor, she is reminded of her caste again and again. Even the peon and clerks gave her racist attitudes and passes her with ere sheer of caste consciousness. In Ajay Navaria's *New Custom*, he brings to light the realistic depiction of an educated dalit who has to undergo through everyday harassments and abuses even with a degree and a secured job. He was a product of modern views and thoughts and worked for the equality and social security of women. All together, he was not seen as a human by the teashop owner and all those around him because he was a dalit, an untouchable. Even when he was able to establish himself as an educated respectable man in the society and adopted an intellectual outlook, in the eyes of the teashop owners, tailors and cobblers, he was still lower than them. Ajay Navaria's concern is that, "the hold of caste is so subtle and pervasive that even such a person has not managed to escape it" (Satyanarayana and Tharu 16). With the rise in social status, caste system continues to determine the fate of the dalits.

S. Joseph in his poem, "Identity Card" talks about a relationship that gets dismantle when caste come in between. Caste consciousness is rooted deeply in the psyche of young minds that when his lover saw the markings in his identity card with a red stipend signifying his caste, she felt cheated and left him. The red markings that give him access to education and scholarship is what deprives him of friendship and love. S. Joseph questions the day when caste consciousness is killed and people from all walks can mingle in triumph and harmony without any distinction. Dalit writers have taken the core issues and experiences of their tragic dalit life and incorporated them into literary works. Another concern which contemporary dalit writers focus on is the scholarships given to the SC/ST/OBC students and the delay or in some cases, the denial of sanctioning the money. Students from the lower section depends on the

money for paying off their student loans however, the higher offices fails to hand out the money and continues to control and dominate what legally belongs to them.

Uma Chakravarti, a dalit writer and feminist narrates the incident of some dalit students who were deprived of the scholarship and faced discrimination because of their caste. Rohit Vemula, a young dalit student from a central university was seriously affected by the discriminations he faced at a leading institute and when they protested against the administration and the university, the students involved were suspended. Rohit Vemula's death was quickly termed as "an institutional murder as the dalit students faced systemic and systematic discrimination in institutions of higher education" (Chakravarti 188). As the news of the death of Rohit spread across India, the university and the government in power denied that Rohit was a dalit so that "the POA act would not be applicable upon the VC's action in suspending Rohit and other dalit students" (Chakravarti 188). The higher offices used their position to hide the ugly truths and actions and determine amongst themselves in revealing who was a dalit and who was not. They abused their power and authority even to the extent of someone's death. Rohit's suicide was a result of caste discrimination implemented even at the central level and realising that he could never get out of the chains he was born and forced to live with, he set himself free. In his suicide note was written; "my birth was a fatal accident" (Chakravarti 189). Rohit's case is just another example of young dalit students taking their own life's to be freed from social injustice and discriminations; they do not find any hope for improvement and living with the stigma of depravity, iniquity and exclusion based on caste was worse than death. There were no rooms for improvement or any steps taken towards the eradication of caste injustice. This is the ugly truth and reality of what is happening behind closed doors. The Rohit Vemula's case signifies the larger workings of injustice, corruption, marginalization and subjugation of the lower sections of the society at the educational levels and the foreplay of power and authority at hand. To fight against these injustice and discriminations ranging from caste, the dalit students raised their voices and protested against these evil infested issues but their voices were muffled, neglected and misrepresented.

The facet of corruption is inherent in every society wholly for the thirst of more power and authority and unscrupulousness means of deceiving the poor. The reservation of

seats for the scheduled caste was also the foreplay of corruptive decisiveness and biased and unfair means to harbour control over the minorities. Pawde resolve to become a professor of Sanskrit and thought that she would secure a government job “because she was probably the first women from the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe category to appear in the merit list of Sanskrit studies” (Rege 329). However, her dreams and aspirations were shattered as instead of getting a job she was laughed at right after she left the interview room, “So now even these people are to teach Sanskrit! Government Brahmins aren’t they?” (Pawde 81) She blurts out at the corruptive mechanism in which the society is built on, “When people like these, wearing hypocritical masks, are in responsible positions in the society, it does not take even a minute for that society to fall” (Pawde 82). Resolving to tackle the matter, she wrote a letter of protest to the Minister Jagjivan Ram and condemned the facade put up by the State and the corruption residing in its system and to maintain the spirit of constitutional law and abide by its democratic principles. The letter was forwarded to the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who was impressed at her and send her a reward of rupees 250 and told her to meet the chief minister of Maharashtra, Yashwantrao Chavan. The expectation she had was destroyed when the chief minister made fulsome promises and utter inconsiderate guilt for his inability to help her. Pawde remembers the anger within her and mastering every bit of courage she replied, “Saheb, if you can’t give me a job tell me so, clearly. I don’t want promises. Promises keeps false hopes alive. Research is the fruit of mental peace. How do you expect me to have mental peace, when I am starving? And I’m tired of speeches” (Pawde 82). Pawde understood the hypocrisy involved at the backdrop of finding a job even with the reservation for the SC because caste is a mental issue, it does not die away.

She remained unemployed for two years and to occupy herself she enrolled for a Master’s degree in Literature and during the first year of her academic pursuits, she married Motiram Pawde, a social worker of the Kunbi Maratha- a caste higher than hers. It was an intercaste marriage which made Kumud Somkuvar leap into a caste higher than her birth caste, and two months after her marriage, she was offered a lecturer position at a government college. The interview boards were appalled at the fact that a qualified woman could remained unemployed for two years. In the following year, Pawde became a professor at her previous college where she felt the respect of the institution during her college days. However, a thought continues to

prick her, the credit of acquiring the job solely relies on her husband's surname 'Pawde' and not 'Somkuvar' because a woman's surname changes when she marries and so is her caste. So, she says, "the credit of being a professor of Sanskrit is that of the presumed higher caste status of Mrs Kumud Pawde. The caste of her maiden status remains deprived"(Pawde 83).

The irony residing in her journey of finding employment is the fact that she needed to change her caste through intercaste marriage in order to secure a government or private job. It was only through her marriage with Motiram Pawde that Kumud was recognised as an educated qualified candidate for the post. By changing her surname, Kumud gained her identity as an upper caste woman landing her recognition and success; however her identity as a dalit was dispossessed. It was a mockery to the upper caste if she could land a job through her identity as a dalit and that too, teaching the language that was considered solely belonging to the property of the upper caste, and through which caste was further inscribed to the language for the workings of its system. Despite her efforts to break social codes and conducts that restricted dalits, the force and power of caste domination were heavily constructed and stood in periphery opposite to her strong determination and will power. Caste is a social, mental disease that had differentiated humankind as 'pure' and 'polluted' beings, and has enforced all vigorous things that could possibly happen to a living soul, making the value of life consistently low and invalid.

Chapter 4: Narratives of Pain and Suffering

4.1 Introduction

Baby Kamble also known as Babytai Kamble was born in 1929 and died on April 2012. She belonged to the Mahar caste of Maharashtra which constitutes the largest untouchable community in Maharashtra. She was a Dalit activist and writer who saw the interventions of independence, democracy and modernity in India. She was one of the earliest Dalit women writers whose writings have a distinctive voice and repulsive feminist assertions that sets her writings apart from mainstream and male dalit literature. Baby Kamble is widely known for her autobiography *Jina Amucha* which was written in Marathi then translated to English with the title, *The Prisons We Broke* that has managed to turn the attention of critics from all corners. Her work became one of the most important autobiographical accounts on dalit women, patriarchal slavery, domestic violence, poverty, caste slavery. Kamble writes with honest and reflexive mindset towards her own community and their oppressors.

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We broke* was first serialised in a women's magazine *Stree* and was published in book form in 1986 in Marathi. The book was then translated to English by Maya Pandit in 2008. As Kamble recalls, she kept her written works hidden for twenty years in fear of her husband's reaction. The title of the autobiography, *The Prisons We Broke* hints out the message of cracking out the shell of caste disparity through self perseverance and education of the dalits led by revolutionaries like B.R Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule. It is considered to be one of the first autobiographies written by a female Indian writer in any Indian language.

Kamble's autobiography is more of a social document, documenting not only her personal life but the life of her community and its environment. In fact, it is all about her community. In this sense, it is a historical, social and political treatise as well as a feminist critique to the system of patriarchy. The community she grew up with and the kind of adversities and everyday affairs that hovers over their pathetic life and the discrimination female faces within the walls and comfort of their own home. The message she tries to convey through her autobiography is straightforward- she calls for

the unification of the dalits under one banner in order to serve their common goals. *The Prisons We Broke* carries the cultural stigma of caste nepotism of the Mahars of Maharashtra retold through the eyes of Baby Kamble over a span of fifty years and as she explains, “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, daughter-in-laws and my grandchildren to show them how the community suffered because of the chains of slavery[...]" (Pandit xiv). She writes about the brahmanical exploitations and oppression that had reduced the life of the dalits to that of animals, bounded by chains and cages for generations. Kamble used her memory in order to tell the story of her people and her concern is for the younger generation who with the passing of time would deflate and forget about their history. She writes,

Today, our young, educated and so called ‘progressive’ people are ashamed of using this word. But what is there to be ashamed of? On the contrary, the word Mahar makes us feel proud. It tells us that we are the great Mahars of this Maharashtra. It proclaims aloud that we are the true, original sons of this soil[...] This land is ours[...] I love this word-Mahar-it flows in my veins, in my blood, and it makes me aware of the core of my being of the tremendous struggle for truth that we have waged.
(Pandit xvii)

Her autobiography stands as a reminder between the past and the present life of the dalits and the future she envisions for the progress of the Dalits.

In the Introduction section by Maya Pandit, the translator of *The Prisons We Broke* into English, Kamble asserts that she wrote it for her people. She argues that the memories of suffering and pain must be reiterated because future generation must know about the ordeal the past generations have undergone through and understand the sacrifices many dalits have given in order for the future to have a better, prosperous life regardless of the wretched life they were forced to live with. It is without doubt that Kamble’s concern for her community is deeply bounded in her psyche and the changes she has seen coming around between the dalits is one of her greatest concern for the future generations in generalising their identity and knowing the explicit truth about their past.

She believed Ambedkar was the sole revolutionist who turned the life of the dalits around. Her autobiography speaks of the greatness of Ambedkar in tackling the core issue of the Dalit problem which no one was possible to achieve, unified and strengthened them together in order to achieve what humanistic traits they were barred from. Ambedkar's influence over her life inspires her to write down her narratives. She traces back the courses of Dalit movement and the consciousness that arrive with the integration of Ambedkar in the forefront leading the Dalit's movement. Kamble's greatest worry comes from how her people views Ambedkar in the recent days, the influence he has over all their lives is vanishing away with time as life became to improve for them with education and as they strung higher in the economic stratum, Ambedkar has become a forgotten figure, a forgotten memory. The recent division of the dalits after the death of Ambedkar and the urge for political power amongst them is among her many concerns for the future.

Kamble's autobiographical narrative also sheds light for the first time in any dalit works of the workings of patriarchal system within the domains of dalit household and presents the voices and experience of the worst hit victims in the society- the dalit women. She becomes the writer and voice of the depressed women of her community and her concern for womanhood is psychologically ingrained in her. As a fervent observer and victim of patriarchal ideologies and practices, she for the first time critiques Dalit patriarchy and narrates the everyday affairs of the dalit women and the trauma and exploitation she faces both in her household and outside her domain. She not only discusses the physical and psychological trauma of the women community but also celebrates the very spirit of her womanhood and strength in tackling and overcoming her prejudices. The dalit women are the strongest amongst them for with overbearing workloads and discrimination, domestic violence and abuses she still garners her inner strength and finds the courage to live.

4.2 Narratives on Caste Consciousness and its Implications

Caste conflict is prevalent in the modern Indian society. According to Risley, caste is "a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling; [...] forming a single homogeneous community" (Hutton 47). Caste has determined the inner workings of the society in terms of social and political

standings, economic and financial dependence. Caste has generated division and hostility in the society and demarcated the relationship between human beings. The ideals of democracy stand in opposition with the ideals of casteism as M.S.S. Pandian referring to K.M. Panikkar writes, “Democracy and caste are totally opposed [...] one is based on equality, the other on inequality of birth. The one is actuated by the principle of social inclusion, the other by the principle of social exclusion. Democracy tries to break down the barriers of class; caste seeks to perpetuate them[...] (Pandian 26).

Caste consciousness is inherent in the autobiographical narrative of Kamble thus enlightening readers on the issues of segregation, exploitation and disparity caste has taken root in the society. Kamble brings to life the social reality of the Mahars of Maharashtra through her narration, and details the everyday happenings and household cycle of the Maharwada. She grew up in her grandparent’s house in the Maharwada in Virgoan in Purander district of western Maharashtra. Her autobiography contains few details of her personal life and delves mainly on her community because according to her, her community’s story is greater than her life. Her life is connected to her community. She brings out the history of the dalit oppression and demonstrated how caste hierarchy was solely responsible for the deprivation and subjugation of the dalits for generations. Like her counterparts, Kamble looks at caste as an enforcing entity and it cannot be swiped away from the consciousness of any dalit writers. All dalit writers delved into this matter as one of their major subjects and the impact it has on their respective community. Brahmanical domination and oppression is seen throughout her narration as from the simplest basic necessity like drinking water to buying groceries amongst the many.

Religion plays an important role in the formation of caste mentality in the Hindu Indian society. The Hindu religion has enforced and legitimised the root of caste system and strengthened its practices and traditions. Before the rise of Ambedkar, the dalits blindly followed the Hindu religious practices as their ancestors had, and waste their earnings in the deities, Gods, rituals and festivals. As Kamble writes,

Hindu philosophy had discarded us as dirt and thrown us into their garbage pits, on the outskirts of the village. We lived in the filthiest conditions possible. Yet Hindu rites and rituals were

dearest to our hearts. For our poor helpless women, the haldi-kumkum in their tiny boxes was more important than even a mine full of jewels. We desperately tried to preserve whatever bits of Hindu culture we managed to lay in our hands. (Kamble 18)

By doing so, they hope for a better life which is to be achieved through firm faith in the Hindu religion. The naivety of the Dalits lies in the fact that it was the Hindu religion which was backing such a frivolous system of status. Hinduism was the birth of the caste system. As Gnana writes, "Hinduism born out of Brahmanic philosophy made us believe that God created human beings unequal. The primary concern of the Hindu society is the preservation of the established Hindu social order rather than any effort at the improvement of human welfare and well being. The only possibility of progress is within the caste" (Gnana 66). Hinduism has enforced caste structure in the society and deprived the Dalits even from simplest natural resources like water and excluded their participation in all social, political, religious and economic structures. A young dalit girl who was educated under the aegis of Phule's revolutionary movement wrote on caste stating, "Let that religion, where only one person is privileged and the rest deprived, perish from the earth and let it never enter our minds to be proud of such a religion" (Chakravarti 116).

The concept of 'purity' and 'pollution' which falls under the observance of Untouchability is one of the most wretched forms of practices that disregards the values of humanism and intricate the feelings of communal hatred and angst. It divides humankind into seeing someone as 'pure' and 'impure' thus asserting the need to distinguish and abolish human touch. Untouchability was formulated into the caste system in the fifth century forcing the Dalits to live a sealed fate which was worse than the fate of the animals. The practice of untouchability has reduced the status of the dalits to that of a slave, removing all traits of humanity from them. It took the very humanity out of them. The hideous practice of untouchability is shown in the narrative when an upper caste teaches his son, "Chabu, hey you, can't you see the dirty Mahar woman standing there? Now don't you touch her. Keep your distance.", ultimately the Mahar woman cautions him, "Take care little master! Please keep a distance. Don't come too close. You might touch me and get polluted" (Kamble 14). The stigma of

pollution and being untouchable is seeded from such a young age in the minds of the castes. The Dalits were not allowed to walk the main roads, drink from the same well or pray from the same temple in fear of being polluted by them. The mere shadow or a slight touch from the dalits was considered a grave sin to the upper caste. There was caste discrimination and hierarchical division on the basis of the dress sense between the upper and lower caste as well. The dresses of the dalit women were made from rags and in order not to offend or pollute the upper caste, they made sure they were out of harm's way. As Kamble writes on how the Dalits were humble and polite and tried to make sure the upper caste were not polluted by them, they had to distance themselves away while begging for leftover foods or buying groceries or selling firewood, grass and vegetables. As Kamble writes,

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 had we been reduced to this bestial state? Who was responsible? Who else, but people of the high caste! They destroyed our reasoning, our ability to think. We were reduced to a condition far worse than that of bullocks kept in the courtyards of the high caste. The bullocks were at least given some dry grass to eat...But we were merely given leftovers. (Kamble 49)

Discrimination based on caste is a mental slavery that had bounded the Dalits for generations under the pretext of religion and had smeared the very lives out of them to slavery and rigorous living and years of living under such domain had perpetuated their very beliefs of seeing themselves as humans. It had taken control over their lives and they had started to believe their earthy duty was to assist, slave and live under the shadow of the upper caste. It was in their conscious mind that affirms such devotion and loyalty without questioning the very root of it, "God has drawn a line for us and you want us to cross it? Listen, we are born for this work. That's our sacred duty. Why should we give up our religion, our duty?" (Kamble 67) They had started to believe in the presumed role of slaving for the upper caste as their designated duty and job on earth. However, with the interception of colonialism and education, the Dalits began to see themselves under a new light. Generations of being kept under bounded rules and

practices lies in their religion and socio-political forces that enhance the structure of caste system. The arrival of education and the emancipation of Ambedkar enhanced the larger minds of the dalits in seeing and understanding things broadly and thoroughly.

The arrival of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to the forefront of the Dalit's revolution captivated and influence the Dalits in understanding the real forces behind the structure of caste system. His ideologies and principles are crucial in breaking the chains of social structures that blinded them to frenzy and liberating the cause of Dalit's freedom and equality. With his arrival, the caste consciousness amongst the Dalits began to emerge and awaken. He pave the way for the Dalits towards a better future of prosperity and change where the evil social structures that were responsible for their misery and exploitations were destroyed. Kamble wrote about the influence of Ambedkar in her community and through his influence, she was able to receive education. She asserts that he was responsible for creating a unity among the dalits and gave them a sense of identity and strength through communal collaboration for the first time.

A recurring theme amongst the Dalit writers is the empowerment of the Dalits through education and the discrimination faced within the folds of educational institutions in contemporary settings. The Dalit students have always faced discrimination from their fellow students, teachers and the administration. In the contemporary period where equality, justice and freedom are celebrated the Dalits are still forced to exploitations and subjugations. They are reminded of their caste and their history of indulged slavery and heinous past and insulted for obliterating their position. Kamble writes about the attitude of the upper caste students, "They treated us like lepers, as if our bodies dripped with dirty blood or as if pus oozed out of our rotten flesh. If they had to pass by us, they would cover their nose, mutter 'chee,chee', and run as if their lives were in mortal danger" (Kamble 108). The upper caste mothers refused to let their children inside the house without taking bath for they are aware that the Dalit children were in the same school and the fear of being polluted was so grave a sin. The teachers forbid them from leaving their seat for the whole day, they were forced to seat adjacent to the wall and were refused to raise questions or clarify their doubts. They were forbidden to drink from the same water tap but Kamble and her friends refuse such hostile treatments towards them and defiled such rules. They were starting to let

on their fiery spirit of revolt in order to make themselves humane. They embraced their identity and ward off those insulting them by touching and polluting them. This gave them a sense of assurance and satisfaction. The ideological difference between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the issue of Dalitism is also debated by the dalit student and the upper caste student. As Uma Chakravarti writes, “for Gandhiji the campaign against caste discrimination was focused on the temple-entry movement, for Ambedkar it was the discrimination in the very access to a life-giving resource such as water, which the dalits were debarred from” (Chakravarti132). Gandhi denied a separate identity to the Dalits and club them together as ‘harijans’ meaning children of God, he was against the practise of untouchability but he wanted the varna system to continue. Ambedkar on the other hand call for the annihilation of caste. He was a dalit and knew the condition of his community and declared that “there is no democracy and equality possible in Hinduism” (Satyanarayana and Tharu 11). The shaming of both the national leaders is a frequent debate undertaken by the students and insults and mockery were thrown from both sides thus highlighting the sensible awareness of the students.

4.3 Narration on Poverty and Hunger

Kamble emphasises upon the very food and language they uses as integral to the dalit identity. Poverty and malnourishment is a continuing process for the Dalits in India. The Dalit’s income capita is low and without any financial assistance and economic backup, they are forced to remain under the line of poverty. All filthy and dangerous works were their share of labour. The works they perform were laborious, disgusting and tiresome but they were paid only a small amount, sometimes they had to work for free or for a handful of grains. Kamble blames the social hierarchy for the diminishment of Dalit’s financial stability and growth.

Our place was in the garbage pits outside the village, where everyone threw their waste. That was where we lived, in our poor huts, amidst all the filth. We were masters only of the dead animals thrown into those pits by the high castes. We had to fight with cats and dogs and kites and vultures to establish our right over the carcasses, to tear off the flesh from the dead bodies. Our lives were governed by various calamities. We were

imprisoned in dark cells, our hands and feet bound by the chain
of slavery. (Kamble 49)

Kamble praises the people of her community who had their fair share of struggles and with their poverty stricken life were kind hearted and was ready to sacrifice their lives for someone dear. The houses in her community were far from being a house to shelter and provide protection, it was a space only to sleep in unhygienic conditions and they used all kinds of natural resources they can find in order to compensate themselves from buying kitchen accessories and utensils. The poverty was so grave that the Mahars children were malnourished and was thin as stick. They depended on wild plants and fruits to feed their children if there were no other food commodities in the household, to prevent them from starvation. It was a relief to console and make them sleep the night in peace. Kamble writes, “The cactus was a boon to us poor people. It yielded us everything, right from toys to firewood. When we went hungry, they supplied us with food” (Kamble 43). The leftover food was considered a luxurious meal by the dalits. The misery of their life lies in their fatal birth to the dalit caste as she writes, “A life without food, living space and clothes, it was a story of permanent deprivation and suffering” (Kamble 79).

The only source of protein food which they can depend upon was through the method of carcassing dead animals and eating them. This was considered to be their duty claiming to their context on the usage of the term ‘polluted’. Kamble writes, “The Mahars considered animal epidemics like diphtheria or dysentery a boon” (Kamble 85). It was during these epidemics that they could store and eat their fill for months. They considered it a blessing to their hardship lifestyle they had to endure. The children and women wait in queue to take their portion of meat. There was happiness and contentment in the Maharwadas the day the meat of the dead animals was butvhered and distributed. The women took preparation for drying the meat and placed them in earthen pots to be eaten later. When there was no epidemic or the dead of animals Kamble writes that the males of her community took strategies by giving medicines to the buffalo so that it would die in a day or two. They had to undertake such methods in order to provide food for their family. Such was the impoverished condition of the Dalit’s household. “Just as the Mahar had a duty towards dead animals, he had a duty towards dead people too” (Kamble 79), stating the role the

dalits have to undertake through various villages carrying the death news to families and in return was beaten and killed for bringing such news. The despicable roles and food habits of the dalits were far from humane living with impoverished social conduct.

Poverty dominated and resided in every dalit household. In every dalit household there were more than eight children running naked and their noses dripping snot as Kamble puts it “their noses were like leaky taps of snot” (Kamble 8). The dalit children were wrapped in ragged clothing their mothers could find in the household. Their blouses and pants have multilayered stitching and in order to hold their pants, a waist string was torn from the saris to tighten them. However this string has lice infected in them that result in rashes all over their body. Due to their unhygienic living conditions, lice and maggots reside in their bodies making it their permanent house. When the girls reached puberty, their mothers gather some dirty rags, fold them and tied it around their waist. Due to their poverty, they could not afford buying clothes or undergarments for their children.

The Mahars considered the Ashadh month as the most important festival throughout the year which involves works like cleaning and purifying the body and the household. They celebrated this month because of the provision that brings them some food as Kamble writes, “a blessing for their starved bodies-when the tongue satiated with the tastes it loved” (Kamble 12). Kamble praised her community who with abject poverty and miseries, “their hearts were full of kindness and love for each other” (Kamble 49). With the dusk of a new morning, they always find the strength and will to provide for her family amidst her adversities. They sing songs of hope and dream of a better life where they are treated equal and respected, where there is no more poverty and hunger.

4.4 Narratives on Gender and Patriarchal Consciousness

Patriarchy is a social and domestic institution that places males at the top of the hierarchy and exercise absolute authority over the females in their community or society. Patriarchy is a male dominated syndrome of controlling and dominating women in all spheres of their life. Walby defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby

20). She further institutionalised its power under the system as “women’s labour power, women’s reproduction, women’s sexuality, women’s mobility and property and other economic recourses- are under patriarchal control” (20). Gender related studies have been an engrossing topic that emerged under feminism. Gender in its simplest sense is the differentiation between men and women and their competence and incompetence in the intellectual, social, economic and financial world. The word ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ are used to further differentiate their specific roles in the society. Gender studies look at the demarcated role between the genders and studies its relations as being patriarchal and authoritarian.

The ideologies of Caste and gender are linked together that forces the doubly marginalisation of the Dalit women and Dalit patriarchy enforces the thrice subjugation of the dalit women. One of the important concerns of dalit writings is the plight of the dalit women. The post-Independence period saw the emergence of caste and gender critique writings of dalit women who took the genre of autobiography to narrate their story of being the most depressed and oppressed gender in the society. Omar writes, “Female writers were searching for an idiom of self articulation and the autobiography was the fittest vehicle” (Omar 62). As a group socially and historically exploited under the banner of caste and gender, dalit women writers intervened between these structures and deconstruct the meaning of their existence and destroy the banners that holds them down. They intervene in the critical engagement with the politics of difference. They break the barriers that confined their sexuality and subjectivity in order to assert their identity and position in the society.

Baby Kamble’s autobiographical narrative *The Prisons We Broke* looks into the plight of the dalit women from the perspective of patriarchal domination, caste politics and women’s sexuality. Her book was amongst the first dalit writings to intercept on the conjoined oppression and workings of tyrannical control against dalit women both from outside and within the dalit household. She delves into the physical and psychological trauma that dalit women were forced to live with and narrates the despicable agonies of dalit womanhood. From an early stage, the girl child is taught on the duties that are expected from them. The girl child is considered lesser than the male child and the work division between the genders even from an early childhood is starkly distinguishable. Dalit patriarchy enforces women to be dominant under the

male's supremacy and authority. The power that dalit patriarchy exerts over the women is to confine her within the four walls of his house. As she writes,

The honour enjoyed by a family was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house. When no one could see even a nail of the women thus confined within the four walls of the house, then this 'honour' became the talk of the town-a byword among the relatives and friends in the surrounding villages... My father had locked up my aai in his house, like a bird in a cage. (Kamble 5)

Dalit women have been forced to be culturally silent of their oppression and have gotten used to their slavery. They work and provide for their family like the males of their community but when it comes to social, religious and communal participation and meetings they have no voice and part to play. They are restricted to leave the house conforming to their feminine sensibilities and sexuality. Like caste treats the dalits as animal, the dalits treats their women as pet. They were caged like animal in order to preserve her womanhood and chastity.

The religious books and myths of Hinduism preposition the role of a woman in the patriarchal society. It speaks on the virtue and chastity of women claiming a women's virtue to be her highest prized possession. Through such religious books and texts, they controlled the sexuality of female. They contain elaborate and detailed reference to a woman's virtue and praises and glorify such women. It also highlights the supremacy a husband has over his wife and she was to be placed under his control and authority. There were other texts that regarded the virtue of women from all caste to be "guarded more carefully than wealth" (Chakravarti 73). In the patriarchal state of ancient India, adultery was the highest form of punishment meted out to its defaulters. The males of the society tied down a woman's sexuality to its control and the subordination of women was the prime basis of any patriarchal society. The women's sexuality was controlled and suppressed by men from all caste and one of the main reasons for the observance of a woman's chastity in the upper caste was to avoid endogamy. According to Chakravarti, "Caste cannot be reproduced without endogamy and it is for this reason that endogamy has been regarded as a tool for the manifestation and perpetuation of caste and gender subordination (Chakravarti 26).

Endogamy remains the system through which hierarchical domination was controlled by the upper caste and women played an important role in the observance of this structure. The upper caste women were confined to their kitchen walls in accordance to the rules and practices followed. However that does not compromise their control and exploitation towards the dalit women. They were the chief exponent of this caste exploitation and educated their children from their childhood.

Women play an important role in the transmission of cultures and traditions to their children and it is the women who oppress other women depending on the authority and position they hold in the society. The upper caste women followed the purity rituals stringently and avoided all contacts with the Mahar women while buying firewood or other things from them. The Mahar women have to check for hairs or thread that had fallen from their saris into the sack of wood for fear of polluting the higher castes. The money would be thrown from a distance into the road and the Mahar women had to collect it. Kamble angrily detest the fate and misery of the Mahar women which had been perpetuated from the Hindu religion and shows how the upper caste definition of pollution had a different aspect to it as she writes,

When the Mahar women labour in the fields, the corn gets wet with their sweats. The same corn goes to make your pure, rich dishes. And you feast on them with such evident relish! Your palaces are built with the soil soaked with the sweat and blood of Mahars. But does it rot your skin? You drink their blood and sleep comfortably on the bed of their misery. Doesn't it pollute you then? Just as the farmer pierces the bullock's nose and inserts a string through the nostrils to control it, you have pierced the Mahar nose with the string of ignorance. And you have been flogging us with the whip of pollution. This is all that your selfish religion has given to us. (Kamble 56)

The upper caste lives in fear of being polluted from the dalits but the very access to their comfort and livelihood has been provided through the sweats of the Dalit community. Uma Chakravarti writes, "As the sexual availability of lower caste women was part of the material structure of domination by the upper caste, it was something that both men and women of the lower caste were forced to accept" (Chakravarti 81).

She calls it 'graded patriarchies'. Dalit women were seen as sexual objects to satisfy the desires of the upper caste men. She was tortured, harassed and raped and the miserable woman had to suffer the stigma of sexual violence and exploitation alone because the patriarchal demand of both the dalit and brahmanic do not underscore the rights and voices of the dalit women.

Baby Kamble draws attention to the Dalit Patriarchy as the ruling force of power against the dalit women. A woman suffers within the domain of her household again due to male autonomy and supremacy. A woman had grown up believing the religious and social notions that society has created, they regard the Kumkum on the forehead as the most religious and sacred markings of her marriage and "for the sake of the Kumkum mark, we lay our lives at the feet of our husbands. We believe that if a woman has her husband she has the whole world; if she does not have a husband, then the whole world holds nothing for her" (Kamble 41). A woman is swayed into believing and following rituals and practises that makes them fully devoted to their husband and worshipping them. A woman is made to feel that she has no identity aside from her husband. Her identity lies with her husband. Even on her sexual relationship with her husband, she has no voice in it. She served as an object to satisfy the desires of her husband and "continue to give birth till she reached menopause" (Kamble 82). Her life revolved along the lines and rules set up by the male community.

The reproductive labour of the dalit women is implausible and callously cold leaving her to attend herself and manage things. Dalit patriarchy ties women to the centre of exploitation and oppression within its circle and the women are on their own exploited once again based on their gender. As Chakravarti writes the words of Swaroopa Rani in her book *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens* that best explain the oppression dalit women faces in the society as,

When has my life been truly mine?

In the home male arrogance

Sets my cheeks stinging,

While in the street caste arrogance

Splits the other cheek open. (Chakravarti 83)

The dalit women are left to confront themselves after their child birth. The dalit patriarchal ideology is such that child births are feminine responsibility upon the women themselves and they pay no heed to her sufferings or pain. The male ego suppresses compassions and love towards husband and wife in a patriarchal society. With poverty residing within each household, the birth mother has nothing to eat and with scorch hunger trembling in her empty stomach, the women folk took the task of collecting grains from the Maharwadas, grind it and serve it to her. Her pain and sufferings knew no bounds as Kamble refers the Mahar women to that of a black cow that can survive on thorns. The women of her community would consume thorns in order to survive. Kamble writes that childbirth was “a battle with death” (Kamble 58). With no medical assistance and equipments the mid-wives insert their bare hands into the vagina which in turn get swollen and misdirect the path of the baby. After the delivery there were cuts and bruises, blood gushing out and without any medical help, “the girl would be fortunate if her family could find even some dirty rags for her” (Kamble 59). The Mahars followed the system of child marriage in which girls who have reach the age of eight or nine were married off. The dilemma of childbirth at such age was inconceivable. The young girl had to suffer miserably and her grief knew no bounds. As Kamble writes on the young mothers, “Many young girls on the threshold of life succumbed to death. One in every ten lost their lives during childbirth” (Kamble 60). Child marriages and childbirth have taken the lives of women but the issue seem to surpass the concern of the male genders in the society.

The Mahar women were religious superstitious women who can only turn to rituals to save their daughters by dipping in the river and placing stones on the Goddess Lakamai for the safe delivery. They placed neem twigs on the doorsteps to symbolise the newborn baby and visitors were made to spit three times before stepping in. It is during the night they believed that goddess Satwai and god Barama visited her house and writes the fate of her child. Kamble however questions such superstition as all the Mahar children suffers the same fate of being a dalit with no progression and hastily mocks at the religious notions that the deities might have made a common stamp for the dalit children. The conscious mind of Kamble enables her to question such bigotry notions that the dalit followed despite the condition they were forced to live in. She

blames the religion and all its rituals and ideologies for the miserable plight of the dalits.

Kamble dexterously narrates the patriarchal control and domination over the Mahar women as she narrates the reality of being married and bounded up like slaves like they were treated by the upper castes. She explores the hold of patriarchy in a woman's life. As Kamble writes, "The other world has bound us with chains of slavery. But we too were human beings. And we too desire to dominate, to wield power. But who would let us do that? So we made our own arrangements to find slaves-our very own daughters-in-law! If nobody else, then who could at least enslave them" (Kamble 87). The newly married women falls under the category of children as they were barely eight to nine years of age when they are send off by their parents without their consent and the memory of her marriage remains a mystery to her because she does not remember it. She was the last person to eat and sleep and sometimes she was not even served food though there was food in the house. She was made to make the Bhakris for the whole family and if it did not turn out perfect her mother-in-law would beat and slap her face. She was treated like an outcast, an animal. She has to do all the household chores by herself and was not allowed to rest or leisure around. A life of misery and suffering awaited them as they try to adjust to the new reality of being someone's wife, daughter-in-law and a mother.

The married women was treated like a slave in the dalit household who had no power of speech and remained a caged women slaving for her in-laws the same way they were slaves to the upper caste. The mother-in-law contributed largely to the system of patriarchy by inducing her sons with masculine power and authority and targeted her daughter-in-law for adultery and blasphemous behaviour. She would encourage them of their supremacy, "You are a man. You must behave like one! You must be proud and firm. You must walk tall. Twirl your moustache and show us that you are a man" (Kamble 100). The despicable condition of a married woman had been detailed exclusively by Kamble,

These sasus ruined the lives of innocent women forever. Every day the Maharwada would resound with the cries of a hapless woman in some house or the other. Husbands, flogging their heads as if they were beasts...the heads of the women would

break open, their backbones would be crushed, and some would collapse unconscious. But there was nobody to care for them. They had no food to eat, no proper clothing to cover their bodies; their hair would remain uncombed and tangled, dry from lack of oil. Women led the most miserable existence. The entire day, the poor daughter-in law would serve the entire household like a slave[...]Nobody, neither her in-laws nor any others, had any sympathy for the poor tortured girl. The husband or the in-laws would beat her to a pulp. Even her brother and father would flog her mercilessly and ask the in-laws to take her back. (Kamble 98)

The lives of a Mahar woman were unimaginable, destructive and dreadful to its core. The daughter-in-law led a harsher life as the whole family including her sister-in-law and brother-in-law took to extreme measures of making her their slave. She bears all the violence and abuses of male egoistic nature and patriarchal practises that hovers the society. She is not welcome anywhere neither to her parents house or her in-laws. She is not seen as a human being but a slave to patriarchal systems. The mother-in-law plays the role of framing immoral characterization of her daughter-in-law to her son who agitated at her behaviour and control by the emotion of egoism took to cutting off the girl's nose as her punishment. She tries to destroy their marriage as Kamble writes, "Her daughter-in-law was her enemy! She would feel terribly jealous of her youth" (Kamble 96). The mother-in-law was the driving force behind torturing the poor girl and defaming her character and virtue. The cutting of a woman's nose was a symbol to indicate the demoralisation of a women's chastity or 'metaphor for genital mutilation' (Chakravarti 74). The religious books and mythological texts of Hinduism like the Ramayana contain incidents of women's nose being cut off as violence is used to keep the practise of patriarchal norms and ideology alive. The daughter-in-law was the victim of matriarchal power and patriarchal dominance. As Chakravarti writes, "It was one of the most successful ideologies constructed by any patriarchal system, one in which women themselves controlled their own sexuality and believed that they gained power and respect through the codes they adopted" (Chakravarti 70).

The urge for power and authority is evident in every society and one tries to control and dominate over the other. In order to generalize themselves as the superior gender, the Dalit males exercise their control over the dalit women through the establishment of patriarchy. Baby Kamble faced the same abuse and violence from her husband when some young guys stared at her in a train compartment and she meets the wrath of her husband's anger right there. A woman had to be cautious about her speech, her way of seeing things and her actions because the mere action of throwing sink water arouses suspicion about her faithfulness as Kamble in her interview with Maya Pandit narrates that throwing off dirty water would indicate the signal of her lover at that direction and she was beaten because of it. The patriarchal institutions have taken absolute authority over the exercise of a woman's individual freedom and liberty making her dominated by male mechanisms and structures. As Kamble writes, "Their male ego gave them some sense of identity, 'I am a man, I am superior to women, I am somebody'. If the whole village tortures us, we will torture our women" (Kamble 156). To redeem their masculinity and power they turn their revenge on the women of their community in order to establish their power over them and to derive their identity. The dalit men being oppressed by the upper caste needed to sustain their superiority as the tougher sex and their male egoism contributed to their sustainability. However as Kamble writes with the inculcation of education and employment, they repressed this egoism through their works which gave them a sense of achievement and "their ego is sustained by that success" (Kamble 156).

The consciousness among the Dalit women arises with the inculcation of Ambedkar's ideology to the forefront and his emancipation of dalit women through education as the way out of established anti humanistic systems that was prevalent in the society. His principles attracted the women's community who began to recognise their oppression based on gender and caste for the first time. The women community were ignorant of their oppression and blindly followed and practise systems and doctrines that were meant to marginalise and subjugate them. But with the dalit movement their eyes were open to a false belief and saw the root cause of their oppression and sufferings. It was the women who took the initiative of sending their children to school by sacrificing everything they have. Baby Kamble being a stern follower of Ambedkar's revolutionary ideas and doctrines realised the importance of education as the way out to their individual freedom and liberty. Throughout her narratives, she

speaks out against practises and religious notions that the Mahars followed in order to find favour and recognition from the Gods and the upper caste. The movement embroidered the spirit of humanity and compassion in her and broaden her views to the oppression and domestic violence of women. The education she received enabled her to use her knowledge for the good of her community as she open a school for the dalits and started an ashram shala for orphans. She praises Ambedkar as the 'divine flame' who came to life to show the world what humanity is. She credits the Dalit's achievements and advancement to the sole leader who revolutionised the future of the Dalits.

The autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* was written due to the influence of Ambedkar and his ideologies as Kamble writes, "I decided to begin my struggle through writing" (Kamble 135), and her story of her struggle becomes a social agent of change in the Mahar lives particularly Dalit women. As a product of the movement, Kamble documented the social, political, religious, cultural and economic life of the Mahars of Maharashtra right from her childhood to that of her present life. She brought to light the patriarchal society of the Dalit community of Mahars amidst the talks and discussion on caste discrimination and oppression in all dalit works. The hold of patriarchy was so strong that she had to hide her written works from her husband and her sons for years. The Dalit women activist face discrimination from their husbands and brothers due to patriarchal set up of the society but that did not stop them from fighting. The revolutionary words of Ambedkar revolutionised the Dalits mindset and they were transformed from slaves to humans. Kamble writes that the Hindu religion have abandon them to a fate of misery and servant hood and turn a blind eye to the sufferings of the Dalits. She speaks of Ambedkar as the one "who lighted a lamp in each heart and brought light to our dark lives. He is far greater to us than the maker of the universe...First he gave us life; then he made us human beings. The first need of a human being is education" (Kamble 118). Kamble's autobiography documents the changes in the Dalit's life achieved through their movement and educational progress. The dalit movement reignited their flames and consciousness and broke the codes of barriers and prisons that confined them.

Chapter 5: Reflection of Cultural Marginality: A Comparative Study

The Dalits have been marginalised for generations under the banner of casteism and literature reflects the inner and outer workings of the system. The new wave of dalit writing has begun to look at the reflection of culture and the celebration of dalit identity as a distinct vibrant socio-political phenomenon in deliberating themselves from the clutches of slavery and its mentality. Their outlook on perceiving themselves as a group of people collectively exploited under the stronghold of casteism has permeated them to culturally, politically, economically and socially question the autonomy of its structures and reveal their experiences of untold truth and its unspeakable reality. The new dalit writers wrote with a perspective on the culture, religion, language and traditions of the Dalits. Their characters are bold-minded, individualistic and strong against the prejudices of caste and its workings. They are no longer ashamed of the identity they wore during the gone period and started to look at it as an important aspect in channelizing their past, present and future. Their choice of taking the genre of autobiography is a form of protest towards casteism and serves a larger purpose to understand caste structures and the denial of humanity in order to ascertain their cultural identity.

According to Festino, “Literary narratives are not considered as being enigmatic constructions that hide meanings and, therefore, belong in the realm of the sacred; rather, they are seen as highlighting their deep connectedness to the social” (26), experiences of the individuals turn narratives into a social communal narration. And it is dalit literature that imposes the experience of the individual into a communal one. As Festino writes,

Its main genre is that of narratives, in the form of autobiographies and fictional autobiographies that offer themselves as metaphor of visibility. As for content, these life narratives break away from both traditional autobiography and bourgeois Indian literature since they look at the Indian social hierarchy from below, rather, than above and instead of depicting the plight of any individual in particular, they depict

the life of the community as a whole because for the dalits, the individual's predicament can only be defined in relation to its community. (29)

Dalit writers deal with the reality rather than the imagination. They presented their own experiences because they are of the opinion that no other writers aside from being a dalit can actually write about the dalit experiences and it could be achieved only through a dalit consciousness. Caste is instigated, it is created. It was created by people who wanted authority and power over religion and humanity. The result of caste hierarchy was disastrous and evil to its core, denying the right to living as a human. For any dalit writers to write something fictional or creative is way beyond its subject matter or concern. The fictional world is far from what can constitute their actual ground reality. Their sufferings caused by casteism cannot be ignored and remains the main point of focus in any dalit writings. They do not glorify their sufferings but instead presents a deeper understanding of the working of caste in the rural and urban settings. The caste system has ancient roots but with the evolvement of time, it has its modern impact. As stated by Satyanarayana and Tharu "Caste may no longer be called caste, but it is everywhere. It goes by other names and is practised by everyone. One of the most important contributions of the new dalit writing is its analysis of such everyday and subtle forms of power" (Satyanarayana and Tharu 16). Autobiographies reveal the private memories of the writer but in the case of Dalit writers they reveal the common experience of their community in order to assert their social identity.

For centuries women have been seen as the weaker sex needing the protection and support of the males and a family without any male child was considered an ill-luck and the girl child was murdered just after birth for bringing misery into the family. As Simone De Beauvoir writes in her book, *The Second Sex*, "woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave, the two sexes have never shared the world in equality...Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man's, and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. Even when her rights are legally recognised in the abstract, long-standing customs prevents their full expression in the mores" (Beauvoir 19). The status of women has been relegated over generations and structural system like Patriarchy was institutionalised to control and keep the women under the grip of male

dominance. The lot of burden women had to carry was never recognised by the society and her plight and miseries was considered to stay within the walls of her house. Women's voices were confined to their kitchen walls and monitored by the already experienced patriarchal abuse of power and control, the elder women or mother-in-laws, who have been brainwashed by the existing autonomy and its principles and believe in the continuance of the system for the welfare of the society. Michael Ryan in his book *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction* writes, "Feminist literary criticism studies literature by women for how it addresses or expresses the particularity of women's lives and experience. And it studies the male-dominated canon in order to understand how men have used culture to further their domination of women" (Ryan 101). Men used cultural traditions to hold women under the grasp of preserving cultural heritage.

Patriarchy has existed right from the start of civilization pushing females to the pit of patriarchal control and domination. Men were considered the stronger sex, the bread earners of the family and indulged themselves in political, social, economic workforce whereas females were confined to the four walls of her house looking after the children and household chores. The society confided her role and a good woman was one who obeyed her husband and performed household duties. Aside from bearing children and looking after the household, her presence in the society was restricted. She was restricted from earning her own money or living independently because the establishment of the social structure was bigotry. Women all over the world suffers from different oppression and their experiences and marginalisation varies as does the various branches of feminism that takes into account the sufferings and pain of its own race, colour, creed, caste etc. The concept of 'other' is a universal phenomenon that points to female as the "other" as is shown by the historical factor. In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir writes about the 'other' as,

The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of duality-that of the Self and the Other. This duality was not originally attached to the definition of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical facts. It is revealed in such works as that of Granet on Chinese

thought and those of Dumézil on the East Indies and Rome. The feminine element was at first no more involved in such pairs as Varuna-Mitra, Uranus-Zeus, Sun-Moon, and Day-Night than it was in the contrasts between good and evil, lucky and unlucky auspices, right and left, God and Lucifer. Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. (Beauvior 16)

The concept of 'Other' implies not only to the third world women but also to those who have been subordinated resulting in their difference as unwanted people like the disabled, special needs and the homosexuals. The concept of 'Self' and 'Other' highlights the demarcated role and function of the male and the female in the society. The self dominates the women to the extent that she has no choice but to follow him in death as well. The practice of Sati in India was horrendous and an evil breeding system that has tried to establish the supremacy of the male in the Hindu society. The result was that, this practice was founded by misogynistic hypocrite religious male orthodox who believed that a woman live only for her husband, was born to serve and obey him. The male gender tried to channelize their control and demand for respect through the sati system making them the dominant gender that oppressed the weaker neglected gender. The Sati system institutionalised the practise of Hindu women jumping into the funeral pyre of the dead husband as a symbol of love, devotion, loyalty and sacrifice voluntarily and involuntarily. The widows who were against this practise and carried on with their lives were ridiculed, isolated and discriminated by the society. All her actions, movements and thoughts were monitored closely by her relatives and a slight mistake of looking at the wrong direction could result in her death.

One of the earliest features of Patriarchal outline in India was adultery and was regarded the highest form of crimes next to stealing. A woman's virtue was considered to be more precious than gold and was to be rusticated her whole life in order to maintain the legacy of the family. Violence was attached with patriarchal practise and texts like *Jatakas*, *Arthashastra* and *Ramayana* backed the religious connotations to justify their actions as a necessity for the perseverance of honour and blood purity in the family. A continuing act of punishment for adultery in the earlier times and till date is the chopping off of a woman's nose if found guilty of the alleged crime. The

complete control of a woman's sexuality was done in order to preserve the purity of caste and that of the social order itself as it is through a woman that blood can be transfused into the future. A woman's sexuality remains the most importantly guarded asset of her body as Manu writes, "by carefully guarding the wife, the most important category for him, a man preserves his family, his lineage, the purity of his offspring and his means of acquiring merit" (Chakravarti 68). The purity of blood lineage was an important aspect in the Hindu family and it was the women who carried this stigma of shame or praise. The woman remains the proof of a household's stand and she was closely guarded and monitored so as to protect the standings of the family in the society. She has no voice and no one would dare listen to her which is one of the many reasons Spivak had to say about the repression of voices of the subaltern in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which she ends her essay with the note that the subaltern cannot speak. Spivak's justification came from the many factors and reasons concerning Indian lower caste/minority women who for centuries have sweat blood and tears under the rigid dominance of patriarchy and its systems. They remain inconsistent to change and ignorant of their subordination.

Menstruation was seen as a negative phenomenon and is connoted to the impurity of a woman's body. A traditionalist Hindu woman was not allowed to enter the kitchen or sleep in the same room as the male while she was on her menstrual period. She was regarded highly precarious in spreading pollution and contaminating the whole of the family and was warded off in isolation even to sleep in the cowshed. Spivak writes about the story of Bhivaneswari Bhaduri who committed suicide while menstruating in order to prove her fidelity and her participation in the social reformations that took place where her involvement was dismissed. Her story has been misinterpreted and misrepresented by the media moguls and her attempt to prove her understatements have been in vain until her death. Menstruation was seen as a religious symbol of impurity and connoted with the Hindu myth of women's involvement in murdering a Brahmana according to the eighteenth century writer and codifier of Hinduism, Manu. The major religious Hindu text like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* writes about the impure blood of the womenfolk in deeming equal as the men before the sights of the Gods.

The structure of Patriarchy was build upon the subordination of women, to control and attain power. It was one of the most successful systems of ideologies and practise where subordination and domination were entangled to suppress women as a whole. The participation of women into the system further enhances its growth as “women themselves controlled their own sexuality and believed that they gained power and respect through the codes they adopted” (Chakravarti 70). Without understanding their oppression and suppression of rights and freedom as an individual women further became the epitome of patriarchal enforcement among other women. Beauvoir writes, “she is often very well pleased with her role as the *Other*” (Beauvoir 20).

Religious texts and myths highlighted the history of women, who had to suffer under male autonomy as Uma Chakravarti writes,

According to the Mahabharata women have been sinful from the very beginning when the creator first made the five gross elements, and he gave shape to men and women. At the time of creation the original Manu allotted to women the habit of lying, wasting time, an indiscriminate love of ornaments, anger, meanness and treachery and bad conduct...Even the Ramayana associates most women with being essentially weak and sinful. According to Kaushalya women do not care for a good family, good deeds, or wisdom, and their hearts are ever inconstant. The sage Agastya states in the Ramayana that it has been women's nature ever since creation began to cling to a man only when he prospers and desert him when things are difficult...Manu, one reason for the 'innate' impurity of women is that women became recipients of the guilt of brahmicide, the heinous sin of killing a brahmana[...]thus women became impure, and menstruation, according to this myth, was associated with women's participation in the brahmana murder. It is the mark of their innate impurity and at the same time of their innate sexuality. (Chakravarti 67)

The religious methodologies and texts prescribe the role of a good woman and see her as an inhumane person with the trait of sinfulness and impurities in her. She is

described as a kind of an animal who cares only about her looks and engages in sinful deed like lying, cheating and whoring around. As Amar Nath Prasad quotes in his book *Women Empowerment in Indian Writers in English* about the writings of Manu, “Verses 14 and 15 of Chapter IX in *Manusmriti* depict women in general as licentious and grossly sensuous. The Creator implanted in them carnal passions, love for ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct” (Prasad 3). She is not seen with an equal status to that of men instead they degraded her to that of a lowly person with no moral values and intellectual capacity. The women were seen as an outsider outside the realms of men. As Manu, the codifier of Hinduism and Casteism writes in his book *Manusmriti* about the confined role a woman had to play in the society.

In Hindu religion Manu constantly stresses the inferiority of women to men. Manu starts with the fundamental principle that all through her existence woman must remain dependent on man. In childhood a female should be dependent on her father and in youth on her husband and after the death of her husband on her children. If she has no sons or the near kinsmen of her husband; if she be left no kinsmen on those of her father, if she has no paternal kinsmen on the sovereign, a woman must never seek independence. (Prasad 3)

With such statements from religious text, it become impertinent to turn the focus men perceived upon women as it has religious connotations and reference which have been written by the holiest of mankind. It backed their statements and justifies their actions meted out against the womenfolk. The Dalit’s belief in superstitious notions was a social agenda implemented by the upper caste people to dominate the Dalits and keep them under the grip of religious connotations. The superstitious and cultural belief of the Mahars of Maharashtra according to the narratives of Kamble was that the Goddess Satwai and the God Barma came to the house of the newborn baby to write the fate of the child on his/her forehead. This was a belief premeditated by the caste system to keep the hold of the dalits under its grip on the basis that everything was premeditated by God and one should never question its legitimacy. This belief acknowledges the wretched role and status a Dalit is born into. Ignorance of the reality

and illiteracy was used as a scheme to further exploit the dalits to the margins of being unexposed to education and knowledge that came with it.

The call for religious conversion under the leadership of Ambedkar has resulted in mass conversions of the Dalits to Buddhism and Christianity. Article 25-28 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to the freedom of religion in a secular India. Ambedkar envisioned the growth of the dalits through religious conversion by firstly breaking off the shell of Casteism generated by Hinduism as an important development towards equality and freedom of the dalits. It was an attempt to culturally delink them from Hinduism and the conversion was an important step in seeing themselves as humans of value and worth. They found basic tenets of humanism, equality, justice, compassion, and love in the doctrines of Buddhism and Christianity, principles which they fail to see in Hinduism. They found one God in these religions irrespective of their cultural or historical background. The existence of hundreds of Gods and Goddess in Hinduism further perpetuated the hierarchy of upper and lower caste by differentiating Gods and Goddess on behalf of one's social status. The transition of religion impacted the lives of the Dalits in seeing themselves as humans for the first time. However, they were not freed from the stigma of casteism. They were largely known through suffixes as Dalit Muslim, Dalit Christians and Dalit Buddhists. The religious converts were targeted by the Hindus who tried to burn down their houses, attacked and mass murder them. The Dalit women remained the greatest threat to these incidents as they were raped in order to defile and pollute their blood lineage, display the supremacy of their authority and bring shame to the family. The media coverage of such incidents is staggeringly low and the victimised families remain unheard and untold of. The converts were cut off from all financial and educational support that came under the recipient of Scheduled Caste provisions laid specifically by the Constitution. Regardless of their sufferings the dalits try to break free from their cultural chains of caste slavery by breaking out of the cage and finding their freedom and liberty.

Baby Kamble writes about the cultural trauma of the Dalits through the scarcity of food and hunger as a predominantly existential phenomenon in their community. Every dalit household knows the trauma of hunger and sickness. The denial of drawing water from the village wells and pumps have been an important concern

among the dalit writers in propagating untouchability even in modern India, decades after its abolishment. Pollution is the key factor of untouchability. On the strength and vigour of Dalit women as compared to the upper caste Chakravarti writes that, “dalit women are thoroughly integrated into labour system and have a strong work ethic. Upper caste women on the other hand have no function outside reproduction-and are thus reduced to the single axis of providing sexual labour” (Chakravarti 82).

The demarcation between various castes was further differentiated by the dress codes between upper and lower caste. Owing to poverty, dalit women wore saris that had been stitched to hold the sari together from falling apart with whatever rags they could find. The borders of their sari pleats were worn in such a way that they were hidden and not an iota of their skin were to be seen because it was an offence of mockery to the upper caste. The dalit women were forbidden from wearing any kind of gold jewelleryes or ornaments to depict their social status in the society.

The concept of ‘difference in location’ is brought to light by Kamble and Pawde’s depiction of the Dalit world not only in terms of geographical difference but also in the difference of social margins. They are alienated and pushed to the margins of poverty and hard labour for they are deemed impure in the sights of Gods and humans. Rege writes, “the focus of a feminist dalit standpoint is squarely placed on social relations, which convert difference into oppression” (Rege 97). Pawde’s narration of her childhood reflects a rather bright light of taking a shift from unhygienic to hygienic lifestyles where her parents were fortunate enough to afford the basic necessities like soap, hair oils, toiletries, creams and perfumes for her. She was cleaner than the upper caste girls who went on rampant cautions about pollution and cleanliness. A look at Pawde’s and Kamble reflection of their childhood contrast in some margins but caste shaming and discrimination remains stagnant. Both the autobiographies were written after modernisation and democracy was at its peak in India and the celebration of human rights and freedom were used in jargon usage by the politicians and Media. Though set in different eras the core issues of tackling the problem of dalit remains at the centre of inert propaganda.

Dalit women were marginalised on the fact that mainstream feminism refused to acknowledge and recognise their internal problems of struggles and pain as concerning womanhood as an individual and seeing them on the basis of humanistic and

feministic approach. It further clubbed them under the common term of sisterhood as facing the same problem and resistance. This led to the emancipation of all dalit women movements in India during the 1980's as a call to represent their own interest in the fight towards equality, justice and liberation. The Dalit women movement drifted away from the general dalit movement which focused more on men and women's problem were not given importance. Even in the literary scene, dalit women criticised their male counterparts for dominating and marginalising them. Dalit scholars like Kancha Ilaiah celebrates the diversity of dalit culture as enforcing equality and free from gender suppression. The Dalit women refused to celebrate dalit culture because it was full of superstition, gender stereotypes, rituals and beliefs. The denial of having a space to be recognised and a voice to represent them led to the independent foundation of Dalit feminism in India.

Mainstream literature does not present the lives of the dalits, they are neglected because their stories are not worth mentioning or important enough to be written or read about them. As stated by Mishra,

The literature of the dominating castes can never voice the demand for the liberation of the dalits as they present dalit as sick people responsible for their own wretchedness. Bama holds: Dalit literature is people's literature. It is an integral part of dalit culture. It should be the story of the dalit struggle and its relationship with authority. It should bring about chaos into hierarchical relationships between the dominant and the dominated. So far as language is concerned, consciously the attempt should be to avoid 'The standard languages, pure, classical, divine and cultured- the academic languages. The so-called decency is the most suffocating term for the dalits'. (Mishra 36-37)

The discrimination based on caste and gender is the core issue tackled by dalit feminist writers to differentiate the usage of the word in different contexts. They are of the opinion that both caste and gender cannot be seen as an entirely different force but should be linked together while discussing dalit patriarchy. Caste is the central idea of dalit feminist discussions without which patriarchy, gender inequality cannot be

constituted upon. The need to assert and protect his masculinity and illustrate his power, dalit men run and rule women in order to protect his pride and ego as the larger sex that commanded respect and order base in the family. The humiliation they faced outside their kitchen walls by the upper caste women and men as failing to protect their masculinity and undergoing through hard labour and degrading themselves to that of an animal slave had a psychological impact of wanting to rule elsewhere where their actions were not questioned and their authority was not challenged. Patriarchy was used as an umbrella to enforce and legitimise violence through the sanction by religious and cultural traditions.

Under the system of dalit patriarchy, a woman had to forego through numerous domestic violence and verbal abuses from her family all the while performing her heavily duties and labour. Kamble writes that every night, a cry of mercy was heard in the Maharwada, screams of woman's wails engulfed the locality; one in every hundred women had a disfigured nose, limbs, backs and scars. She was also a victim of domestic violence and male egoistic nature where she was frequently beaten due to the suspicious nature of her husband. The matriarchal influence was staggeringly high in the community as Kamble writes that in order to wield power and dominate as they have been victims in the other world; they found themselves a slave, the daughter-in-law. The shifting of power and authority is an indication of suppressed slavery where slavers control other slavers. The mother-in-laws wield such power and sowed seeds of suspicion and poison in her son's mind. A woman rebelling against such practises and violence had nowhere to go as she is not accepted even in her family. Such woman is targeted by the society and is considered a weed of shame bringing dishonour to the family. It was through the system of patriarchy that gave them a sense of identity and supplemented their male egoism.

The depiction of dalit characters by non-dalit writers have been debated and scrutinised with the works of the dalit writers. They are marginalised on the very ground of how the non-dalit writers represents and writes about them. The characters in non-dalit writings have no animosity towards the Hindu religion or its set up, they are discriminated and helpless but do not try to change their social conditions and remain victimised under the hegemony. As Bishun Kumar writes in his article, "Dalit Writing Versus Non-Dalit Writing", "They are but the passive and the lifelong bearers

of the suppression and victims of extreme marginalization who could never bring the revolution for social change. They are such characters who can win sympathy but can never identify themselves to be the human being no less than those who make them a pig out of a man” (Kumar 94). They continue to live within the wretched life they found themselves to, without any consciousness about reformations or change. They associate their life to the servitude works they perform for the higher caste as a necessity and not as a discrimination of human worth. They remain static characters under an unfair corrupted system.

The eccentricity of advancing in the modern world is through the scope of education. The core advancement of the dalit women lies in their education and employment as moving towards the advancement of social standings and financial stability. It amalgamated them independence and freedom to pursue the vast storehouse of knowledge and in expanding their creativity and sensibility. Caste segregation has been practised to keep the dalits illiterate and ignorant, disorganised and shattered away without a conscious mind of their own. The communal marginalisation of the dalits students kept them at the back of the classroom, compelled to do manual labour in school and discouraged from pursuing their academic interests. Kumud Pawde’s decision to take up Sanskrit was faced with criticism and negative response from the public. The Modern India refused to accept a Dalit woman teaching Sanskrit in the University. The only way through which the society accepted to see her as an academically established lecturer was after she married into an upper caste family. The refusal to accept the advancement of dalits in the forerun of education and employment was intermingled with caste politics.

Both Kamble and Pawde have contributed largely to the expansion of the Dalit literature in widening its scope and structures. They remain the versatile writers who brought both the external and internal struggles within the dalit household as a woman twice discriminated because of their gender. Their works led to the manifestation of dalit feminism as an independent form of literary movement twice discriminated and repressed. They describe both their surroundings and community through an educated perspectives with strong Dalit consciousness where being born a woman is horrendous because they are not still allowed to assert their individual freedom. They remain the voices of thousands of Dalit women who have recorded their sufferings and pain in

written forms with an outlook on communality, far from the personal. Both writers recorded the communal life and its collective trauma in their autobiographies.

Writing is an act of breaking out of the wheel of silence and patriarchal dominance that has governed women for centuries. It gives them a sense of freedom to articulate one's intellectual capability, creativity and individuality. The need to assert their identity within the stronghold of male's dominance has given rise to many feminist works and movements. In the post independence era in India, budding Dalit women writers took to autobiography as an idiom to best express their self articulations. Gopal Guru writes, "Dalit women's claim to 'talk differently' assumes certain positions. It assumes that the social location of the speaker will be more or less stable' therefore, 'talking differently' can be treated as genuinely representative[...] the phenomenon of 'talking differently' foregrounds the identity of Dalit women" (Guru 152). By being culturally marginalised as a result of their caste and gender, dalit women rose to prominence through the art of literature by refusing to be silent and repressed even in their own form of literary sphere.

The cultural marginality of the dalits has led to the formation of their literature as a discursive opening for their marginalised voices and questioning their repression and struggle and the location where power resides. The manifestation of prime values like freedom, justice, equality and fraternity emphasises its own literary space as a literature of social transformation and an agent of social change. It called for the liberalisation of not only the dalits but other weaker sections of the society whose voices and anguish goes unheard and unaccounted for. The need to assert their communal identity and history, suppression of the dalit women voices, caste segregations and violence constitute a large part of their subaltern literature.

Chapter 5: Reflection of Cultural Marginality: A Comparative Study

The Dalits have been marginalised for generations under the banner of casteism and literature reflects the inner and outer workings of the system. The new wave of dalit writing has begun to look at the reflection of culture and the celebration of dalit identity as a distinct vibrant socio-political phenomenon in deliberating themselves from the clutches of slavery and its mentality. Their outlook on perceiving themselves as a group of people collectively exploited under the stronghold of casteism has permeated them to culturally, politically, economically and socially question the autonomy of its structures and reveal their experiences of untold truth and its unspeakable reality. The new dalit writers wrote with a perspective on the culture, religion, language and traditions of the Dalits. Their characters are bold-minded, individualistic and strong against the prejudices of caste and its workings. They are no longer ashamed of the identity they wore during the gone period and started to look at it as an important aspect in channelizing their past, present and future. Their choice of taking the genre of autobiography is a form of protest towards casteism and serves a larger purpose to understand caste structures and the denial of humanity in order to ascertain their cultural identity.

According to Festino, “Literary narratives are not considered as being enigmatic constructions that hide meanings and, therefore, belong in the realm of the sacred; rather, they are seen as highlighting their deep connectedness to the social” (26), experiences of the individuals turn narratives into a social communal narration. And it is dalit literature that imposes the experience of the individual into a communal one. As Festino writes,

Its main genre is that of narratives, in the form of autobiographies and fictional autobiographies that offer themselves as metaphor of visibility. As for content, these life narratives break away from both traditional autobiography and bourgeois Indian literature since they look at the Indian social hierarchy from below, rather, than above and instead of depicting the plight of any individual in particular, they depict

the life of the community as a whole because for the dalits, the individual's predicament can only be defined in relation to its community. (29)

Dalit writers deal with the reality rather than the imagination. They presented their own experiences because they are of the opinion that no other writers aside from being a dalit can actually write about the dalit experiences and it could be achieved only through a dalit consciousness. Caste is instigated, it is created. It was created by people who wanted authority and power over religion and humanity. The result of caste hierarchy was disastrous and evil to its core, denying the right to living as a human. For any dalit writers to write something fictional or creative is way beyond its subject matter or concern. The fictional world is far from what can constitute their actual ground reality. Their sufferings caused by casteism cannot be ignored and remains the main point of focus in any dalit writings. They do not glorify their sufferings but instead presents a deeper understanding of the working of caste in the rural and urban settings. The caste system has ancient roots but with the evolvement of time, it has its modern impact. As stated by Satyanarayana and Tharu "Caste may no longer be called caste, but it is everywhere. It goes by other names and is practised by everyone. One of the most important contributions of the new dalit writing is its analysis of such everyday and subtle forms of power" (Satyanarayana and Tharu 16). Autobiographies reveal the private memories of the writer but in the case of Dalit writers they reveal the common experience of their community in order to assert their social identity.

For centuries women have been seen as the weaker sex needing the protection and support of the males and a family without any male child was considered an ill-luck and the girl child was murdered just after birth for bringing misery into the family. As Simone De Beauvoir writes in her book, *The Second Sex*, "woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave, the two sexes have never shared the world in equality...Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man's, and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. Even when her rights are legally recognised in the abstract, long-standing customs prevents their full expression in the mores" (Beauvoir 19). The status of women has been relegated over generations and structural system like Patriarchy was institutionalised to control and keep the women under the grip of male

dominance. The lot of burden women had to carry was never recognised by the society and her plight and miseries was considered to stay within the walls of her house. Women's voices were confined to their kitchen walls and monitored by the already experienced patriarchal abuse of power and control, the elder women or mother-in-laws, who have been brainwashed by the existing autonomy and its principles and believe in the continuance of the system for the welfare of the society. Michael Ryan in his book *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction* writes, "Feminist literary criticism studies literature by women for how it addresses or expresses the particularity of women's lives and experience. And it studies the male-dominated canon in order to understand how men have used culture to further their domination of women" (Ryan 101). Men used cultural traditions to hold women under the grasp of preserving cultural heritage.

Patriarchy has existed right from the start of civilization pushing females to the pit of patriarchal control and domination. Men were considered the stronger sex, the bread earners of the family and indulged themselves in political, social, economic workforce whereas females were confined to the four walls of her house looking after the children and household chores. The society confided her role and a good woman was one who obeyed her husband and performed household duties. Aside from bearing children and looking after the household, her presence in the society was restricted. She was restricted from earning her own money or living independently because the establishment of the social structure was bigotry. Women all over the world suffers from different oppression and their experiences and marginalisation varies as does the various branches of feminism that takes into account the sufferings and pain of its own race, colour, creed, caste etc. The concept of 'other' is a universal phenomenon that points to female as the "other" as is shown by the historical factor. In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir writes about the 'other' as,

The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of duality-that of the Self and the Other. This duality was not originally attached to the definition of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical facts. It is revealed in such works as that of Granet on Chinese

thought and those of Dumézil on the East Indies and Rome. The feminine element was at first no more involved in such pairs as Varuna-Mitra, Uranus-Zeus, Sun-Moon, and Day-Night than it was in the contrasts between good and evil, lucky and unlucky auspices, right and left, God and Lucifer. Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. (Beauvior 16)

The concept of 'Other' implies not only to the third world women but also to those who have been subordinated resulting in their difference as unwanted people like the disabled, special needs and the homosexuals. The concept of 'Self' and 'Other' highlights the demarcated role and function of the male and the female in the society. The self dominates the women to the extent that she has no choice but to follow him in death as well. The practice of Sati in India was horrendous and an evil breeding system that has tried to establish the supremacy of the male in the Hindu society. The result was that, this practice was founded by misogynistic hypocrite religious male orthodox who believed that a woman live only for her husband, was born to serve and obey him. The male gender tried to channelize their control and demand for respect through the sati system making them the dominant gender that oppressed the weaker neglected gender. The Sati system institutionalised the practise of Hindu women jumping into the funeral pyre of the dead husband as a symbol of love, devotion, loyalty and sacrifice voluntarily and involuntarily. The widows who were against this practise and carried on with their lives were ridiculed, isolated and discriminated by the society. All her actions, movements and thoughts were monitored closely by her relatives and a slight mistake of looking at the wrong direction could result in her death.

One of the earliest features of Patriarchal outline in India was adultery and was regarded the highest form of crimes next to stealing. A woman's virtue was considered to be more precious than gold and was to be rusticated her whole life in order to maintain the legacy of the family. Violence was attached with patriarchal practise and texts like *Jatakas*, *Arthashastra* and *Ramayana* backed the religious connotations to justify their actions as a necessity for the perseverance of honour and blood purity in the family. A continuing act of punishment for adultery in the earlier times and till date is the chopping off of a woman's nose if found guilty of the alleged crime. The

complete control of a woman's sexuality was done in order to preserve the purity of caste and that of the social order itself as it is through a woman that blood can be transfused into the future. A woman's sexuality remains the most importantly guarded asset of her body as Manu writes, "by carefully guarding the wife, the most important category for him, a man preserves his family, his lineage, the purity of his offspring and his means of acquiring merit" (Chakravarti 68). The purity of blood lineage was an important aspect in the Hindu family and it was the women who carried this stigma of shame or praise. The woman remains the proof of a household's stand and she was closely guarded and monitored so as to protect the standings of the family in the society. She has no voice and no one would dare listen to her which is one of the many reasons Spivak had to say about the repression of voices of the subaltern in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which she ends her essay with the note that the subaltern cannot speak. Spivak's justification came from the many factors and reasons concerning Indian lower caste/minority women who for centuries have sweat blood and tears under the rigid dominance of patriarchy and its systems. They remain inconsistent to change and ignorant of their subordination.

Menstruation was seen as a negative phenomenon and is connoted to the impurity of a woman's body. A traditionalist Hindu woman was not allowed to enter the kitchen or sleep in the same room as the male while she was on her menstrual period. She was regarded highly precarious in spreading pollution and contaminating the whole of the family and was warded off in isolation even to sleep in the cowshed. Spivak writes about the story of Bhivaneswari Bhaduri who committed suicide while menstruating in order to prove her fidelity and her participation in the social reformations that took place where her involvement was dismissed. Her story has been misinterpreted and misrepresented by the media moguls and her attempt to prove her understatements have been in vain until her death. Menstruation was seen as a religious symbol of impurity and connoted with the Hindu myth of women's involvement in murdering a Brahmana according to the eighteenth century writer and codifier of Hinduism, Manu. The major religious Hindu text like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* writes about the impure blood of the womenfolk in deeming equal as the men before the sights of the Gods.

The structure of Patriarchy was build upon the subordination of women, to control and attain power. It was one of the most successful systems of ideologies and practise where subordination and domination were entangled to suppress women as a whole. The participation of women into the system further enhances its growth as “women themselves controlled their own sexuality and believed that they gained power and respect through the codes they adopted” (Chakravarti 70). Without understanding their oppression and suppression of rights and freedom as an individual women further became the epitome of patriarchal enforcement among other women. Beauvoir writes, “she is often very well pleased with her role as the *Other*” (Beauvoir 20).

Religious texts and myths highlighted the history of women, who had to suffer under male autonomy as Uma Chakravarti writes,

According to the Mahabharata women have been sinful from the very beginning when the creator first made the five gross elements, and he gave shape to men and women. At the time of creation the original Manu allotted to women the habit of lying, wasting time, an indiscriminate love of ornaments, anger, meanness and treachery and bad conduct...Even the Ramayana associates most women with being essentially weak and sinful. According to Kaushalya women do not care for a good family, good deeds, or wisdom, and their hearts are ever inconstant. The sage Agastya states in the Ramayana that it has been women's nature ever since creation began to cling to a man only when he prospers and desert him when things are difficult...Manu, one reason for the 'innate' impurity of women is that women became recipients of the guilt of brahmicide, the heinous sin of killing a brahmana[...]thus women became impure, and menstruation, according to this myth, was associated with women's participation in the brahmana murder. It is the mark of their innate impurity and at the same time of their innate sexuality. (Chakravarti 67)

The religious methodologies and texts prescribe the role of a good woman and see her as an inhumane person with the trait of sinfulness and impurities in her. She is

described as a kind of an animal who cares only about her looks and engages in sinful deed like lying, cheating and whoring around. As Amar Nath Prasad quotes in his book *Women Empowerment in Indian Writers in English* about the writings of Manu, “Verses 14 and 15 of Chapter IX in *Manusmriti* depict women in general as licentious and grossly sensuous. The Creator implanted in them carnal passions, love for ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct” (Prasad 3). She is not seen with an equal status to that of men instead they degraded her to that of a lowly person with no moral values and intellectual capacity. The women were seen as an outsider outside the realms of men. As Manu, the codifier of Hinduism and Casteism writes in his book *Manusmriti* about the confined role a woman had to play in the society.

In Hindu religion Manu constantly stresses the inferiority of women to men. Manu starts with the fundamental principle that all through her existence woman must remain dependent on man. In childhood a female should be dependent on her father and in youth on her husband and after the death of her husband on her children. If she has no sons or the near kinsmen of her husband; if she be left no kinsmen on those of her father, if she has no paternal kinsmen on the sovereign, a woman must never seek independence. (Prasad 3)

With such statements from religious text, it become impertinent to turn the focus men perceived upon women as it has religious connotations and reference which have been written by the holiest of mankind. It backed their statements and justifies their actions meted out against the womenfolk. The Dalit's belief in superstitious notions was a social agenda implemented by the upper caste people to dominate the Dalits and keep them under the grip of religious connotations. The superstitious and cultural belief of the Mahars of Maharashtra according to the narratives of Kamble was that the Goddess Satwai and the God Barma came to the house of the newborn baby to write the fate of the child on his/her forehead. This was a belief premeditated by the caste system to keep the hold of the dalits under its grip on the basis that everything was premeditated by God and one should never question its legitimacy. This belief acknowledges the wretched role and status a Dalit is born into. Ignorance of the reality

and illiteracy was used as a scheme to further exploit the dalits to the margins of being unexposed to education and knowledge that came with it.

The call for religious conversion under the leadership of Ambedkar has resulted in mass conversions of the Dalits to Buddhism and Christianity. Article 25-28 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to the freedom of religion in a secular India. Ambedkar envisioned the growth of the dalits through religious conversion by firstly breaking off the shell of Casteism generated by Hinduism as an important development towards equality and freedom of the dalits. It was an attempt to culturally delink them from Hinduism and the conversion was an important step in seeing themselves as humans of value and worth. They found basic tenets of humanism, equality, justice, compassion, and love in the doctrines of Buddhism and Christianity, principles which they fail to see in Hinduism. They found one God in these religions irrespective of their cultural or historical background. The existence of hundreds of Gods and Goddess in Hinduism further perpetuated the hierarchy of upper and lower caste by differentiating Gods and Goddess on behalf of one's social status. The transition of religion impacted the lives of the Dalits in seeing themselves as humans for the first time. However, they were not freed from the stigma of casteism. They were largely known through suffixes as Dalit Muslim, Dalit Christians and Dalit Buddhists. The religious converts were targeted by the Hindus who tried to burn down their houses, attacked and mass murder them. The Dalit women remained the greatest threat to these incidents as they were raped in order to defile and pollute their blood lineage, display the supremacy of their authority and bring shame to the family. The media coverage of such incidents is staggeringly low and the victimised families remain unheard and untold of. The converts were cut off from all financial and educational support that came under the recipient of Scheduled Caste provisions laid specifically by the Constitution. Regardless of their sufferings the dalits try to break free from their cultural chains of caste slavery by breaking out of the cage and finding their freedom and liberty.

Baby Kamble writes about the cultural trauma of the Dalits through the scarcity of food and hunger as a predominantly existential phenomenon in their community. Every dalit household knows the trauma of hunger and sickness. The denial of drawing water from the village wells and pumps have been an important concern

among the dalit writers in propagating untouchability even in modern India, decades after its abolishment. Pollution is the key factor of untouchability. On the strength and vigour of Dalit women as compared to the upper caste Chakravarti writes that, “dalit women are thoroughly integrated into labour system and have a strong work ethic. Upper caste women on the other hand have no function outside reproduction-and are thus reduced to the single axis of providing sexual labour” (Chakravarti 82).

The demarcation between various castes was further differentiated by the dress codes between upper and lower caste. Owing to poverty, dalit women wore saris that had been stitched to hold the sari together from falling apart with whatever rags they could find. The borders of their sari pleats were worn in such a way that they were hidden and not an iota of their skin were to be seen because it was an offence of mockery to the upper caste. The dalit women were forbidden from wearing any kind of gold jewelleryes or ornaments to depict their social status in the society.

The concept of ‘difference in location’ is brought to light by Kamble and Pawde’s depiction of the Dalit world not only in terms of geographical difference but also in the difference of social margins. They are alienated and pushed to the margins of poverty and hard labour for they are deemed impure in the sights of Gods and humans. Rege writes, “the focus of a feminist dalit standpoint is squarely placed on social relations, which convert difference into oppression” (Rege 97). Pawde’s narration of her childhood reflects a rather bright light of taking a shift from unhygienic to hygienic lifestyles where her parents were fortunate enough to afford the basic necessities like soap, hair oils, toiletries, creams and perfumes for her. She was cleaner than the upper caste girls who went on rampant cautions about pollution and cleanliness. A look at Pawde’s and Kamble reflection of their childhood contrast in some margins but caste shaming and discrimination remains stagnant. Both the autobiographies were written after modernisation and democracy was at its peak in India and the celebration of human rights and freedom were used in jargon usage by the politicians and Media. Though set in different eras the core issues of tackling the problem of dalit remains at the centre of inert propaganda.

Dalit women were marginalised on the fact that mainstream feminism refused to acknowledge and recognise their internal problems of struggles and pain as concerning womanhood as an individual and seeing them on the basis of humanistic and

feministic approach. It further clubbed them under the common term of sisterhood as facing the same problem and resistance. This led to the emancipation of all dalit women movements in India during the 1980's as a call to represent their own interest in the fight towards equality, justice and liberation. The Dalit women movement drifted away from the general dalit movement which focused more on men and women's problem were not given importance. Even in the literary scene, dalit women criticised their male counterparts for dominating and marginalising them. Dalit scholars like Kancha Ilaiah celebrates the diversity of dalit culture as enforcing equality and free from gender suppression. The Dalit women refused to celebrate dalit culture because it was full of superstition, gender stereotypes, rituals and beliefs. The denial of having a space to be recognised and a voice to represent them led to the independent foundation of Dalit feminism in India.

Mainstream literature does not present the lives of the dalits, they are neglected because their stories are not worth mentioning or important enough to be written or read about them. As stated by Mishra,

The literature of the dominating castes can never voice the demand for the liberation of the dalits as they present dalit as sick people responsible for their own wretchedness. Bama holds: Dalit literature is people's literature. It is an integral part of dalit culture. It should be the story of the dalit struggle and its relationship with authority. It should bring about chaos into hierarchical relationships between the dominant and the dominated. So far as language is concerned, consciously the attempt should be to avoid 'The standard languages, pure, classical, divine and cultured- the academic languages. The so-called decency is the most suffocating term for the dalits'. (Mishra 36-37)

The discrimination based on caste and gender is the core issue tackled by dalit feminist writers to differentiate the usage of the word in different contexts. They are of the opinion that both caste and gender cannot be seen as an entirely different force but should be linked together while discussing dalit patriarchy. Caste is the central idea of dalit feminist discussions without which patriarchy, gender inequality cannot be

constituted upon. The need to assert and protect his masculinity and illustrate his power, dalit men run and rule women in order to protect his pride and ego as the larger sex that commanded respect and order base in the family. The humiliation they faced outside their kitchen walls by the upper caste women and men as failing to protect their masculinity and undergoing through hard labour and degrading themselves to that of an animal slave had a psychological impact of wanting to rule elsewhere where their actions were not questioned and their authority was not challenged. Patriarchy was used as an umbrella to enforce and legitimise violence through the sanction by religious and cultural traditions.

Under the system of dalit patriarchy, a woman had to forego through numerous domestic violence and verbal abuses from her family all the while performing her heavily duties and labour. Kamble writes that every night, a cry of mercy was heard in the Maharwada, screams of woman's wails engulfed the locality; one in every hundred women had a disfigured nose, limbs, backs and scars. She was also a victim of domestic violence and male egoistic nature where she was frequently beaten due to the suspicious nature of her husband. The matriarchal influence was staggeringly high in the community as Kamble writes that in order to wield power and dominate as they have been victims in the other world; they found themselves a slave, the daughter-in-law. The shifting of power and authority is an indication of suppressed slavery where slavers control other slavers. The mother-in-laws wield such power and sowed seeds of suspicion and poison in her son's mind. A woman rebelling against such practises and violence had nowhere to go as she is not accepted even in her family. Such woman is targeted by the society and is considered a weed of shame bringing dishonour to the family. It was through the system of patriarchy that gave them a sense of identity and supplemented their male egoism.

The depiction of dalit characters by non-dalit writers have been debated and scrutinised with the works of the dalit writers. They are marginalised on the very ground of how the non-dalit writers represents and writes about them. The characters in non-dalit writings have no animosity towards the Hindu religion or its set up, they are discriminated and helpless but do not try to change their social conditions and remain victimised under the hegemony. As Bishun Kumar writes in his article, "Dalit Writing Versus Non-Dalit Writing", "They are but the passive and the lifelong bearers

of the suppression and victims of extreme marginalization who could never bring the revolution for social change. They are such characters who can win sympathy but can never identify themselves to be the human being no less than those who make them a pig out of a man” (Kumar 94). They continue to live within the wretched life they found themselves to, without any consciousness about reformations or change. They associate their life to the servitude works they perform for the higher caste as a necessity and not as a discrimination of human worth. They remain static characters under an unfair corrupted system.

The eccentricity of advancing in the modern world is through the scope of education. The core advancement of the dalit women lies in their education and employment as moving towards the advancement of social standings and financial stability. It amalgamated them independence and freedom to pursue the vast storehouse of knowledge and in expanding their creativity and sensibility. Caste segregation has been practised to keep the dalits illiterate and ignorant, disorganised and shattered away without a conscious mind of their own. The communal marginalisation of the dalits students kept them at the back of the classroom, compelled to do manual labour in school and discouraged from pursuing their academic interests. Kumud Pawde’s decision to take up Sanskrit was faced with criticism and negative response from the public. The Modern India refused to accept a Dalit woman teaching Sanskrit in the University. The only way through which the society accepted to see her as an academically established lecturer was after she married into an upper caste family. The refusal to accept the advancement of dalits in the forerun of education and employment was intermingled with caste politics.

Both Kamble and Pawde have contributed largely to the expansion of the Dalit literature in widening its scope and structures. They remain the versatile writers who brought both the external and internal struggles within the dalit household as a woman twice discriminated because of their gender. Their works led to the manifestation of dalit feminism as an independent form of literary movement twice discriminated and repressed. They describe both their surroundings and community through an educated perspectives with strong Dalit consciousness where being born a woman is horrendous because they are not still allowed to assert their individual freedom. They remain the voices of thousands of Dalit women who have recorded their sufferings and pain in

written forms with an outlook on communality, far from the personal. Both writers recorded the communal life and its collective trauma in their autobiographies.

Writing is an act of breaking out of the wheel of silence and patriarchal dominance that has governed women for centuries. It gives them a sense of freedom to articulate one's intellectual capability, creativity and individuality. The need to assert their identity within the stronghold of male's dominance has given rise to many feminist works and movements. In the post independence era in India, budding Dalit women writers took to autobiography as an idiom to best express their self articulations. Gopal Guru writes, "Dalit women's claim to 'talk differently' assumes certain positions. It assumes that the social location of the speaker will be more or less stable' therefore, 'talking differently' can be treated as genuinely representative[...] the phenomenon of 'talking differently' foregrounds the identity of Dalit women" (Guru 152). By being culturally marginalised as a result of their caste and gender, dalit women rose to prominence through the art of literature by refusing to be silent and repressed even in their own form of literary sphere.

The cultural marginality of the dalits has led to the formation of their literature as a discursive opening for their marginalised voices and questioning their repression and struggle and the location where power resides. The manifestation of prime values like freedom, justice, equality and fraternity emphasises its own literary space as a literature of social transformation and an agent of social change. It called for the liberalisation of not only the dalits but other weaker sections of the society whose voices and anguish goes unheard and unaccounted for. The need to assert their communal identity and history, suppression of the dalit women voices, caste segregations and violence constitute a large part of their subaltern literature.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Dalit literature has evolved into a universal platform of portraying real experience with real characters and garnered its unique credibility in the world of literature. It brings originality and authenticity in its theme, structure and literary techniques. It has received worldwide phenomenon in dealing with social problems and its implications. It stands contrasted to the mainstream Indian literature in terms of its literary inputs and devices. It brings reasoning to the forefront of understanding their plight of misery, violence, exclusion subjugation, marginalisation and acts as a metaphor of understanding the prism of Dalit problems. According to Kumar, “Inequality is the root cause of marginality and literature the reflection of the outer reality of the inner self” (Kumar 209). Similarly, Dalit literature is a weapon to cut off all forms of casteism that functions as a hurdle towards the path of equality and humanity. Literature creates social consciousness and communicates to a greater number of people in developing collective consciousness. Dalit literature has succeeded in bridging the gaps of two different minds residing in two different geographical locations. Shameemunnisa Begum writes “Self- Criticism is one of the significant aspects of Dalit writing” (Begum 276) and dalit women writings contribute to those aspects.

Within Dalit literature, women writing stands out because it presents two-fold discrimination based on caste and gender. Dalit women writings have contributed to the intensity and expansion of its literary sphere by culminating exploitation both from outside and within. It takes into account the double marginalization and exploitations of the personal and the community. The patriarchal ideologies of both dalit and brahmanic structures are constructed and critiqued from a feminist point of view where dalit women were pushed to the margins of being dominated and controlled all throughout her life. Within the foreplay of caste, dalit women are dalits amongst dalits. Within the Hindu caste structural system in India, the fate of a baby is sealed from the caste he or she is born to, which determines her social and financial status in the society. It is a lottery system where skills and talents are not required to move forward in the society. The quintessential mode of determining a person’s arrangement and eminence in the society comes from the bequest of casteism.

The genre of autobiography manifested the arousal of the self in presenting a true and sincere staging of oneself. Dalit literature in general and autobiography in particular offers an escape from the traditional repressive society by inculcating radical social mobility in a modernised society. Dalit autobiographical texts have led to an awareness of the different forms of oppression that comes under the banner of caste and gender. It has mobilised dalit social sensibility and its consciousness in tackling the varied forms of caste based oppression and marginalisation. Autobiographies offer a pragmatic representation of the real life in all aspects.

With the expedition of education as the backbone that forms a nation, measures and schemes have been undertaken by the government of India to eradicate illiteracy and provide free education to the poor children. The accessibility of education enabled and empowered the lower sections of the society from ignorance to consciousness. It acted as a vehicle of social, political, cultural, and economical awareness. Education was the way out of poverty and building a stable future for the dalits. Ambedkar's vision for the Dalits was based on empowering them through the mode of education in order to garner them from the dark hoops to light and break the barriers of social monopoly. He changed the course of the dalits' life and brought them to the foreground of social mobility and welfare. Any discussion on the pros of Dalit's life goes back to the contribution of Ambedkar and the significance of his principles. Ambedkar saw that the driving force behind his movement had been contributed by the women in his community. He understood the consequence of their presence and in turn, they would mobilised their children and educate them. Therefore, he called upon women as the active agents of change and asked for their intervention in educating their children in order to move towards the social hierarchy. Influential dalit women writers like Sharmila Rege, Kumud Pawde, Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, Bama stresses on the culmination of education as the key to open doors for the advancement of Dalit's livelihood. Baby Kamble herself proclaimed that she was a product of the Ambedkar's movement and she resolved to record her stories in writings to begin her struggle of resistance.

The concept of 'race' and 'caste' has existed for generations and deemed inhumane and barbaric towards humanity but it manages to find its way into the daily papers because of the ongoing treatments meted out towards the victimised group of people.

This is highly contributed by the conscious psyche imbedded within human's minds in determining who is low and upper. The demarcation between the rich and the poor, the lower caste and upper caste exist to satiate mankind's need for the lust of power, greed and authority. Caste system continued to grow and strengthen its roots rather than being weakened by it. It contributes towards the feeling of exclusion, marginalisation, discrimination and oppression between the Blacks of America and the Dalits of India as well as enhancing their social consciousness and common sensibility towards their oppressors. While Black literature dealt with the literature of the slaves, Dalit literature delved into the literature of the untouchables. Both literatures started as a protest towards their oppressors and a weapon for liberation and equality. It emphasised on the reality rather than the fiction. Their stories hold immense power of retaliation and reinforce the spirit of communal bonding through the use of literature.

There is not a place where they are reminded of their caste or discriminated because of the same. Whenever the dalit community tried to advance in the society, it is oppressed further. They are refused to have a mindset of their own, own property or challenged the already existing norms and traditions in the society. The upper caste views the oppression of the lower caste such as refusing to draw water from the public wells as cultural practices. The caste identity is stagnant till death. Uma Chakravarti writes, "The tragedy of India, even in the new millennium, is that caste system does not look like it is dissolving: The relationship between caste, class and gender remains intact: the endogamous marriage remains the norm and is being reproduced with minor cosmetic changes at the top that we might see occasionally in inter-caste marriages, almost always between the upper most caste" (Chakravarti 189). Endogamous marriages were the only way out to break through the social caste system in India. However, newspapers still carries matrimonial advertisement that seeks women from the same caste or sub caste detailing sexist demands and criteria's for a fair bride, tall, educated, slim and beautiful.

Dalit literature has underwent through criticism for the lack in its technical literary techniques and style for which Dalit scholars defend by claiming that "all modern literatures prefer to portray realism through imagined situations and characters in form of free verse while Dalit literature goes one step ahead and portrays real reality through autobiography that describes the real situations with the real victims of

suffering” (Kumar 96). Dalit literature is full of realism and pleas for a humane lifestyle. The realism becomes more central to their literature than fictional aesthetics. The expedition to literature as a means of pouring their untold stories for generations became a fresh breath of air to the already existing Indian literature where myths and fictions, praise for the Indian civilization and its monuments were its prominent concerns and interest of study. Dalit literature channelizes the experience of its community in written form giving it the liability for worldwide recognition and pleas for intervention into their deteriorating state of livelihood.

The usage of the writer’s dialect or language retains the originality and texture of the wordings the writer had initially tried to convey over the course of her journey in order to dictate the actual experience in its unique form. This has led to the consumption of local readers who can associate her experience with that of the writer. It is a pure existential form of conveying and creating awareness of their true self, educating them of the kinds of oppression they fall under. The translation of these works to English has contributed to a wider scope of readers all around the world garnering in their support and solidarity. Translation of dalit works plays an important role in bridging the gaps of two minds living in different locations. The local dialects are rustic, coarse and rough. Major Dalit writers like Bama imposed the usage of their own language into writing as showcasing diversity in its texture and structure. The standard decency or knowledge as highlighted by the mainstream literature was everything the dalit writers opposed against. It opted for durability and diversity from its dominant predecessors to probe into the deep psychological underworld of the oppressed dominated dalits.

Caste Politics is fervently debated and thoroughly analysed by the dalit writers as an ongoing struggle that continues to reciprocate and undermine their existential concerns. The interference of caste in politics have begun to complicate the Indian electoral policy in bringing in the emotions of caste play and the inequitable resonance of shared citizenship and experience in battling injustice and inequality. The reservation of seats for the students and job seekers alike for the SC/ST is seen as a kind of irrational handling of misused depravity. Kumud Pawde fights her way against such treatment and verbal abuses from the upper castes by refusing to meet her caste as her final destination. .

Dalit literature is a literature of marginality. Both Kumud Pawde and Baby Kamble with their strong sense of feminist sensibilities bring to the foreground the problems of women's struggle and violence in the domestic, educational and societal sphere. They remained strong feminist voices echoing female exertion and brought dalit women empowerment to the forefront of independent lifestyle. Kumud Pawde envisioned the road to education as a means to move forward in the society. Both Kumud Pawde and Baby Kamble found their strength from Ambedkar's principles and teachings. They reflected his teachings and inspirations in their works.

There was marginality within the dalit literature in pushing women to the margins and occupying the centre. The Dalit discourse go parallel with their cause on liberating casteism but separates on the discourse and studies on women. There were instances of patriarchy within the workings of dalit movement and literature. Dalit feminist writers deliberately tried to distinguish their oppression from that of their male counterparts in countering the forms of external and internal forces of repression in their community. Women began to organise and educate themselves on their subjugation and violence, reform the laws and rules on women's issues such as divorce, remarriage, child marriage, girl's education etc. They began to represent themselves in all local, communal and national spheres. The need to be recognised as an individual with moral and intellectual conscience harbouring the same constituent rights and freedom and not linked through her husband's, father's or household name led to the emergence of seeking acknowledgment and detachment to a larger self, a common agenda and vision. Dalit feminism represents dalit women's experiences and stories that dissect through patriarchy and caste as intersecting social structures.

Gender based violence continues on a regular scale in India with cases such as rape and murder breathing by the very sideline of women. India has been ranked amongst the top ten dangerous places to be a woman in the world and Uttar Pradesh falls under the least safe place for women in India. It has been reported that eight women gets raped everyday in Uttar Pradesh. Thousands of such cases are silenced, remained nameless, covered and refused by the authorities to garner any legal investigation because of the lack of money and status. Some few cases reaches national attention which prompts national feelings but is soon defused by the police authority and women are made to defend oneself and succumb to their injuries. There is a huge

disparity existing within the legal sections of police autonomy in regarding who is guilty and the abuse of their power and authority towards the lower caste. The Media and journalists are controlled by the upper caste and accurate information about the case fails to meet the light of the day. Some journalists have been arrested for reporting such alarming details on the atrocities committed towards the dalit commune and there subsist no justice for them. There is caste politics in news coverage and reports. The narrative of the medias have been controlled by the upper caste in order to turn the sentiments of the public towards them and reports that highlight caste atrocities have been single out because an important agenda of the BJP's political narrative is that they speak on behalf of the Hindus.

Caste and gender are intermingled together to justify their violence towards the dalit women. The tragedy of our times is that exploitation and violations of the rights and freedom of dalit women, harassment, sexual assault, rape and murder have become a routinized activity that evokes no sympathy and justice than it should in a civilised society (Chakravarti 152). Sexual violence against dalit women was a means to dominate and retaliate towards the new forms of social mobility and constitutional right the Scheduled Caste received under the Constitution. The administration, medical establishments, the police, judges, lawyers, political parties, the media all work together to subvert the possibilities of justice towards the dalit victims. The Khairlanji atrocity in 2005 in Maharashtra reveals the inner workings of all the legal systems in the Indian administration to bury the truths to the case.

One of the fragmentary debates of the 21st century is the existence of the practise of untouchability in India. Untouchability has been abolished by the Constitution but it still finds its way into the rural villages of India. Caste system is a mindset, a powerful psychological consciousness that continues to havoc between the powerful and weak sections of the society that cannot be discarded with the implementation of legal laws and articles. Under the banner of Untouchability, the Dalits lose their physical body parts such as their hands and legs for merely touching or swaying through an upper caste. The question that exists when it comes to the practicability of this system is the denial of transacting pollution though rape or molestation of a dalit girl. Women remain the target of easy prey for defiling and polluting her family's name. In September 14, 2020 Uttar Pradesh became the spot of media frenzy where a nineteen

year old dalit woman was gang raped in Hathras District and succumbed to her injuries and died on September 29. Albeit she was the victim, the police and the Medias portrayed her as the perpetrator who lured the upper caste men and remained at fault even in her death. The abuse of the police power came to light when they cremated her body for fear of conducting post mortem and altering the accused, symptoms that would lead to the delimitating of their report. There is no justice for the dalits and they remained at the lowest spectrum of the Indian society because caste structure determines the implementation of legal forebodings. The Hathras case in 2020 revealed the workings of caste and gender discrimination as an ongoing progression even in the present times.

The inter-dependence on the upper caste garners them the weight of influence and power over the dalits in an encompassing module of dominance and being dominated. The dalits live at the mercy of the upper castes in a servant-master environment and are barred from improving their livelihood in fear of breaking the chain of repression. The need to be dependent on an upper caste member sowed the seed of negligence and ignorance, hence the intervention of Ambedkar into the centre of Dalit's rebellion. The primary goal of the Dalit's revolution was the acknowledgment of their humanity and the abolishment of caste discrimination. Caste conundrum had divided humanity, distorted the very foundation of humanism and brought implacable truths to the nature of human's greed.

Dalit women are exempted from decision making and political engagements, they are denied entitlement to land ownership or economic benefits and are trapped in extreme poverty because their work pay comes from their caste benefit and they are paid next to nothing. This exclusion makes them vulnerable to violence and caste based slavery and prostitutions. Dalit girls are trafficked into the sex industry by kidnapping them and placing them in towns, cities and brothels. The system of *Devdesi* which requires the assignment of placing dalit girls as offerings to the temple priests for their sexual desires bring to a standstill on the dreams and future of the Temple prostitute. Under this system, young dalit girls are also married off to a god or goddess. It is the worst form of exploitation keeping in mind the concept of untouchability and the stature of caste distinction. *Izaat* or the notion of honour is an important ideal in the patriarchal countries of Hindu and Muslim domains. Women are seen as repositories of family

honour in maintaining the purity of the blood lineage through her. *Izzat* is another form of male prerogative that falls under the system of patriarchy. Since women's sexuality falls under patriarchal and caste control, the community contributes to the validation of this practise on the basis to which the caste is referred to. The Mehrana killings in 1991 hit the daily papers in which Roshni, a dominant caste of Uttar Pradesh eloped with Brijendra, a low caste and were assisted by their friend. They were caught and the Panchayat tortured them the whole night, hanged them and set them on fire. The surprising truth to the murder of these three people came when the villagers and their families supported the decision of the Panchayats maintaining that it was a necessity to carry out the practise of *Izzat* in order to restore the dignity and honour of the family. (Chakravarti 149). In a democratic country like India, a woman have no say when it comes to the practise of *Izzat* either belonging to the same or different caste, her validation as an independent citizen under the Constitution of India sways away.

Baby Kamble's autobiography *The Prison's We Broke* remains central to the writings of dalit literature in general and dalit feminist writings in particular as it put pen to paper the ground reality of dalit women from a feminist perspective. It is far from being an autobiography as the community becomes central to her writings at the dawn of the Ambekarite movement. The variations existing within the formulation of the dalit women character as a sacrificing mother, sister, daughter shedding off her individuality and happiness has been the driving force behind the emancipation of dalit women's writings. It delineates the transition between tradition and modernity. Modernity is fervent to the writings of new dalit writers as emancipated by Ambedkar as integral to the growth of the Dalit's conditions. The arrival of modernity pushes dalit women from the traditional patriarchal role they have known perpetually.

Baby Kamble's autobiography sheds light on the perpetrators and victims both belonging to the dalit community. It is factual that both reside under the domination of the upper caste but within the household, there is another family structure that determines the workings of its system. This is governed by the patriarchal system and the matriarchs that sustained the subsistence of its monopoly. The play of domination and submission annul irretrievably. The mother-in-law holds the power of domineering and directing her sons by keeping the daughter-in-laws afloat and within

her jurisdiction. She finds another slave in order to relish her fury for being captive under one. The intervals of the role play can be looked as another form of ascendancy to satiate one's hunger for power and authority where it resides within their grasp. Caste is a mental psychological slavery and patriarchy stands parallel to that. Patriarchy is deeply rooted in the Indian society and leaves no room for women's freedom and advancement. It has contributed to a disparity between the two genders in determining the hierarchical structure and control of power. While caste and class have been recognised as a form of social power and dominance, patriarchy has not been recognised as a form of power or the damage it evokes in the Indian society. Violence against women is primarily attached with patriarchy hence the outlook between caste violence and patriarchal violence should be deciphered and studied differently.

Kamble's autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* can be regarded as the founding book on Dalit Feminism. It opened up new thematic ground and discussions on gender studies and gave Dalit feminism its laying structures. The descriptions of caste and gender slavery, domestic violence, patriarchal dominance and discrimination open up new and hidden forms of oppression both outside and within the dalit household. Kamble not only presents the hidden forms of caste and gender exploitations but also analyses her community vices and failures. She narrates her concern and anxiety over the issue that the figure and sacrifices of Ambedkar and other reformist Dalits will soon be dragged into the mud and become a forgotten memory.

Kumud Pawde's outlook on the society through her critical narrative on the path of education and employment sheds light on the very attitude of what it takes to be an educated unemployed dalit in India. The reservation of seats and grants to the Scheduled Caste and Tribes have been seen as a bargain, an illegitimate donation and token of being the "sons and daughter-in-laws" of the government. She deals with the external and internal workings of caste and patriarchy and narrates strong sensible dalit women who defy caste and gender restrictions to rise above their preordained status. She uses her critical life narrative or autobiography as a weapon to convey her agony and trauma over major untouched and unheard issues dominating dalit women in India.

Dalit women writings particularly the genre of autobiography have transformed the shape of dalit literature and made it into a worldwide resistance literature. It had succeeded in bringing dalit literature to the foreground of universal recognition and appraisal for the authenticity and realism of its literary texture. Through their mode of writings, it has encouraged and uplifted their readers to fight and resist exploitation and abuse of power in the virtue of caste, gender and religion. One of the main concerns of dalit writings is the issue of identity crisis as they move forward in the social hierarchy. The theme of resistance against patriarchy is evident from both the autobiographies of Baby Kamble and Kumud Pawde, where they struggle to chart their way out from the clutches of this systems and make a name for themselves, breaking the social barriers that confined and excluded them. Dalit women writers have become an epitome or an agency of change. While Pawde looks at the intervention of caste in education and employment institutions, Baby Kamble writes on the transition between tradition and modernity and the intake of caste and gender discrimination that emerges with the rise of modernity in India. If Dalit literature cannot be written by non-dalit writers who are not victims of casteism on the same ground under dalit feminist writings, one cannot write on the trauma of being a dalit woman unless it is a dalit woman.

Feminist dalit women writings are composite and multilayered. With the evolvement of time, it can be seen as traversing new modern forms of caste and gender discrimination in its fold and articulating bold and strong assertions against its dominant forces. Dalit women writings have historical, sociological significance in its perspectives and transcend over mainstream non- dalit writings in its thematic structures and techniques. They have personalised their sufferings and transformed it into a worldwide resistance literature. The unique contribution of Dalit feminist discourse is their view on the oppositional consciousness that are absent in mainstream feminism and dalit male discourse. It is pertinent that scholars focused on their social undermining and damage that patriarchy and caste implements onto the Dalit women folk as a whole. The international intervention of social groups and welfares need to be accessed and shown in order to uplift the women from the shackles of caste and patriarchal slavery. They need to be recognised and celebrated for being a dalit and a woman.

Works Cited

- Arya, Sunaina and Aakash Singh Rathore. *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Routledge, 2020.
- Bama. *Karukku*. Translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Bama. *Sangati Events*. Translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. Translated and edited by H.M. Parshley. Jonathan Cape, 1956.
- Begum, Shameemunnisa. "Prisons We Broke: An Expression of Change". *Veda's Journal of English language and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2018, pp. 271-80.
- Chakravarti, Uma. *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens*. Sage Publications, 2018.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed., Routledge Publication, 2000.
- Dangle, Arjun. *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Orient Longman, 1992.
- Devy, G.N. *The G.N Devy Reader*. Orient Longman, 2006.
- Festino, Cielo Griselda. "Dalit Women Life-Narratives and Literature as Experience". *Acta Scientiarum: Language and Culture*, vol. 37, 2015, pp. 25-36.
- Gnana, Selvin Raj. "Caste System, Dalitization and its Implications in Contemporary India." *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 10, Oct. 2018, pp. 65-71.
- Guru, Gopal. "Dalit Women Talk Differently". *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore, Routledge, 2020.
- Hooks, Bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End Press, 1984.

- Hutton, J.H. *Caste in India: Its Nature, Function and Origins*. Oxford Publications, 1963.
- Ingole, Prashant. "Intersecting Dalit and Cultural Studies: De-brahmanizing the Disciplinary Studies". *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, Vol. 1, Oct. 2020, pp. 91-106.
- James, Olney. *The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Joshi, Barbara R. *Untouchable! Voice of the Dalit Liberation Movement*. Zed Books, 1986.
- Kamble, Baby. *The Prisons We Broke*. 2nd ed., Translated by Maya Pandit, Orient Blackswan, 2020.
- Krishnappa, B. "Dalit Literature". *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*, edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, Navayana, 2013, pp. 106-111.
- Kumar, Bishun. "Dalit Writing Versus Non-Dalit Writing". *Labyrinth: An International Refereed Journal of Postmodern Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, April 2011, pp. 93-98.
- Kumar, Sanjiv. "Interrogating 'Subaltern': A Critique of 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'" *Dalit Literature: Challenges and Potentialities*. Edited by Karan Singh, et al., Creative Books, 2009.
- Kumar, Soumya Nair Anoop. "Indian Dalit Literature- A Reflection of Cultural Marginality". *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics*, vol. 2, no. 4, Dec. 2016, pp. 209-12.
- Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies, and Considerations*. Translated by Alok Mukherjee, Orient Longman, 2004.
- Manifesto, Dalit Panthers. "Dalit Panthers' Manifesto." *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*, edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, Navayana, 2013, pp. 55-64.

- Maragathavalliyar, M.U. "The Sufferings of the Adi-Dravidas". *The Other Half of the Coconut: Women Writing Self Respect History*, edited and Translated by K. Srilata, Zubaan, 2007, pp. 56-59.
- Mishra, K.C. "Literature of Emancipation: Some Reflections on the 21st Century Concerns of Dalit Literature". *Multicultural literature in India: Critical Perspectives Vol-I*, edited by N.D.R. Chandra, Sarup Book Publisher, 2009, pp. 35-42.
- Neelavathi, Trichi. "Will Educated Women take the Initiative?" *The Other Half of the Coconut: Women Writing Self Respect History*, edited and Translated by K. Srilata, Zubaan, 2007, pp. 84-86.
- Nimbalkar, Waman. *Dalit Literature: Nature and Role*. Lakshmi Publishers, 2005.
- Omar, Shabina Nishat. "Dalit Literature: From Oppression to Emancipation". *Labyrinth: An International Refereed Journal of Postmodern Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, April 2011, pp. 54-64.
- Pandian, M.S.S. "Caste and Democracy: Three Paradoxes". *Dalit Literature in India*., edited by Joshil K and et al., Routledge, 2016.
- Pascal, Roy. *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. Routledge, 1960.
- Pawar, Urmila. *The Weave of My Life*. Translated by Maya Pandit, Stree, 2015.
- Pawde, Kumud. *Antasphot*. Anand Prakashan, 1995.
- . "The Story of My Sanskrit". *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*, edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, Navayana, 2013, pp. 71-83.
- Phillips, Layli. "Introduction-Womanism: On Its Own". *The Womanist Reader*. Routledge, 2006.
- Prasad, Amar Nath. *Women Empowerment in Indian Writers in English*. Sarup Book Publishers, 2009.

- Rao, Anupama. "Introduction to Caste, Gender and Indian Feminism". *Gender and Caste*, edited by Anupama Rao, Kali Publishers, 2003.
- Razak, Arisika. "Response". *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. vol. 1, no. 1, 2006, pp. 99-107.
- Rege, Sharmila. "Antasphot" by Kumud Pawde. *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonies*, Zubaan, 2006, pp. 304-44.
- . "Jinne Amuche" by Baby Kamble. *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonies*, Zubaan, 2006, pp. 261-303.
- . *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women Testimonies*. Zubaan, 2006.
- Ryan, Michael. *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*. Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Sarangi, Jaydeep. "Metaphors of Conquest: Towards the Aesthetic of Dalit Feminism through Select Texts and Contexts". *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, vol. 10, 2018, pp. 77-83.
- Satyanarayana, K and Susie Tharu. "Dalit Writing: An Introduction". *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*, edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, Navayana, 2013, pp. 7-21.
- Sharma, Shasanka Shekhar. "Autobiographical Theory and Discourse on Naipaul's *Half a Life*". *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies*, edited by N.D.R. Chandra and Fewzai Bedjaoui, Chandra Publications, 2014.
- Singh, Shweta. "Representation of Dalit Women in Dalit's Men's and Women's Autobiography". *The Delhi University Journal of the Humanities & the Social Sciences*, vol. 1, 2014, pp. 39-47.
- Srilata, K. *The Other Half of the Coconut: Women Writing Self-Respect History*. Zubaan, 2007.
- Walby, S. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Blackwell Publishers, 1990.

Zelliot, E. *From Untouchable to Dalit Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. Manohar Publishers, 1996.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Arya, Sunaina and Aakash Singh Rathore. *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Routledge, 2020.

Chakravarti, Uma. *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens*. Sage Publications, 2018.

Kamble, Baby. *The Prisons We Broke*. 2nd ed., Translated by Maya Pandit, Orient Blackswan, 2020.

Pawde, Kumud. *Antasphot*. Anand Prakashan, 1995.

---. "The Story of My Sanskrit". *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*, edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu, Navayana, 2013, pp. 71-83.

Rao, Anupama. "Introduction to Caste, Gender and Indian Feminism". *Gender and Caste*, edited by Anupama Rao, Kali Publishers, 2003.

Rege, Sharmila. *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women Testimonios*. Zubaan, 2006.

Secondary Sources

Bala, Anju. "Giving Voice to Voiceless: A Study of Dalit literature". *Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2014, pp. 36-41.

- Barat, Urbashi and Neelajana Pathak. *Protest and aftermath in Post-War Literature in English*. Surabhi Publications, 2005.
- Basu, Tapan. "Narratives of Suffering: Dalit Perspectives". *Translating Caste*, edited by Tapan Basu. Shurap Publications, 2012.
- Chandalia, H.S. "Dalit Literature: The Question of Representation". *Dalit Literature: Challenges and Potentialities*, edited by Karan Singh, Amod Rai and Jyoti Yadhav, Creative Books, 2009.
- Gulati, Varun, and Garima Dalal. *Multicultural and Marginalized Voices of Postcolonial Literature*. Lexington Books, 2017.
- Guru, Gopal, and Sundar Sarukkai. *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Holmstrom, Lakshmi. "Introduction". *Karukku* by Bama, translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Holmstrom, Lakshmi. "Introduction". *Sangati Events* by Bama, translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Joseph, Ancy. "An Exploration on the Tormenting Expressions of Caste system, through the Narratives of some Dalit Women Writers". *Language in India*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2018, pp. 1-12.
- Kanwar, Neelima. *Resistant Voices*. Anamika Publishers, 2008.
- Kumar, Amit. "Caste and Patriarchy Dominant the Lives of Dalit Women in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*". *Research Scholar- An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations*, vol. 3, no. 3, Aug 2015, pp. 174-205.
- Pandit, Maya. "Introduction". *The Weave of My Life* by Urmila Pawar, translated by Maya Pandit, Stree, 2015.
- Paswan, Mamta. "From Exploitation to Exploration". *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, vol. 8, no. 8, 2017, pp.85-91.

- Radhakisan, Yeshwant Madahav. "The Dalit and Non-Dalit Women Autobiographies". *The Criterion: An International Journal of English*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2011, pp. 1-5.
- Rajaram, V and P Prabhakaran. "A Study of Selected autobiographies in Dalit Literature". *International Journal of English Research*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2018, pp. 19-20.
- Rajkumar. *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*. Orient Blackswan, 2010.
- Satyanarayana, K and Susie Tharu. *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*. Navayana Publishers, 2013.
- Siddiqui, Nikhat. "Dalit Autobiographies". *Humanities & social Science: Interdisciplinary Approach*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2015, pp. 25-28.
- Singh, Bijender. *Indian Dalit Autobiographies: Marginalized Voices*. Authorspress, 2015.
- Smith, E. Dorothy. *The Everyday world as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Northeastern University press, 1987.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.
- Yadhav, Karan Singh. "Locating Women in Dalit Literature: A Study of Sharam Kumar Limbale's Akkarmashi". *Dalit Literature: Challenges and Potentialities*, edited by Karan Singh, Amod Rai and Jyoti Yadhav, Creative Books, 2009.

Webliography

- Arya, S. "Dalit or Brahmanical Patriarchy? Rethinking Indian Feminism". *CASTE/A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, vol. 1, no. 1, Feb. 2020, pp. 217-28, <https://doi.org/10.26812/caste.v1i1.54>.

- Christ, Carol P. "A New Definition of Patriarchy: Control of Women's Sexuality, Private Property and War". *Sage Journals*, 5 April 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735015627949>. Accessed on 15 December 2020.
- Gorringer, Hugo. "Afterword: Gendering Caste: Honor, Patriarchy and Violence". *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 18 Sept. 2018. <http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/4685;DOI:https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.4685>. Accessed on 23 June 2020.
- Mandavkar, Pavan. "Indian Dalit Literature: Quest for Identity to Social Equality". *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 20 Feb. 2015, vol. 3, April 2015, pp. 42-48. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333877318>. Accessed on 27 July 2021.
- Rege, Sharmila. "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Feminist Standpoint Position". *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 33, no. 44, 1998, pp. 39-46. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4407323>. Accessed on 28 March 2021.
- Sen, Shoma. "The Village and the City: Dalit Feminism in the autobiographies of Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar". *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 54, no.1, 2019, pp. 38-51. <https://doi:10.1177/0021989417720251>. Accessed on 7 November 2020.
- Soman, Uthara. "Patriarchy: Theoretical Postulates and Empirical Findings". *JSTOR*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2009, pp. 253-272. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23620688>. Accessed on 19 February 2021.