Caste, Gender and the Aesthetics of Experience in Dalit Autobiographical Narratives: A Dalit Literary Perspective

Ph.D. Thesis

By

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A THESIS

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **CASTE, GENDER AND THE AESTHETICS OF EXPERIENCE IN DALITAUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES: A DALIT LITERARY PERSPECTIVE** in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** and submitted in the **DISCIPLINE OF ENGLISH, Indian Institute of Technology Indore**, is an authentic record of my own work carried out during the time period from July, 2012 to December, 2016 under the supervision of Dr. Amarjeet Nayak, Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Technology Indore.

The matter presented in this thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other institute.

Signature of the student with date
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This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my/our knowledge.

Signature of Thesis Supervisor #1 with date
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Bijaya Kumar Sethi has successfully given his/her Ph.D. Oral Examination held on _____

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Mr. Bijaya Kumar Sethi

Dedicated to

The brave souls who fought

and have been fighting

against the evil called caste

SYNOPSIS

Caste, Gender and the Aesthetics of Experience in Dalit Autobiographical Narratives: A Dalit Literary Perspective

Introduction

From the very inception of the term 'Dalit literature' in the first Dalit Literary Conference in 1958, its struggle to establish itself as a 'literary' genre begins. Dalit literature faces three major challenges: first, as an extension of the Ambedkarite legacy, it emerges as a body of writing in the latter half of the 20th century which entails the caste critique as its primary agenda and thus challenges the very establishment of Hindu social order and dismisses the Brahminical texts that are found to be main sources of casteist ideology. For this revolutionary approach, Dalit literature faces a strong resistance from the upper-caste Hindus who constitute the majority of Hindu society and enjoy their power of being in superior caste positions. Secondly, Dalit literature does not conform to the established mainstream aesthetic norms, because the realities of Dalit lives cannot be captured through such aesthetic norms for the very fact that Dalit life has hardly ever been a point of reference in conceptualizing these norms. Therefore, there is criticism in a large scale from the mainstream intelligentsia that Dalit literature should not be considered as literature because it does not have the aesthetic beauty. Thirdly, Dalit literature not only tries to establish itself as a literary genre but also demarcates its domain to restrict easy entry of the 'upper-caste other' to avoid the misrepresentations of Dalit lives and speak for themselves. Sharankumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations* by (first published in Marathi in 1996

as *Dalit Sahityache Saundaryashastra*, translated into English in 2004) and *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* (2012) by Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai are the two major texts in foregrounding theoretical standpoint of Dalit literature that stands apart as a counter literary culture to the Brahminical literary tradition. Limbale questions the Brahminical aesthetic concepts such as 'satyam' (the truth), 'shivam' (the sacred) and 'sundaram' of being casteist, exclusionist and exploitative and thus replaces them with 'equality, liberty, justice and fraternity' as the aesthetic essence of Dalit literature.

Though the proposition is not made through a rich theoretical grounding, the delineation of the constituting elements of Dalit literature is quite judicious and experience-driven. There is also a deliberate attempt not to overshadow the practical implication of Dalit literature by unnecessarily complicating the discourse with high theories. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986) state that there is a "scarcity of talent" in a minor literature which in fact is beneficial for the minor literature as it allows "the conception of something other than a literature of masters" (17). The absence of 'abundant talent' in a minor literature which Deleuze and Guattari talk about, in my understanding, is not because the writers of a minor literature are inherently less creative but since the community has been kept away from the discourse of knowledge, sometimes they may be found to be a little less skilled in the dominant discourse, in comparison to the mainstream writers. Dalits, for instance, had been denied access to knowledge for centuries since they did not have the right to education and therefore they may not be as skillful in the mainstream knowledge production as the mainstream writers would be. And also they do not want to use the vocabulary of the 'master' and thus prefer not acquiring it. Therefore, Limbale suggests a different language to represent Dalit literature, i.e. the language which Dalits use in their intra-community communications and one that is capable enough to capture the intensity of the Dalit 'lived-experience'. The concept of 'lived-experience' which has been argued for and propagated by Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai in *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*, as the principal tool of Dalit literature makes the

theoretical grounding even stronger. Guru and Sarukkai claim that only a Dalit should represent a Dalit life since she/he only has and the upper-caste 'other' cannot have the 'lived-experience' of being a Dalit. Such an assertion is important because it restricts the dominant 'other' from misrepresenting the Dalit and occupying the literary space which the Dalits create for themselves. It also opens the agency for Dalits to speak for themselves rather than being spoken about by the 'other'.

Establishing a Dalit standpoint on the basis of 'lived experience' though demarcates the insider and outsider domain, it certainly prompts Dalit women to claim their experiential difference as a gendered category within the defined Dalit space. They claim to have an additional set of problems because of their gender identity along with the caste which the Dalit men fail to understand and address. In fact Dalit men are accused of jeopardizing the domestic sphere of Dalit women and thus seen as oppressor like upper-castes. Dalit women identify themselves as a doubly-marginalized category since they are oppressed by the upper-castes both because of their caste and gender, and by their own men because of the patriarchy within the community. Gopal Guru in his article "Dalit Women Talk Differently" (1995) states that "dalit men are reproducing the same mechanisms against their women which their high caste adversaries had used to dominate them" (2548). Sharmila Rege (1998, 2013) observes how Indian mainstream feminism and the Dalit movements in the post-Ambedkar India have sidelined Dalit women's issues. To indicate how the Indian mainstream feminism ignores the issues of Dalit women, Rege writes, "The upper caste of feminist modern is thus signified as absence of caste in claiming to represent the ideal subject of feminist politics…" (*Writing Caste* 66). Even the literary representation of Dalit women by the Dalit men is stereotypical as they often appear in the roles of passive house wives and mothers and therefore Dalit women's world is grossly misrepresented. Due to such structured discriminations and misrepresentations of Dalit women both in socio-political and literary spheres Dalit women seek for a space of their own where they can speak for themselves and articulate the immediate realities of

their lives. Rege names it as a 'Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position', and for Synthia Stephen, it is 'Dalit Womanism'.

Research Gaps:

Dalit literature is generally studied from socio-political point of view, but its definition as 'literature' is often rejected by the mainstream critics such as Shrawan K Sharma, N. S Phadke, Kusumvati Deshpande and many others as they find a scarcity of literary elements in it. To respond to such criticisms, an aesthetic analysis of Dalit literature is much needed to explicate the aesthetic norms of Dalit literature which will strengthen its ground as a literary genre. Works such as Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*, Guru and Sarukkai's *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*, Omprakash Valmiki's *Dalit Sahitya ka Soundaryashastra* (published in Hindi, 2001, can be translated as The Aesthetics of Dalit Literature) and Toral Jitin Gajarawal's *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism* and *the Crisis of Caste* (2013) provide a theoretical grounding and outline the aesthetic features of Dalit literature, but there is a need to carry it forward by engaging these theories with the primary Dalit literary texts to locate the literary tropes, folklores, symbols and images used by the Dalit writers and how they are different from mainstream literary elements. Looking into a recently published book called *Dalit Literatures in India* (2016), which is a collection of critical essays published by Routledge, one can easily say that there is hardly any focus on Dalit aesthetics because not even a single essay is found to be dedicated for the further development of Dalit aesthetics. Therefore, the thesis has a valid enough reason for looking into the issue of 'aesthetics' in Dalit literature.

This thesis dedicates a major portion to address the Dalit feminist issues. It is found that Indian feminism has been exclusionist in terms of addressing Dalit women's issues. Though a few mainstream feminist critics such as Nivedita Menon, Uma Chakravarti, Surbani Guha Ghosal have registered the growing dissatisfaction of Dalit women towards Indian feminism they have not gone into the details to find out ways to minimize the gaps. Nevertheless Anupama Rao,

Sharmila Rege, and the Dalit critic and activist Synthia Stephen make an effort to understand the problems in Indian feminism in terms of addressing Dalit women's issues and thus demand for a Dalit feminist standpoint. Taking it forward from them the thesis goes into the details of the history of feminism in India to analyze how Dalit women have been sidelined from the Indian feminist project and how it continues even today which prompts Dalit women to demand a separate literary space of their own.

While talking about the exploitation of Dalit women in the purview of Dalit literature, the immediate focus goes to the upper-caste oppressors; therefore the oppression of Dalit women within the community by their own men has largely been ignored. Thus, the thesis undertakes an analysis of Dalit women's autobiographical narratives to explicate the embedded patriarchy within the Dalit community, along with a comparative analysis between Dalit men's autobiographical narratives and Dalit women's autobiographical narratives to pinpoint the absences and misrepresentations of Dalit women in the Dalit men's autobiographical narratives.

Since Dalit women are the most marginalized among the Dalits, the general focus of the studies on Dalit women goes on to highlight the multiple marginality of Dalit women which represents Dalit women as a perpetually victimized category and thus, the possibilities and ways in which Dalit women fight back and enjoy their lives are largely neglected. The thesis has its own unique place as through a close reading of Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, it explores the different active and passive ways through which Dalit women fight back against their exploitations and find out their own ways of enjoying life.

Research Questions and Objectives:

The above mentioned research gaps identified in the domain of Dalit literature raise the following questions: What is aesthetics and how does it function in literature to define something as literary or non-literary? Is there a scope of

analyzing Dalit literature from an aesthetic point of view? If so, what are the aesthetic features of Dalit literature and how are they executed by the Dalit writers in their writings? How and why are these aesthetic features different from the mainstream aesthetic features? Why is lived-experience such an important aspect of Dalit literature? How is Dalit women's lived-experience different from those of other women and the Dalit men as well? Why has Indian feminism not been able to address issues of Dalit women? How justified is it to claim for a separate category called 'Dalit women'? Can we view Dalit women as anything other than doubly victimized beings? Can there be an aesthetic analysis of Dalit women's world? This thesis makes an attempt to answer these questions through the following objectives: the first objective of the thesis is to explore the term 'aesthetics' and locate the aesthetic features of Dalit literature through a close analysis of Dalit autobiographical narratives so that the criticism that characterizes Dalit literature as 'unaesthetic' or 'non-literary' can be contested. The second objective of the thesis is to anchor for a 'Dalit feminist' stand point or a 'Dalit womanist' standpoint and reason it by exposing the inability of Indian feminism in addressing Dalit women's issues. This is done through a detailed analysis of feminist movements in India along with bringing in instances from Dalit women's autobiographical narrative which reflect on the same subject. The third objective is to do a comparative analysis between Dalit men's autobiographical narratives and Dalit women's autobiographical narratives to pinpoint the absences and misrepresentations of Dalit women by the Dalit men writers. This also exposes the inbuilt patriarchy within the Dalit community which the Dalit women talk of exclusively in their autobiographical narratives. The fourth objective of the thesis is to go beyond the victimized image of the Dalit women and explore the means and the ways in which they fight back and enjoy their life which they describe in their autobiographical narratives.

Methodology and Discussion:

The thesis deals with the issues of caste, gender and aesthetics from an experiential point of view within the purview of Dalit literature, and thus

undertakes a close reading of Dalit autobiographical narratives to examine the issues by reflecting upon the lived-experiences of Dalits. The thesis enlists Dalit men's and women's autobiographical narratives as the primary texts which are first published in different regional languages and then translated into English.

The introductory chapter (Chapter I) starts with a brief discussion on the emergence and growth of Dalit literature and how Dalit autobiographical narrative gradually develops into the most effective genre of Dalit literature. The chapter goes further to investigate the development of autobiography as a literary genre with the intention to project how autobiography begins in the western literary tradition as a means of the celebration of privileged White individual self. But in more recent times, the intervention of the marginal voices such as African Americans and Dalits (mainly in the Indian context) redefine autobiography not as a literary space meant for the celebration of the individual self but as an assertion of the marginal-self as part of the marginalized community. The chapter concludes with a justification of why the term 'Dalit autobiographical narrative' is used instead of 'Dalit autobiography'.

The second chapter "From Experience to Aesthetic: Locating Dalit Aesthetic Features in Dalit Autobiographical Narratives" begins with an analysis of how the Hindu mainstream critics such as Shrawan K Sharma (2012), N. S Phadke (2004), Kusumvati Deshpande (1987) try to sideline Dalit literature from the literary sphere, categorizing it as a historical and sociological body of writing which does not have any aesthetic relevance to be discussed in literary arena. To respond to the criticism, this chapter solely looks at 'aesthetics', with special reference to the mainstream literature in the Indian context, as an instrument of domination as George Yudice (1990) states,"… the aesthetic is a major ideological instrument by which the bourgeoisie constructed and maintained hegemony throughout modernity"(132). The chapter brings in Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' to theorize how ideas and concepts are used by the privileged groups to gain dominance over the other marginal groups of the society. With the help of the Bakhtinian concept of "speech genres", the chapter argues that there

are different kinds of speeches and modes of narration used in literature according to the subject matter and objectives of writing. By using Dalit critics such as Sharan Kumar Limbale, Omprakash Valmiki and Gopal Guru, the chapter arrives at the conclusion that Dalit literature has its own aesthetics which is manifested through the truthful representation of Dalit consciousness, Dalit lived-experience, Dalit culture and language, Dalit folklore. The intention of this literature is to constitute a counter narrative to the Brahminical casteist ideology and constitute a literary paradigm based on Ambedkar's ideas of equality, liberty, justice and brotherhood. The chapter goes further for a textual analysis of Dalit autobiographical narratives such as Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (2001), Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* (2003), Bama's *Sangati* (2005), Aravinda Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (2007), Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* (2008), Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2009) and Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh: Against the Night* (2010) to explore how Dalit writers bring in the above mentioned aesthetic elements in their autobiographies through Dalit symbols, folklores and tropes.

The third chapter "Claiming the Difference: Departure from Feminism to Dalit Womanism" argues for a separate literary space for Dalit women where they can speak for themselves. The claim is made against the backdrop of Indian feminism which is found to have ignored Dalit women's issues. Through a literature survey of Indian feminism (Gangooli, 2007; Anagol, 2005; Chatterjee 1993; Kumar, 1993), it is found that Indian feminism has been a 'Brahminical feminism' (Rao 2001) since it has taken the issues of upper-caste women only and treated Dalit women as the 'other' by ignoring their issues. The chapter brings in instances from Dalit women's autobiographical narratives which reflect on the same issues. For instance Kumud Pawade, in her autobiographical narrative *Antasphot* (1981) talks about a Dalit girl who delivers a brave speech making the difference clear between the Dalit women and the upper caste women: "We live in the hutments outside the village, like insignificant worms in drainage water. Have you ever given a thought? Our women are raped. Raped not only because they are women, but also for revenge". Pawade also holds a similar kind of view,

as she considers "Indian dalit woman is the most dalit (oppressed) among all women" (316). Viramma in *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* (2000) and Bama in *Sangati: Events* (2005) also describes how Dalit women are exploited by upper caste women physically and sexually in the fields, and discriminated against by the upper-caste women because of their caste. To address the specific issues of Dalit women identified on the basis of lived-experience, the chapter asserts the concept of 'difference' in the feminist context as claimed by African American and Dalit feminist scholars such as Mary Maynard, Caren Kaplan, Sharmila Rege, Cynthia Stephen, etc., as a theoretical tool that is capable of mapping the differences in degree and nature of exploitation between the women who confirm to the dominant feminist discourse and the women with a subjugated cultural identity in terms of race, caste or ethnicity. The chapter further discusses 'Dalit feminist stand point' (Rege 1998) and 'Dalit womanism' (Stephen 2009) as concepts of 'difference' that mark a departure from mainstream Indian feminism and demarcate the domain of Dalit women's literary space.

Taking it forward from the critics such as Gopal Guru (1995) and Sharmila Rege (1998) who point out how the Dalit women have been oppressed and misrepresented by Dalit men, the fourth chapter, "Mapping Multiple Marginalities of Dalit Women: A Comparative Study of Dalit Men's and Women's Autobiographical Narratives" tries to explore the silences and misrepresentations of Dalit women by Dalit male writers. It also brings in a close reading of Dalit women's autobiographical narratives to expose the inbuilt patriarchy within the community which Dalit male writers rarely talk about. Most of the Dalit men's autobiographical narratives such as Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (2015), Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (2001), Aravinda Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (2007) and many others, stereotype Dalit women as helpless mothers or passive housewives. In addition they hardly talk about the exploitation of Dalit women by their own men. In contrast, Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, such as Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* (2008), Bama's *Sangati: Events* (2005) and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2009) openly speak about the oppression of Dalit women within the

community where the husbands of the Dalit women are found to be the main oppressors. Many examples of Dalit women like Mariamma, Thaayi and Susheela are found in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives who are beaten mercilessly by their drunkard husbands on a daily basis. Therefore, the concepts such as 'home' and 'marriage, which are often portrayed as a safe place for women and romanticized as a sacred institution, respectively, are often questioned in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives. To express the damaging effect of marriage in case of Dalit women, Bama quotes her mother, "…you become a slave from the very day you are married" (43). Urmila Pawar also has a similar kind of impression about marriage as she finds her husband to be one of the most daunting impediments in her growth as an independent woman. To explore more about how patriarchy operates through the concepts such as 'home', 'marriage' and the patriarchal construct of 'femininity', and relate it to Dalit women's context, the chapter engages with critics such as Simone De Beauvoir (1949), Betty Friedan (1963) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1796). The chapter explores many lived-realities of Dalit women's lives which the Dalit men's autobiographical narratives fail to do.

The fifth chapter, "Speaking and Speaking Differently: Language as Resistance, Liberation and Celebration in Dalit Women's Life" goes beyond the victimized image of Dalit women to explore how they talk back and resist the oppressor and find their own ways of enjoying life. The focus is mainly on language as Bama's *Sangati: Events*, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* and Viramma in *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* talk of how the Dalit women talk back to the oppressor with harsh language to scare him and keep him at bay. It is also interesting to observe the passive techniques of resistance Dalit women use in their daily life in the situations where an overt resistance is not possible, quite similar to what James Scott observes about the peasants of Southeast Asia in his masterpiece *Weapon of the Weak: the Everyday forms of Resistance* (1985). It is also interesting how they break and displace the morphological boundaries of the upper-caste linguistic order by using the same words in a different context than that is used by the upper castes and import a completely different meaning. The

discussion is contextualized by using Spivak's interpretation of the concept 'catachresis' which signifies the ability of the colonized to take something from the colonizer and encode it with a different meaning. It is also interesting to see how Dalit women use the work field as a space of enjoyment by sharing their daily incidents with each other, cracking jokes and teasing each other and singing folk songs while working. Using Simone de Beauvoir's concept of 'realm of immanence' (the domestic space restricted with patriarchal norms) and 'the light of transcendence' (the liberating free space), it is analyzed as to how the work field plays an important role for Dalit women to come out of 'realm of immanence' and achieve 'the light of transcendence'. Pawar describes one of the incidents as a child when she walks from her school in an evening accompanied by a group of Dalit women who return back from the work. She writes, "They would talk freely, without any restrain, in a language, vivid and robust, full of various cadence, tones and rhythms that evoked many colors and smells of things from different places" (3). The daylong labor does not exhaust them; rather they are energized as they are in a free space where they can express themselves freely. In her essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" Virginia Woolf claims to have similar observations as she explains how she and her friends feel increasingly free and delighted as soon as they step out of their houses into the London streets. Their inner selves transform into free beings possessed with the newly gained freedom through which they realize themselves.

Conclusion:

The thesis contributes not only to Dalit literary discourse but also literary discourse at large from many accounts. The conceptualization of Dalit literary aesthetics on the basis of lived-experience brings in a fresh perspective to study literary aesthetics and offers mainstream critics the opportunity to inform themselves about the aesthetic views of the people whose lives have hardly ever been taken into account for an aesthetic analysis. It may interest the mainstream critics to engage with the debate of 'lived-experience' to understand whether they

can inculcate similar kind of a view point which would help them understand the lives which they have neglected so far.

The Dalit feminist stand point or Dalit womanism, which the thesis argues for, not only provides a space for Dalit women to speak for themselves but also contributes to Indian feminism at large as it can be helpful for the mainstream feminists to understand that caste, gender and patriarchy are interrelated. Control over women's sexuality which is one of the main features of Brahminical patriarchy is primarily intended to maintain the caste boundaries. In many Brahminical texts women are compared with 'Sudras' and in Hindu society women are treated like untouchables when they menstruate, which signifies that there is an intrinsic relationship between caste and gender. Sharmila Rege suggests the upper caste feminists to 'reinvent themselves as dalit feminists', because reinventing themselves as dalit feminists will not only help them understand Dalit women's problems well, but also help them to get a clearer perspective of comprehending gender issues at large.

By bringing in a comparative analysis between Dalit men's autobiographical narratives and women's autobiographical narratives, the thesis exposes the misrepresentations of Dalit women by Dalit men writers, which should educate Dalit men to become more sensitive about Dalit women's issues. The exposition of the inbuilt patriarchy within the Dalit community which is done through a close analysis of Dalit women's autobiographical narratives should be a matter of introspection for Dalit men and it should encourage them to address the issue openly.

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Presentations at National and International Conferences / Seminars

- "Mapping Multiple Marginalities and Exploring Dalit Women's World: A Comparative Study of Dalit Men's and Women's Autobiographical Narratives" in the AHRC funded international conference 'Cast(e)ing Gender in Dalit Literature'. Held at the English Department at Savitribai Phule Pune University, India, December. 14-15, 2015.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the study:

Though the term 'Dalit literature' came into existence with the first Dalit Literary Conference in 1958 (Satyanarayana and Tharu 12), Dalit voices can be traced back to Bhakti movements with saint poets like Chokhamela, Ravidas and Tukaram, as they were the ones who started questioning the *varna* system and Brahminical hegemony through their *abhangas* (a particular form of devotional poetry). Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr. Ambedkar were the two modern Dalit thinkers and activists whose activism, writings and speeches had set the premise of Dalit literature in twentieth century. However, Dalit literature gathered recognition with the rise of Dalit Panthers (1972) which was established by the Marathi Dalit poet and activist Namdeo Dhasal, later joined by Raja Dhale and Arun Kamble who published poems, essays and pamphlets against casteism. The Dalit literary movement was carried forward by Annabhau Sathe, Daya Pawar, Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav, Waman Nimbalkar, Laxman Mane, etc. With the progress of Dalit literary movement, along with poems, short stories and essays, Dalit autobiographical narratives became more popular, with the arrival of Marathi Dalit autobiographical narratives such as Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (1987), Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (1984), Laxman Mane's *Upara* (1984), Vasant Moon's *Vasti* (1995), Laxman Gaikwad's *Uchalya* (1998), etc. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, the Dalit autobiographical narrative gradually grew up as the most favoured literary genre of Dalit literature, because it provided the space for Dalit writers to represent their raw experiences of caste discrimination. By registering the caste experiences and cultural practices of Dalits, Dalit autobiographical narrative to a large extent functioned as a repository of Dalit history which had hardly ever been a part of mainstream history. Therefore Dalit autobiographical narrative became a suitable space for Dalit assertion.

This chapter contextualizes the study of autobiography primarily by exploring how autobiography grows up being a literary genre and how as a literary space it is reoriented by the marginal voices such as African Americans and Dalits. It analyses how autobiography which starts as an act of celebrating the achievements of the White dominant self, is molded into a space for self-assertion and representation of community culture by African Americans. The chapter further examines how autobiography flourishes as a literary genre in colonial India under the influence of the British education and remains confined to the dominant upper castes as an act of registering self-achievements in history, until the Dalit voices use the very literary space for self-assertion and community expression.

1.2 Tracing the Tradition of Autobiography from the Center to the Margin:

Unlike the modern autobiography which, according to Rockwell Gray (1982), has been a "mere self-display" of a "highly differentiated individual personality", its early form carries a religious agenda of scrutinizing one's soul by acknowledging their faults and mistakes committed in the course of their lives. In other words, the idea of putting one's own life on the pages begins as an act of "religious confession" in the West (31-32). Bhikhu Parekh (2006) takes the investigation a step further as he claims that the traces of autobiographical writings can be recognized with the Egyptian kings' descriptions of their own achievements which were meant to be inscribed on their tombs. Not only Egyptian kings but there are also examples of Roman statesmen such as Lutatious Catulus, Scarus, Rutilious, Rufus, Sulla, Caesar and others who noted down the accounts of the achievements of their lives to create a favorable view among their contemporaries and set examples for their successors. Plato's "Seventh Epistle" (one among the thirteen letters written by Plato during 4^{th} century BC) is one such example wherein Plato describes an important period of his life. But Parekh comes to an agreement with Gray as he states that the practice of writing about one's own life rather than their selective achievements only starts early in the Christian tradition. St Augustine's *Confessions* (AD 397-8) is the best known confessional writing,

though there are men such as Justine the Martyr, the Bishop of Poitier, Gregory of Nazianus and Hilarius who have similar kind of works in their name. Though published much later in comparison to St Augustine, Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1789) can be included in the same catalog. W. P. Scargill's *The Autobiography of a Dissenting Minister* (1834) is considered to be the first autobiography as Scargill first uses the word 'autobiography' in reference to the book on his life.

The tradition of writing autobiography is primarily considered to be a self-conscious and Western phenomenon. In his essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography", Georges Gusdorf describes that the autobiography is predominantly found in the Western culture and "expresses a concern peculiar to Western man" (29). According to Arnold Krupat (1981), "autobiography as a term to denote a particular kind of self-written life is an invention of comparatively recent date" (307). In other words, autobiography is a recent development in comparison to the other forms of writings, which revolves around the 'self'. The 'self' emerges as a subject of discourse in the West with the philosophical interventions of Descartes, Hume, Kant and Hegel which influences autobiographical writing to develop into a literary genre. Though there were traces of autobiographical writings such as inscriptions, diaries, confessions and memoirs which existed much before the 'self' became a conscious point of discourse in the West, it would not be baseless to say that the proliferation of autobiography as a literary genre is significantly influenced by the school of thought that believes in the centrality of 'self'. But in comparison to the West, the social, cultural and philosophical scenario, in this context, is quite different in India. There is a fundamental difference between the Western and Indian philosophical perception of 'self'. The conception of 'self' in Indian philosophy is "morally constituted by the tradition of renunciation" which does not believe in the celebration of material achievements of self "but rather aspires towards self-effacing moral qualities". In contrast, "the western self is driven by the need to demand recognition from other" (Guru 158), and thus proclamation of the

material achievements of 'self' has been one of the integral aspects of Western culture.

Except the difference in philosophical roots, the 'community' culture of Indian society which believes in the concept of 'Vasudeiva Kutumbakam' (a Sanskrit phrase taken from the Vedas which means 'the whole world is a single family') has always been a powerful force in Indian society that holds every individual together without giving ample space for the growth of individualism. Hence, there is little scope for the growth of autobiography in such cultures where the individual "does not feel himself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community" (Gusdorf 29). But in the West, since the concept of 'self' had already evolved prioritizing the existence of the free individual, claiming the 'self' as a way of seeking recognition from the 'other' had become a part of western tradition. It is important to note that the 'other' always plays an important role in sensitizing the 'self-consciousness', precisely because, as Hegel puts it, the "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel 111). Hence, 'self' as a consciousness exists with the existence of 'other' and demands to be acknowledged by the 'other'. With such a self-conscious culture and philosophical tradition, 'self' comes to focus in the Western world as a thinking and attention seeking subject, which provides a platform for the growth of autobiography as an act of self-assertion and often as the celebration of self. Similar socio-cultural atmosphere comes much later in India, after the arrival of the British which is seen as the dawn of modernity in India. Indian society goes through a major socio-cultural transformation under the colonial rules. With the introduction of British education, opening of railways and industrialization, which are considered to be founding steps of modernization, Western culture starts gradually to influence Indian society. The concept of the independent individual and claiming his/her personal identity comes as one of the manifestations of modernity, in India. Therefore Gopal Guru writes, "In India, writing autobiography is a modern phenomenon" (158).

The act of writing autobiography was started by the privileged White Man for glorification of his achievements, with an anticipation of being immortalized in the pages of history. Judith Okely in her essay "Anthropology and autobiography: Participatory experience and embodied knowledge", states that "In the Great White Man tradition, the lone achiever has felt compelled to construct and represent his uniqueness, seemingly in defiance of historical conditions, but actually in tune with the dominant power structures which have rewarded him" (7). In short, Autobiography in the hands of the White Man is not merely a means of proclamation of his achievements, rather the act itself is an exhibition of the privileged state of being in power, in a given social order.

For a long time in the West, the domain of autobiography remains confined to and dominated by the White Man only, till the slave narratives such as Frederic Douglas's *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) come into picture, wherein Black authors narrate their experience as slaves under their racist White masters. For the first time in history, Blacks voice their own experience not essentially as a signature of Blacks coming to power, but as an act of unmasking the brutality of slave tradition set by the dominant as well as hypocritical White society. The extreme physical violence meted upon the Black folk portrayed in these slave narratives, intends to pose a strong subversive resistance against slavery by creating a consciousness about its detrimental effects in the society. Harriet explains that, she pens down her experience not to gather sympathy from the readers but to "arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women in the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse". What is path-breaking here in the African American autobiographical context is the autobiographical space which was used by the dominant individuals for a long time to claim and celebrate the individual self, is now used by the voices from the margin to represent the community. So the African American writers not only made their space in the autobiographical sphere where they could speak through their own

experience but also redefined autobiography where the community was represented through.

Apart from broadening the scope of autobiography by readjusting the individual space into a space of community representation, African American writers used autobiography as a literary space where they could expose the religious hypocrisy of White Christian society. Douglas's first autobiography (*The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave*) has a number of moving anecdotes in which the White masters who were recognized as great religious personalities for their everyday long prayers to Lord Christ, very often whip their slaves, almost for no reason, till they bleed profusely and their bodies become numb in pain. They provide religious justifications for such wretched deeds, and do so in regular intervals to create fear and obedience among the slaves. For instance, Douglass, while talking about Mr. Hopkins, a slave owner who is highly respected in the white community for his religious activities, describes Mr. Hopkins as one who "always managed to have one or more of his slaves to whip every Monday morning. He did this to alarm their fears, and strike terror into those who escaped" (75). Christianity in the hands of white masters is used as a shield to cover all the extreme physical as well as mental violence perpetrated on the black folks, wherein the White masters always find a religious justification to it. Jacobs in her autobiographical narrative explains how the White Christian clergy men indoctrinate the slavehood while baptizing the slaves. Jacobs recalls a White clergy man called Mr. Pike who teaches Christianity to the slaves and during the prayers he repeats certain lines such as, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ" (76). The White masters are positioned in the place of Christ so that they will not be questioned for their any unkind deed and their orders will be followed as the wish of Lord Christ. To condemn such a hypocritical practice of Christianity by the white masters, Douglass writes,

> I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,—a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,—and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. (74)

Depiction of such incidents, which autobiography provided space for, is primarily intended to expose the religious hypocrisy of White Christian society as well as pose a subversive resistance through which the African Americans show the White community their racist faces. The religious indoctrination of slavery and White supremacy in the context of race is comparable to the subordination of Dalits and Upper-caste hegemony in the Indian caste context by the fact that the origins of caste are found in Hindu religious texts such as the *Manusmriti*, though caste is much more complex and multilayered in comparison to race. This is one among the many other dynamics that brings Dalit literature and African American literature to a common ground of analysis. Tracing down the autobiographical tradition from the center to a margin and establishing a connection between African American autobiographical narrative and Dalit autobiographical narrative, to a large extent, is encouraged by the same proposition.

Autobiography in African American literary context evolves to be one of the most successful literary genres to deconstruct the stereotypes that have been thrust upon them. Douglas, for example, aptly uses his autobiographical narrative to crack down the stereotype constructed by the Whites that the Black folk don't like or don't trust the people of their own color. Douglass, in this context, writes,

> It is sometimes said that we slaves do not love and confide in each other. In answer to this assertion, I can say, I never loved any or confided in any people more than my fellow-slaves… I believe we would have died for each other. (82)

Being reoriented by African American writers, autobiography in the West begins to provide space for voices from the margins to speak for themselves and claim their own identity.

The tradition of autobiography in India, which is largely influenced by the Western culture with the arrival of the British, has gone through a similar journey.

In pre-modern India, since Dalits were denied education and their lives were considered trivial, writing an autobiography, for a Dalit, was out of question. Therefore, almost all the early Indian autobiographies such as Banarasidas' *Ardhakathanaka* (1641), Lal Bihari's Day's *Recollections of My School Days* (1873-76), Lala Lajpat Rai's *The Story of My Deportation* (1908), Surendranath Banerjea's *Nation in Making* (1925), M.K Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiment With Truth* (1927), Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936), Mulk Raj Anand's *Apology for Heroism* (1946), Nirad Chandra Chaudhari's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) are written by influential upper caste Hindus. Though Banarasidas' *Ardhakathanaka*, which is considered as the first Indian autobiography, is written in Hindi in verse form, upper caste autobiographies flourish in English in colonial India, mostly as an act of documentation and celebration of their eventful lives and achievements, and in many occasions it appeared as an act of resistance against colonialism.

In comparison to Indian upper caste autobiographies, Dalit autobiographical narratives came quite late and unlike upper caste autobiographies, Dalit autobiographical narratives stood strongly against casteism in India. The first two Dalit autobiographical narratives, which were published at the same time in 1939, were Ambedkar's *Waiting for a Visa* and Rettaimalai's *Jeeviya Saritira Surukkam* which is considered as the first Tamil Dalit autobiography (Ravikumar xi). Following Ambedkar, Hazari's *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste* (1951), D. P Das's *The Untouchable Story* (1985), Balwant Singh's *An Untouchable in the IAS* (1997), D. R Jatava's *A Silent Soldier: An Autobiography* (2000) and Shyamlal's *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* (2001), are some of the Dalit autobiographical narratives that are originally written in English. More than the Dalit autobiographical narratives which are written in English, the autobiographical narratives that are written in Indian languages such as Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada became popular and later got translated into English targeting a wider readership: Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (Marathi: 1978, translated as *Baluta* in 2015), Laxman Mane's *Upara* (Marathi: 1984, translated as *Upara* in 1997), Sharankumar Limbale's

Akkarmashi (Marathi: 1984, translated as *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* in 2003), Narendra Jadhav's *Amcha Baap Aani Amhi* (Marathi: 1993, translated into English as *Outcaste: A Memoir* in 2003), Vasant Moon's *Vasti* (Marathi: 1995, translated as *Growing up Untouchables in India* in 2001), Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (Hindi: 1997, translated as *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* in 2007), Laxman Gaikwad's *Uchalya* (Marathi: 1998, translated as *The Branded* in 1998), Aravinda Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (Kannada:1994, translated as *Government Brahmana* in 2007), Siddhalingaiah's *Ooru Keri* (Kannada:1996, Translated as *Ooru Keri* in 2003), Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh* (Punjabi: 1997, Translated as *Changiya Rukh: Against The Night* in 2010) and K. A Gunasekharan's *Vadu* (Tamil: 2005, translated as *The Scar* in 2009).

Apart from the Dalit male autobiographical narratives, there are a few Dalit women autobiographical narratives which are written from a Dalit feminist point of view along with the caste issues, which are translated into English. Baby Kamble's *Jina Amucha* (Marathi: 1986, translated as *The Prison We Broke* in 2008), Bama's *Karukku* (Tamil: 1992, translated as *Karukku* in 2000) and *Sangati* (Tamil: 1994, translated as *Sangati: Events* in 2005), Urmila Pawar's *Aaydan* (Marathi: 2003, translated as *The Weave of My Life* in 2009) are some of the women's Dalit autobiographies to bring on the board. Therefore, one can safely say that an important section of Dalit literature is available in the form of autobiographical narratives not merely because they are considerable in number but because Dalit autobiographical narratives bring in Dalit culture, history and most importantly the lived-experience as an element of Dalit aesthetics.

I prefer to use the term 'Dalit autobiographical narrative' instead of 'Dalit autobiography' for certain reasons. Firstly, the traditional definition of autobiography, as James Cox states it, "a narrative of a person's life written by himself." (145), but Dalit autobiographical narrative does not exclusively refer to the written texts, because some of the Dalit autobiographical narratives are orally narrated to persons who have translated them into written texts. For instance, *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* (19987) which has multiple authors such as

Viramma, Jean-Luc Racine, Josiane Racine. The very Dalit autobiographical narrative is the representation of the life story of Viramma, a Tamil Dalit old woman who describes her life story to Josiane Racine in Tamil, their shared first language. It was first published in French as *Une vie paria. Le rire des asservis, Inde du Sud* (1995) and latter translated into English. Similarly, James M. Freeman's *Untouchable: An Indian Life History* (1979) is an account of Muli, a Dalit man, who narrates his life to Freeman in his mother tongue Odia. Both the books are written from the first person perspective making 'I' as the subject. Therefore the addition of the term 'narrative' to autobiography allows the Dalit autobiographical narrative to be more inclusive by extending the autobiographical space to the oral narrative. Secondly, many Dalit autobiographical narratives are about particular episodes of their lives which do not fit in the conventional understanding of autobiography. For example, Ambedkar's autobiographical narrative *Waiting for a Visa*, having six sections, is a very short document wherein Ambedkar, through some of the select incidents of his life, tries to expose the fact that, caste in India is not only practiced among the Hindus but also among other religious communities such as Muslims and Parsis. Ambedkar writes "a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Parsi…a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Mohammedan" (Ambedkar 12). Perhaps for the same reason, Ambedkar found Buddhism as a safe religious and spiritual abode which resulted in his conversion into Buddhism. The intention of bringing such an autobiographical narrative into discussion is to suggest that the implication of the term 'narrative' in addition to autobiography certainly allows us to include such writings which compile a few but important incidents of a person's life. Thirdly, the rise of Dalit autobiographical narratives is largely influenced by the slave narratives and therefore, there are noticeable similar characteristics between Dalit autobiographical narratives and slave narratives. Though it is rare to find direct references of slave narratives in Dalit autobiographical narratives, the very fact that Dalit Panthers organization (1972) was influenced by the Black Panthers Party (1966) is a substantial proof that not only Dalit autobiographical narratives

but the Dalit literary movement as a whole is influenced by African American social struggle and literary tradition. Dalit Panthers was a social organization established by the Marathi Dalit poet and activist Namdeo Dhasal, later joined by Raja Dhale and Arun Kamble who published poems, essays and pamphlets against casteism and exploitation of Dalits.

Finally, the reason for using the term 'Dalit autobiographical Narrative' is to refer to the narrative formation of Dalit community, its culture and history in the Dalit autobiographical narratives. Though the Dalit autobiographical narratives describe the lives of the individual authors, they represent the whole Dalit community, its culture, problems and atrocities faced by the community. Therefore, the author becomes the representative of the whole community and her / his autobiographical narrative becomes the narrative of the Dalit community. Many times the voice of the individual narrator "I", in the Dalit autobiographical narratives turns into the collective voice "We". While describing his miserable Dalit life in the Maharwada, in his autobiographical narrative *Akkarmashi*, Limbale's voice turns into collective "We" as he writes, "We are the garbage the village throws out… The umbilical cord between our locality and the village had snapped, as if the village torn asunder had thrown us out of it" (5). Here the story is not of a Dalit individual, rather the story is of the whole community. Aravind Malgatti, one of the well-known Kannada Dalit writers, in his autobiographical narrative *Government Brahman* which is considered to be the first Kannada Dalit autobiographical narrative, makes it clear that his experiences as a Dalit are not specific to himself, rather every other Dalit must have similar kinds of experience. He deliberately says, "…I cannot resist saying that these experience are those of every ordinary dalit" (1). Likewise, in the foreword to her autobiographical narrative in Marathi *Jina Amucha*, Baby Kamble makes it clear that she is writing the community history in it. Therefore she states, "I am writing this history for my sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and my grandchildren to show how the community suffered because of the chain of slavery so that they realize what ordeal of fire the Mahars have passed through" (Kamble xiv). By bringing the community history into the autobiographical framework, the Dalit

autobiographical narratives extend the individual narrative space to a collective narrative space as well as represent a community identity.

1.3 Chapterwise summary:

The introductory chapter (Chapter 1) traces the progress of the autobiographical tradition from center to the margin and from the West to the Indian context, and draws the following conclusions: firstly, autobiography no more remains confined to the dominant White Male as it started out, but with the rise of marginal voices such as African Americans and Dalits, the terrain opens up a space for the margin. Secondly, autobiography which was used as a space for the representation of recognized individuals becomes a space through which a community is represented along with the individual. Thirdly, autobiography in the hands of African Americans and Dalits is not used as a space for celebration of self, rather a forum where they assert their marginal selves and deconstruct the negative stereotypes thrust upon them by the dominant groups. Finally, the advent of African American and Dalit autobiographical narratives bring in a number of oral narratives which helps in reviving the oral tradition and breaks away from the absolute authority of the written texts in the sphere of literature.

The second chapter "From Experience to Aesthetic: Locating Dalit Aesthetic Features in Dalit Autobiographical Narratives" begins with an analysis of how the Hindu mainstream critics such as Shrawan K Sharma (2012), N. S Phadke (2004), Kusumvati Deshpande (1987) try to sideline Dalit literature from the literary sphere, categorizing it as a historical and sociological body of writing which does not have any aesthetic relevance to be discussed in literary arena. To respond to the criticism, this chapter solely looks at 'aesthetics', with special reference to the mainstream literature in the Indian context, as an instrument of domination as George Yudice (1990) states,"… the aesthetic is a major ideological instrument by which the bourgeoisie constructed and maintained hegemony throughout modernity"(132). The chapter brings in Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' to theorize how ideas and concepts are used by the privileged groups to gain dominance over the other marginal groups of the society. With the

help of the Bakhtinian concept of "speech genres", the chapter argues that there are different kinds of speeches and modes of narration used in literature according to the subject matter and objectives of writing. By using Dalit critics such as Sharan Kumar Limbale, Omprakash Valmiki and Gopal Guru, the chapter arrives at the conclusion that Dalit literature has its own aesthetics which is manifested through the truthful representation of Dalit consciousness, Dalit lived-experience, Dalit culture and language, Dalit folklore. The intention of this literature is to constitute a counter narrative to the Brahminical casteist ideology and constitute a literary paradigm based on Ambedkar's ideas of equality, liberty, justice and brotherhood. The chapter goes further for a textual analysis of Dalit autobiographical narratives such as Valmiki's *Joothan* (2001), Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi: The Outcaste* (2003), Bama's *Sangati* (2005), Aravinda Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (2007), Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* (2008), Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2009) and Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh: Against the Night* (2010) to explore how Dalit writers bring in the above mentioned aesthetic elements in their autobiographies through Dalit symbols, folklores and tropes.

The third chapter "Claiming the Difference: Departure from Feminism to Dalit Womanism" argues for a separate literary space for Dalit women where they can speak for themselves. The claim is made against the backdrop of Indian feminism which is found to have ignored Dalit women's issues. Through a literature survey of Indian feminism (Gangooli, 2007; Anagol, 2005; Chatterjee 1993; Kumar, 1993), it is found that Indian feminism has been a 'Brahminical feminism' (Rao 2001) since it has taken the issues of upper-caste women only and treated Dalit women as the 'other' by ignoring their issues. The chapter brings in instances from Dalit women's autobiographical narratives which reflect on the same issues. For instance Kumud Pawade, in her autobiographical narrative *Antasphot* (1981) talks about a Dalit girl who delivers a brave speech making the difference clear between the Dalit women and the upper caste women: "We live in the hutments outside the village, like insignificant worms in drainage water. Have you ever given a thought? Our women are raped. Raped not only because

they are women, but also for revenge". Pawade also holds a similar kind of view, as she considers "Indian dalit woman is the most dalit (oppressed) among all women" (316). Viramma in *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* (2000) and Bama in *Sangati* (2005) also describes how Dalit women are exploited by upper caste women physically and sexually in the fields, and discriminated against by the upper-caste women because of their caste. To address the specific issues of Dalit women identified on the basis of lived-experience, the chapter asserts the concept of 'difference' in the feminist context as claimed by African American and Dalit feminist scholars such as Mary Maynard, Caren Kaplan, Sharmila Rege, Cynthia Stephen, etc., as a theoretical tool that is capable of mapping the differences in degree and nature of exploitation between the women who confirm to the dominant feminist discourse and the women with a subjugated cultural identity in terms of race, caste or ethnicity. The chapter further discusses 'Dalit feminist stand point' (Rege 1998) and 'Dalit womanism' (Stephen 2009) as concepts of 'difference' that mark a departure from mainstream Indian feminism and demarcate the domain of Dalit women's literary space.

Taking it forward from the critics such as Gopal Guru (1995) and Sharmila Rege (1998) who point out how the Dalit women have been oppressed and misrepresented by Dalit men, the fourth chapter, "Mapping Multiple Marginalities of Dalit Women: A Comparative Study of Dalit Men's and Women's Autobiographical Narratives" tries to explore the silences and misrepresentations of Dalit women by Dalit male writers. It also brings in a close reading of Dalit women's autobiographical narratives to expose the inbuilt patriarchy within the community which Dalit male writers rarely talk about. Most of the Dalit men's autobiographical narratives such as Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (2015), Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2001), Aravinda Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (2007) and many others, stereotype Dalit women as helpless mothers or passive housewives. In addition they hardly talk about the exploitation of Dalit women by their own men. In contrast Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, such as Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* in (2008), Bama's *Sangati: Events* in (2005), Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* in (2009) openly speak about the

oppression of Dalit women within the community where the husbands of the Dalit women are found to be the main oppressors. Many examples of Dalit women like Mariamma, Thaayi and Susheela are found in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives who are beaten mercilessly by their drunkard husbands on a daily basis. Therefore, the concepts such as 'home' and 'marriage, which are often portrayed as a safe place for women and romanticized as a sacred institution, respectively, are often questioned in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives. To express the damaging effect of marriage in case of Dalit women, Bama quotes her mother, "…you become a slave from the very day you are married" (43). Urmila Pawar also has a similar kind of impression about marriage as she finds her husband to be one of the most daunting impediments in her growth as an independent woman. To explore more about how patriarchy operates through the concepts such as 'home', 'marriage' and the patriarchal construct of 'femininity', and relate it to Dalit women's context, the chapter engages with critics such as Simone De Beauvoir (1949), Betty Friedan (1963) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1796). The chapter explores many lived-realities of Dalit women's lives which the Dalit men's autobiographical narratives fail to do.

The fifth chapter, "Speaking and Speaking Differently: Language as Resistance, Liberation and Celebration in Dalit Women's Life" goes beyond the victimized image of Dalit women to explore how they talk back and resist the oppressor and find their own ways of enjoying life. The focus is mainly on language as Bama's *Sangati: Events*, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* and Viramma in *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* talk of how the Dalit women talk back to the oppressor with harsh language to scare him and keep him at bay. It is also interesting to observe the passive techniques of resistance Dalit women use in their daily life in the situations where an overt resistance is not possible, quite similar to what James Scott observes about the peasants of Southeast Asia in his masterpiece *Weapon of the Weak: the Everyday forms of Resistance* (1985). It is also interesting how they break and displace the morphological boundaries of the upper-caste linguistic order by using the same words in a different context than that is used by the upper castes and import a completely different meaning. The

discussion is contextualized by using Spivak's interpretation of the concept 'catachresis' which signifies the ability of the colonized to take something from the colonizer and encode it with a different meaning. It is also interesting to see how Dalit women use the work field as a space of enjoyment by sharing their daily incidents with each other, cracking jokes and teasing each other and singing folk songs while working. Using Simone de Beauvoir's concept of 'realm of immanence' (the domestic space restricted with patriarchal norms) and 'the light of transcendence' (the liberating free space), it is analyzed as to how the work field plays an important role for Dalit women to come out of 'realm of immanence' and achieve 'the light of transcendence'. Pawar describes one of the incidents as a child when she walks back from her school in an evening accompanied by a group of Dalit women who return from the work. She writes, "They would talk freely, without any restrain, in a language, vivid and robust, full of various cadence, tones and rhythms that evoked many colors and smells of things from different places" (3). The daylong labor does not exhaust them; rather they are energized as they are in a free space where they can express themselves freely. In her essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" Virginia Woolf claims to have similar observations as she explains how she and her friends feel increasingly free and delighted as soon as they step out of their houses into the London streets. Their inner selves transform into free beings possessed with the newly gained freedom through which they realize themselves.

Chapter 2

From Experience to Aesthetics: Locating Dalit Aesthetic Features in Dalit Autobiographical Narratives

2.1 Introduction

Opening the literary space for the voices from the margin has been a painstaking task since the literary sphere for a long time had remained confined to the privileged groups. From the very inception of the term 'Dalit literature' in the first Dalit Literary Conference in 1958, its struggle to establish itself as a 'literary' genre begins. Dalit literature faces three major challenges: first, as an extension of the Ambedkarite legacy, it emerges as a body of writing in the latter half of the 20th century which entails the caste critique as its primary agenda and thus challenges the very establishment of Hindu social order and dismisses the Brahminical texts that are found to be main sources of casteist ideology. For this revolutionary approach, Dalit literature faces a strong resistance from the upper-caste Hindus who constitute the majority of Hindu society and enjoy their power of being in superior caste positions. Secondly, Dalit literature does not conform to the established mainstream aesthetic norms, because the realities of Dalit lives cannot be captured through such aesthetic norms for the very fact that Dalit life has hardly ever been a point of reference in conceptualizing these norms. Therefore, there is criticism in a large scale from the mainstream intelligentsia that Dalit literature should not be considered as literature because it does not have the aesthetic beauty. Thirdly, Dalit literature not only tries to establish itself as a literary genre but also demarcates its domain to restrict easy entry of the 'upper-

caste other' to avoid the misrepresentations of Dalit lives and speak for themselves. For this very reason, Dalit literature is often accused of confining itself within by restricting dialogic engagements with the outside world.

To address the above defined issues, this chapter, through a close reading of Dalit autobiographical narratives such as Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (2001), Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi: The Outcaste* (2003), Aravinda Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (2007), Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* (2008), Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2009) and Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh: Against the Night* (2010) tries to locate the aesthetic elements of Dalit literature and tries to justify how and why they are different from the mainstream literature. This chapter also tries to explore why the insider / outsider dichotomy is necessary in Dalit literary context and what are the avenues through which a dialogue between Dalit world and the outside world is possible.

2.2 The Question of Aesthetics in Dalit Literature

A number of critics, namely, Shrawan K Sharma, N. S Phadke, Kusumvati Deshpande, and many others have tried to push Dalit literature aside, defining it as sociological, subjective, propagandist and non-literary writing. Shrawan K Sharma in his essay "Aesthetics of Dalit Literature and Dalit Movement: A Critique" (2012) contends, "Dalit writer fails to be impersonal... his writings are impregnated with feeling or emotion or vision of his own mind" (Sharma 65). His contention does not end there; he further criticizes Dalit writers thus: "The mind of a Dalit writer seems to oscillate between three states of mind – *ksipt* (sensitive and agitative), *mudh* (sensitive and dull) and *viksipt* (interruptive and disturbed)" (65). Ironically, though the critic's purpose of displaying great depth in Sanskrit language to prove his Brahmin inheritance is served, it uncovers his literary prejudices about Dalit literature. To explain the common impression of the mainstream writers about the Dalit writers, historian Gyandendra Pandey writes "Hence the common response, and even more common feeling that … Baby Kamble, Omprakash Valmiki, and others like them write of trivial, trifling matters, unscientifically and emotionally, in texts that inhabit the domain of the

merely ordinary" (196). In other words, the mainstream critics feel that Dalit writings do not carry any subject worthy of being discussed in the realm of literature. Critics such as Kusumvati Deshpande state that, "It is difficult for Dalits to find an articulate voice and be technically skilled because they are deprived of all sanskar". (qtd in Limbale 109). N. S Phadke, another critic of Dalit writings proclaims, "The kind of contexts and events that are needed to add color to a novel are not found in Dalit lives" (qtd in Limbale 108). Rita Kothari, in her article "Short Story in Gujarati Dalit Literature" pinpoints some of the drawbacks in Gujarati Dalit short stories by raising a few pertinent questions such as, "Why is every dalit equally good and naive, without any mechanisms of circumvention or resistance? Is the oppressive 'other' always without and never within?" (4310). To Kothari, most of the Dalit fictions are the tales of anger and protest with a common theme which moves from a tyrant and powerful upper caste to a hapless innocent Dalit, exploited and tortured by the cruel upper caste. Though most of her contentions are made with reference to Gujarati Dalit short stories, her treatment of Dalit literature, in general, as non-literary, is objectionable. She makes it clear that, sociological analysis of Dalit texts is a preferable tool to understand Dalit problems as literary analysis of Dalit literature is unproductive, because "…any literary investigation" of Dalit writings "has its explanation in the social history of dalits and therefore tools of literary assessment with regard to dalit literature become irrelevant" (4310). Such criticisms undermine the literary productivity of Dalit texts and block the possibility of perceiving literature beyond the established literary domain.

It is a much discussed subject that Dalit literature is sociological and historical as it emerges from the social revolution against casteism, and thus falls back into the history of the caste oppression in the Hindu social order. However, it sounds as if mainstream literature does not have a socio-historical perspective and has no involvement with the social issues. In fact, literature as being one of the human creations cannot stand free from the society, because man him / herself is a social being, and in consequence whatever thoughts and emotions he / she represents in the form of literature is inevitably shaped through the socio-cultural

conditions present around him / her. In words of DeVoto, "Literature is a record of social experience, an embodiment of social myths and ideals and aims, and an organization of social beliefs and sanctions" (quoted in Milton C. Albrecht 462). It signifies that not only Dalit literature but literature as a whole has an integral relationship with society. Therefore, only because of its direct attack on social issues like casteism, reading Dalit literature only as a sociological document closes much more productive ways of reading and unfolding its unrecognized aspects.

The very fact which has been systematically rejected is that, Dalit literature is rich in literary expressions, besides being sociological and historical. However, this strategy of rejection has worked for the mainstream intelligentsia to characterize Dalit literature non-literary or non-aesthetic, and therefore deny its space in Indian literary scenario. Now, one can safely argue that 'aesthetics' as an ideological framework has been used by the mainstream critics as a tool to maintain supremacy not only at the literary level but also at socio-cultural level. This process of maintaining supremacy in the society through ideas is defined as "hegemony" by the Italian Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci, who unlike the traditional Marxist scholars realized that "man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas" (Bates 351). Gramsci defines 'hegemony' as

> …the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (quoted in Bates 351)

Unlike the traditional Marxists, Gramsci goes beyond the reductive materialistic analysis of class domination and tries to understand it through a detailed study of the cultural history of the society. The traditional Marxists analyze social structure as purely determined on the basis of material productions. According to traditional Marxists, the social structure consists of 'base' and 'superstructure': 'base' deals with the laborers, division of labor, production and employer and the 'superstructure' consists of political power and the state. Their analysis describes

that the ruling classes rule and dominate the other subordinate classes by the political power of the state. The state is synonymous to the ruling classes, because the political power of the state is always controlled and exercised in the hands of the ruling classes. Gramsci's understanding of superstructure and class domination is more nuanced, where Marx's explanation of 'ruling ideas' becomes more important than the political power of the state. Gramsci further explores the underlying meaning of Marx's statement that "the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of ruling class" (Marx 26). In Gramsci's understanding, superstructure consists of two constituent parts, i.e. 'political society' and 'civil society'. Political society consists of organized social forces such as military force and police whereas civil society deals with "the whole ideological-cultural relations, of spiritual and intellectual life" (quoted in Woolcock 204). Gramsci, in the analysis of civil society, gives a detailed account of how the ideas of the dominant or ruling classes are systematized into "historical bloc" (Gramsci 195). 'Historical block' is nothing but an organization of the social institutions and disciplines such as religion, morality, politics, literature, etc. which are developed through history by the dominant classes. The subordinate classes passively accept the ideas of the dominant classes and thus allow them to gain the social grant. With the consent of the subordinate classes and the political power of the state, the ruling classes reinforce their ideas as universal facts and maintain hegemony in the society.

Like religion, philosophy or politics, literature is also one of the important constituents of the 'historical bloc', and it is quite logical to say that, literature as a discipline is designed in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Therefore they have framed a fixed set of rules which decide what kind of subject matter, language pattern, style of writing, etc. should be employed in the literary texts; this very set of rules is called as 'literary aesthetics'. While talking about the historical process of conceptualization and function of the concept 'aesthetics', George Yudice, a cultural critic and contemporary aesthetician, in his article "For a Practical Aesthetics" writes

> "… the aesthetic is a major ideological instrument by which the bourgeoisie constructed and maintained hegemony throughout modernity. In the eighteenth century it reconciled self-determination, the 'casual, affable, taken-for- granted style of the stereotypical aristocrat,' with the law of instrumental reason by which the bourgeoisie exercise the will to power. (132)

Thus, 'literary aesthetics' works as an ideological framework that preserves the orthodox bourgeois values in literature and prevents new writing with new subject matters to enter into the realm of literature. In addition, the literary or art works produced in the ancient times, were single, unique and possessed by bourgeois only. Therefore, the common people did not have access to art and literature; consequently art and literature were understood as they were viewed by the bourgeois. Moreover, these art and literary works were primarily created to serve ritualistic and religious purposes which created an "aura" of "cult value" (Benjamin 225), independent of social implication and relevance. Similarly in the Indian context, ancient religious texts such as the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Manusmriti*, *Bhagavad Gita* were basically created for religious purposes, and thus considered as 'sacred', consisting of 'absolute truth value'. More importantly, these texts were written by Brahmins and therefore the literary aesthetic norms set by them were considered to be 'authentic'. These aesthetic norms were unquestionable firstly because they were judged in relation to the religious values and purposes. Secondly, these literary works were comprehended through the explanations provided by the Brahmins because they were the creators of such works and others did not have access to these works and the language (Sanskrit) in which it was written.

This aesthetic 'authenticity', which was created by the epic poetic tradition, had set a literary standard in terms of language, meter, rhyming scheme, diction, imagery, clarity, etc. The aesthetic features of the literary works started being analyzed through such linguistic and stylistic features. These linguistic and stylistic features were essentially poetic by nature and designed to forge a high-language to meet the epic standard. According to Bakhtin, "Such a combining of languages and styles into a higher unity is known to traditional stylistics; it has no

method for approaching the distinctive social dialogue among languages" (Bakhtin 263). Bakhtin's observation about the 'traditional stylistics' and its incapacity of accommodating 'distinctive social dialogues', is path breaking for literature studies. In the modern and postmodern era, with the rise of different marginal literary genres such as African American literature, Australian Aboriginal literature, tribal literature, subaltern literature and Dalit literature which represent the lived realities of the their respective communities, new literary frameworks are developed through new sets of linguistic apparatus or 'speech genres' (to put it in Bakhtinian terms) that capture the realities of marginal lives. But the 'traditional stylistics', which is designed for the unitary language of epic style, fails to recognize the new literary frameworks and the distinct 'speech genres' associated with them.

While talking about "speech genres" in his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres", Bakhtin talks about the speech varieties and their function in real life interactions. According to Bakhtin, language is realized through concrete individual utterances (oral and written) which are used in casual human communication in daily life. When these concrete individual utterances are used in a certain context or sphere, they form certain patterns of sentence structure, thematic content and style, being shaped through the topic, purpose and nature of communication. When all these aspects join together as an inseparable whole it can be called as a speech genre (Bakhtin 60). Bakhtin further divides speech genre into "primary (simple) and secondary (complex) speech genres" (61). When the concrete utterances are used in a certain simple communication of daily life, it can be defined as a primary speech genre. The secondary speech genre is composed of many primary speech genres, and in the process, the simple speech genres go through a series of modifications to create a complex unified whole (62). Bakhtin considers novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary, etc., as the secondary speech genres. In Bakhtin's view, there is a wide heterogeneity among the speech genres, and thus we cannot have "a single common level at which they can be studied" (61). Here lies the whole problem; in

the sphere of linguistics and literature studies, the literary genres, from the ancient times till the present day, have been studied

> … in terms of their specific literary and artistic features, in terms of the differences that distinguish one from the other (within the realm of literature), and not as specific types of utterances distinct from the other types, but sharing with them a common *verbal* (language) nature. (61)

This conventional method of studying literature through comparison seems problematic, where all literary genres are studied together, being compared with each other and perceived in terms of the similarities and the differences they share with each other, rather than being studied separately with their specificities. This kind of study fails to recognize the peculiarities of a literary genre and thus disturbs the relationship between literature and life. It is needless to say that, there is an intimate relationship between literature and life, because literature represents human life and its relationship with the society. Each literary genre develops its own style and mode of representation, language pattern, metaphors and images to deal with specific issues related to human conditions as it happens in case of Dalit literature.

2.3 Situating Dalit Literary Aesthetics

While defining Dalit literature in his book *Towards an aesthetic of Dalit literature: History, Controversies and Considerations* (first published as *Dalit Sahityache Sundaryashastra* in Marathi in 1996, translated into English in 2004) Sharankumar Limbale writes, "By Dalit literature, I mean writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness" and its purpose is "to inform Dalit society of its slavery, and narrate its pain and suffering to upper caste Hindus" (19). Narrating the pain and suffering of the Dalit community to the upper caste Hindus is not intended to draw sympathy for the Dalits, rather it is an act of showing mirror to the oppressive upper caste Hindus and thus embeds the determination of bringing social reformation which could end caste discrimination in the society. Because of this novel purpose, Dalit literature imbibes a different literary framework of its own that is well equipped to carry the intensity and

message of the very literature. In addition, since Dalit literature represents itself as a literary movement against Brahminism, it rejects the traditional aesthetics which have been predominantly Brahminical and discriminatory by nature. According to Limbale, Dalit writers demand "a new and distinct aesthetic for their literature – an aesthetic that is life-affirming and realistic" (19). In Limbale's view, the aesthetic beauty of Dalit literature lies in propounding a caste critique through an honest representation of Dalit lived-experience, Dalit consciousness through a language that reflects the lived realities of Dalit lives.

2.4 Dalit Literature as a Counter Narrative to Brahminism

As it is discussed above, the primary intention of Dalit literature is to reject casteism in society and thus it embeds a scathing criticism of Brahminism which has been the main source of casteist ideologies. Therefore, Dalit writings constitute a counter narrative that questions the oppressive Brahminical grand narrative by enacting a subversive reading of Brahminical texts and Brahminical culture. For instance, Jyotirao Phule in his polemical text *Slavery* (first published in Marathi as *Gulamgiri* in 1873, translated into English by Maya Pandit in 2002) offers a harsh criticism of the Brahminical texts such as *Manusmriti* and other mythologies. Manu's grand narrative which describes that the four *Varnas* (castes) such as *Brahman* (the Brahmins), *Kshatriya* (the warriors), *Vaisya* (the traders) and *Sudra* (the untouchables) are born from Brahma's mouth, arms, thighs and legs respectively, is denounced by a fine tone of sarcasm by Phule:

> …since Brahma had genital organs at four places – mouth, arms, groins and legs (for the four varnas were born out of those four organs according to the *Manusmriti*) – each of them must have menstruated at least for four days each, and he must have sat aside in seclusion, as an untouchable person, for six days in all, each month. If that was so, then who looked after his house during those sixteen days? Does *Manusmriti* say anything about this?. (49)

The analysis and the question put forth by Phule may look strange but it carries the potential to subvert the dominant Brahminical narrative that has given birth to the oppressive caste system. Phule turns the Brahminical narrative upside down

by arguing that the mythical characters such as Hiranyakashyapu, Shankhasur, King Bali, etc., who are described as the *Rakshasas* (demons) in Brahminical texts, are in fact the virtuous and brave native kings of India. Lord Vishnu and his different incarnations, such as, Parsuram, Nrusimha, etc., who are described as great gods in the Brahminical texts, are portrayed by Phule as the cruel and cunning invaders who invaded the native Indians time to time and enslaved them. He defines Nrusimha as "a very greedy, cunning, deceitful, treacherous, scheming, brutal and ruthless man …" (55) and Parsuram as a "bully" and a "barbarous villain" who did not "hesitate to behead his own mother Renuka" (68).

In Phule's subversive scrutiny of Hindu mythology, the Brahmins and their gods are the invaders who originally came from Iran and therefore called Aryans and they named the native Indians as 'Rakshasa' after enslaving them. According to Phule, the term 'Rakshasa' is derived from the Sanskrit term 'Raksha' which means – 'to protect', and because the native Indians were the protectors of their land, the Aryans named them as Rakshasas (28). Phule also argues that term 'Sudra' is derived from the term '*kshudra*' which means – small or unimportant. The term was used by the Aryans to refer to the enslaved natives because they considered the enslaved natives as unimportant beings. Phule's historical reinterpretation of the Brahminical texts should not be analyzed on the basis of factual veracity; rather it should be studied in terms of its subversive intention of challenging the oppressive Brahminical knowledge structure and initiating a fresh perspective which allows the margin to speak. While talking about Phule's very analysis of Brahminical mythologies, G. P. Deshpandey writes,

> His analysis of various avatars, however, may not stand the scrutiny of either history or even plain reason. But that is perhaps not the issue. His attempt was to subvert the brahminical structures of ideas and beliefs so that a new equitable order can emerge. (7)

Like phule, Ambedkar in many of his writings makes fun of the Brahminical texts and the Hindu gods in order to reject the casteist philosophy. For example in his essay "Krishna and His Gita" Ambedkar calls Lord Krishna a 'lunatic' and a

'fool' for justifying the 'chaturvarnya'[1] system through his karmic philosophy and justifies the violence of Kshatriyas as he explains Arjun[2] in the battle field that "the Kshyatriya may kill without sinning because the *Vedas* say that it is his duty to kill" (197). Krishna further explains that the people who perform their duties assigned by *Varna* system are his real devotees and therefore will attain salvation, which in other words means that, a Sudra will not get salvation if he deviates from his duty of serving the upper castes. The primary intention of Ambedkar here is to critique the Brahminical grand narrative of caste construction through a Dalit analytic.

In her book, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*, Toral Jatin Gajarawala states that, "These upper caste literary forms function as oppositional parameter, in dialectic fashion; Dalit literature should therefore be read as constructing an *antigenealogy*" (Gajarawala 4). Like critical writings of Phule and Ambedkar, Dalit autobiographical narratives have major contribution in setting an antigeneology or a counter narrative by critiquing the Brahminical texts. For instance, Baby Kamble's analysis of the story of Vrinda is no less subversive than Phule's. According to Hindu mythology Vrinda was the virtuous wife of the demon king Jalandhar who was extremely powerful and evil natured. All the gods were frightened of Jalandhar as he fought with gods to take possession over the heaven, the place where gods live. Vrinda was blessed with a boon that till she remains pious and does not have any sexual encounter with any other man except her husband, no one will be able to defeat or kill her husband. Therefore Jalandhar was undefeated and a real threat to the gods. All the gods conspired to kill Jalandhar but for his death Vrinda's adultery was necessary. Once when Jalandhar was fighting with the gods in the battle field, lord Vishnu disguised himself as Jalandhar and went to Vrinda to have a sexual intercourse with her so that she can be defamed and Jalandhar's death can be possible. Lord Vishnu succeeded in doing so as Vrinda could not realize that he was not her real husband, in consequence Jalandhar was killed in the battle field. But Baby Kamble has a different reading of the story as she defines Jalandhar as a brave and virtuous Sudra king who did not come under the domination of the gods and

therefore the gods conspired to kill them. Vrinda, despite being a great devotee of lord Vishnu from her very childhood got raped by Vishnu himself. Kamble, in her interview with Maya Pandit, says, "When I read this story, I was furious. The story clearly represented how the upper castes had mythologized the repression of Sudra men and women" (146). Kamble very purposefully brings this story into the discussion to expose the hypocrisy and cowardice of Brahmin gods as a symbolic rejection of Brahminism.

There are similar constructions of counter narratives to Brahminism in Dalit cultural practices where attempts are made to place Dalit gods in superior positions in comparison to the Hindu gods. Balbir Madhopuri in his autobiographical narrative *Changiya Rukh: Against the Night* talks about the celebration of a festival called Saal in the 'Chamar' (a Dalit sub-caste) community where they worship their god Baba Sidh Chano who is considered to be a "powerful deity" and "a protector of animals" (141). There is a story behind the celebration which narrates a wrestling match between the Hindu god Lord Krishna and Baba Sidh Chano. The wrestling match lasted for eighteen days because neither of the two could beat the other. On the last day Lord Krishna was able to defeat Sidh Chano only by creating some kind of illusion. Therefore, the last day of the wrestling match is celebrated as Saal in appreciation of Baba Sidh Chano where people sing this story along with some musical instruments. Here the Hindu god Krishna is portrayed as a cheat and Dalit god Sidh Chano is projected as brave and honest. Construction and celebration of such narratives not only set a Dalit cultural genealogy but also project it at par with Brahminical cultural tradition. Partha Chatterjee in his essay "Caste and Subaltern Consciousness" (1989) provides such an example through a detailed description of how the Balahadi sect, a Dalit community which followed the ideology and teachings of Balaram Hadi, emerged against Brahmanism in Nadia, West Bengal, during 19th century. Balaram Hadi, the founder of Balahadi sect, emerged as a spiritual leader during 1830s and "The most important feature of his cult was the hatred that he taught his followers to entertain towards Brahmans" (quoted in Chatterjee 198). The story of how Balaram Hadi emerged as a spiritual leader is

quite interesting and noteworthy as it delivers the history of resistance and application of subversive strategies to establish a counterculture against Brahmanism. Hadi is an untouchable sub-caste into which Balaram was born, sometimes around 1780s in Meherpur, Nadia (Chatterjee 195). At a young age, while working as a watchman, he was suspected of being involved in a case of jewelry theft which occurred in the jamindar's[3] mansion, and for the same reason, by the order of the jamindar, he was driven out of the village being severely beaten by his employees. For twenty years after the incident, he was not seen in the village or nearby localities. One day, suddenly after twenty years, he appeared in the village being an enlightened person with an excellent ability of leading critical and philosophical arguments. Here is a small incident where Balaram takes the village Brahmins by surprise by his clever action and witty answer:

> Balaram had gone to bath in the river, when he saw some Brahmans offering *tarpan*[4] to their ancestors. Imitating their actions, he too began to throw water on the river-bank. One of the Brahmans asked him, Balai, what do you think you are doing? Balaram answered, 'I am watering my field of spinach.' The Brahmins asked, 'Your field of spinach? Here?'Balaram replied, 'Well your ancestors aren't here either. If you think that the water you pick up and throw back into the river reaches your ancestors, then why should not the water I throw on the river bank reach my fields? (quoted in Chatterjee 196).

The very debate where Brahmins are defeated by a Sudra, takes the authority of knowledge from the Brahmins and replaces it in the hands of a Sudra. By dissociating the Brahmans from knowledge, it operates as a counter narrative to the dominant Brahminical culture.

Like most of the spiritual leaders, a myth is also associated to Balaram's life, which describes the story of his unusual birth. On the occasion of his parents' marriage, the astrologer had forecasted that the son who will take birth from them will be the last of their lineage. When Balaram's mother got pregnant, she kept the fact hidden from others. In one afternoon a baby with full grown hair and beard fell down from the ceiling of their house and miraculously the mother's womb became empty. Keeping it as a secret, Balaram's mother took the baby into

a dense forest and left the baby there all alone. It is said that, Balaram visited his aunt (mother's sister) in her dream and informed her about his existence in detail. In the morning, his aunt visited the spot where she found the baby lying safe under a tree being guarded by two tigers and brought the baby along with her. Fabrication of the very myth and its association with history signifies the intensity to create a cultural lineage of their own community which has always remained unrecognized and often dismissed by the dominant Brahminical culture. Besides setting a counter narrative or an anti-genealogy to the Brahminical culture, Balarami sect sternly rejects the Hindu Vaisnavite practices. Through their songs, the Balaramis mock at the concept of Chaitanya as the dual incarnation of lord Krishna and goddess Radha. They argue that Chaitanya is only an incomplete being who needs Hadiram (Balaram Hadi) to be a complete being. According to them, the enlightened soul has not taken birth in Nabadwip (birth place of Chaitnya), but in Meherpur (birth place of BalaramHadi) (Chatterjee 197-199). It is not their eternal faith in religion which prompts them to propagate their ethos as the superior one and their leader as the supreme being, it is rather the revolutionary spirit of their marginal selves to reset a new cultural paradigm against the hegemonic and discriminatory culture where they can register their active participation as equal selves. Gajarawala's statement sounds very relevant here, as she says, "the real contributions of Dalit literature include the provision for a Dalit analytics, a revisionist critique of canon, and a critique of the hegemony of Brahminical culture in the broadest sense" (4-5). In other words, Dalit literature sets a literary paradigm with an antagonistic approach to the Brahminical literature, not essentially to dismiss the literary canon as such but rather to locate its blind spots through a strict critique of its hegemonic nature and discriminatory literary history, so that a new insight into literature studies can be possible.

2.5 Dalit Realism and the Language of Experience

Going by the Baktinian concept of 'speech genres', which have been discussed earlier in this chapter, in which Bakhtin talks about the usage of different speech

genres in human communications, it is arguable that Dalit writers have developed a different 'speech genre' which can carry the intent and content of the subject. Since Dalit literature intended to forge a caste critique through the representation of pain and suffering that are thrust upon them because of the oppressive caste system, the language which Dalit writers use necessarily becomes the language derived from and reflective of their sufferings. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986) state that there is a "scarcity of talent" in a minor literature which in fact is beneficial for the minor literature as it allows "the conception of something other than a literature of masters" (17). It may be argued that the absence of 'abundant talent' in a minor literature which Deleuze and Guattari talk about is not because the writers of a minor literature are inherently less creative but since the community has been kept away from the discourse of knowledge, sometimes they may be found to be a little less skilled in the dominant discourses in comparison to the mainstream writers. Dalits, for instance, had been denied access to knowledge for centuries since they did not have the right to education and therefore they may not be as skillful in the mainstream knowledge production as the mainstream writers would be. And also they do not want to use the vocabulary of the 'master' and thus prefer not acquiring it. Therefore, Limbale suggests a different language to represent Dalit literature, a language that is capable of capturing the intensity of the Dalit 'lived-experience'.

Dalit autobiographical narrative, being a literary genre which gives utmost space for lived-experience, brings in a language which carries the images of Dalit lives. Moreover, the subject matters in the Dalit autobiographical narratives are quite different from the subject matter we generally find in the mainstream autobiographies, as the association of Dalits with life and society are significantly different from those of the caste Hindus. There are frequent descriptions about the butchering of the dead cows and buffaloes which the village throws out, and the hungry eyes of Dalits hovering on the rotten flesh of those dead animals. Children covered with dirty tattered clothes fight with flies, kites and hungry dogs to keep them away from the rotten flesh. Graphic depictions of untidy naked children

playing on the heaps of garbage are commonly found in the Dalit autobiographies, because Dalit localities are situated at the outskirt of the village where the whole village throws its waste. Therefore Limbale writes, "We hardly knew what a village actually meant as we played and grew up only in the Maharwada. Heaps of garbage, tin sheds, dogs and pigs were our only companion" (Limbale 5). Baby Kamble provides more detailed description of wretched condition of the people and children of Maharwada as she explains,

> Our place was in the garbage pit outside the village where everyone threw away their waste. That was where we lived, in our poor huts, amid all the filth! We were masters only of the dead animals thrown into those pits by 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. (49)

The village described here presents a different picture, unlike the romanticized picture of the village we generally see in mainstream Indian literature which represents a utopian space of Gandhian imagination. Toral Jatin Gajarawala, for example, talks about how Phaniswarnath Renu in his 1954 Hindi novel *Maila achal* (*The Soiled Border*) romanticizes the village. While describing the village landscape during crop yielding time he describes,

> Mother India dwells in the villages, in verdant fields with bountiful crops… The east wind ripples the golden tassels of the wheat filled fields. The villagers working in the fields looked like bathers frolicking in a waist-high river of gold. Those golden ripples, the rows of palms, the jungles of jharber, the bungalow garden, the lotus-filled puddles near the Kamla River… (quoted in Gajarawala 97)

Here we see two completely different worlds, two different realities and thus two different sets of linguistic apparatus – on the one hand it is the language of the 'masters' which erases caste realities and glorifies the village as a prosperous and beautiful mother and on the other hand it is a language derived from the lived experience of the oppressed Dalits which portrays village as a space of multiple humiliations. This very language of oppression reflects upon the material realities of caste such as poverty and hunger. Limbale poignantly describes how to satisfy the fire of their hunger, the children of Maharwada roam here and there in search

of different animals, reptiles, insects, eggs and fishes so that they could kill and eat them:

> We caught crabs, fish, eggs, smashed a honeycomb, caught birds, cried like water-fouls, tied frogs around our necks, searched for lizards, shot pebbles at kites with catapults, roasted squirrels and ate them. We went to the fields and felled the leaves and fruits from trees. We broke the ant hill and ate the queen ant. (65)

On the top of poverty and hunger, Dalits are treated like animals being addressed as the "sons of bitches" (Limbale 77). Valmiki in his autobiographical narrative remembers how he was addressed as "Abey Chuhre" (2) which was a derogatory name that indicated his low caste. His own teachers used to treat him worse than his classmates. Valmiki describes how he was forced to sweep the classrooms and the playground by the headmaster, when he was in his fourth standard. On the occasions when Valmiki was found to be late in doing the allotted work or if he committed any small mistake, the headmaster beat him mercilessly and scolded him "Abey Chuhreke, motherfucker… Go sweep the whole playground… Otherwise I will shove chillies up your arse and throw you out of the school" (5). By using the same language which had been used to abuse him, Valimiki holds a mirror to the upper caste readers in order to show how inhumanly the Dalits have been treated for generations.

Dalit literature establishes an intimate relationship between life and literature as well as between language and life by bringing the real life experiences through a language that has been an intrinsic part of their lives. The images and metaphors used in their description are drawn from their lived experiences. For example, Limbale in his autobiographical narrative gives a description of his adolescent lover Shewanta which is quite different from the way the ladyloves are described in the mainstream literature. He writes,

> Shewanta never smiled wholeheartedly. She never oiled her hair. At home Shewanta was like an ox harnessed to the oil press that goes round and round in a dark room from morning till evening. Shewanta's eyes were as humble as a cow (26).

Shewanta is not beautified here as the beautiful heroines of the epics or as the charming heroines of the mainstream romantic novels. Rather, her poverty is shown through her 'never oiled hair'; her laborious life is compared with an 'ox harnessed to the oil press' and her honest eyes are compared to the eyes of a cow. Perhaps the eyes of the dead cow, with which the author has encountered again and again in his life as a source of food, were the only objects which could resemble the honest eyes of his beloved. To describe how rapidly the news of love between Shewanta and the author spread, he writes "… our love spread like a patch of rash on a leper's skin" (Limbale 27). The imagery here is again drawn from a disease which is most hated among the people. But the metaphor is aptly positioned to describe the love of a boy who is certified as an impure blood and "son of a bitch" (Limbale 62) by the society. The love between the author and Shewanta was not acceptable in the Dalit community, because the author was an illegal child of a Dalit mother and an upper caste father. Therefore, their love was as dangerous and hateful as a disease for the community.

2.6 Dalit Lived Experience and Dalit Consciousness

Putting maximum emphasis on 'lived experience' is one of the distinctive features of Dalit literature, whereas the creative imagination is conventionally considered to be the literary brilliance of a writer. The inaccessible and recondite nature of Dalit 'lived experience' is one of the justifications why it is treated so. In other words, Dalit lived experience is limited to the Dalits and cannot be accessed by a non-Dalit however much he may strive for it. Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai in their book *The Cracked Mirror* (2012) try to give a reasonable answer to this issue concerning the uniqueness of Dalit 'lived experience'. According to them there is a considerable gap between 'being with a Dalit' and 'being a Dalit': the difference between watching from a distance and experiencing it of your own. 'Being with a Dalit' is a state which always allows the other (non-Dalit) to come out of it at any time; but 'being a Dalit' is the state which does not provide that freedom to a Dalit. The state of 'being with a Dalit' is by choice, whereas 'being a Dalit' is a state without having any other choice but to remain a Dalit till death.

This inescapable and un-sharable 'Dalitness' (Limbale 19) or the consciousness of being a Dalit, makes the Dalit 'lived experience' a special entity. Limbale defines the function of 'Dalit consciousness' in Dalit literature as "the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is the belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness" (32). For Laura R. Brueck, 'Dalit consciousness' is a "notion of political *awareness*, in the sense of consciousness-raising among certain sections of the Dalit population, and at other times refer to a collective notion of *identity* among diverse Dalit communities" (*India-seminar.com*).

It is beyond doubt that 'Dalit consciousness' is a collective consciousness and therefore is largely a political phenomenon constituted with Ambedkarite notions of equality, freedom and brotherhood. But is it just a political phenomenon? What is the common element through which a Dalit individual connects with another Dalit individual or a Dalit community connects with another Dalit community to produce such a collective identity? These questions may be answered through an explanation of the term 'Dalitness' which Limbale uses while he states that "…Dalit literature is inherent in its Dalitness…" (19). Here Limbale talks about the very 'Dalitness' which conceals the freedom of becoming anything else but remaining a Dalit. One shed of this entity is the result of the way the society behaves with a Dalit from his/her very childhood, every now and then, creating a consciousness that he/she is born as an inferior being and cannot ever stand equal with the upper caste other. This consciousness of being a Dalit, becomes a burden for a Dalit as he / she travels with an internal fear of vulnerability of their identity. This fear and insecurity remain deep-seated in them and they carry it everywhere, irrespective of time and situation; it hardly matters whether they are educated or uneducated, in a rural or urban space. There are some incidents depicted in autobiographical narratives which reflect on such problems and provide the reasons as to why a Dalit feels reluctant to accept an upper caste friend's invitation for a dinner; why sometimes Dalits try to hide their identity; why they suspect the generosity of an upper caste person. Malagatti

describes some of the incidents which make him feel insecure and suspicious of everything that is offered by the upper caste friends. And for the same reason he avoids the invitations from most of the upper caste friends for food at home. He writes,

> I try to avoid most of the dinner invitations that I receive (except those from dalits)… Though I often gear myself up to declare my caste there are times when I remained mute… When the elders of the house initially speak about this and that and finally broach enquiries about my caste, I turn cold. (100)

Such incidents happen in urban areas and especially in educated houses, because in the village everyone's identity remains transparent and hardly any upper caste person invites a Dalit to his / her own house. Sometimes Malagatti feels humiliated when his upper caste friends instruct him to eat certain foods in certain ways, as if Dalits are not acquainted to those food items and thus don't know how to eat it. Malagatti describes another incident which is pertinent in this particular context as it reminded him of his low caste identity. Once Mallagati could not avoid going for a dinner to his upper caste senior's house as his senior caught hold of Malagatti and literally dragged him to his home. His senior was well known as an "experienced writer and progressive thinker" (101) and whenever he met Malagatti, he used to encourage him saying "you people should walk hand in hand with progressive thinkers…Only then can revolution take place. You should mingle with us. Just literature is not enough my boy. Life should be reflected in your writings" (100). Before going for dinner, to clarify that he is not a casteist, Malagatti's senior conveys that he has an inter-caste marriage. But the aftermath of the dinner was evident enough to shatter the superficial impression that his senior was trying to buildup. After having dinner together, as soon as they wash their own utensils, his son comes and takes the utensils inside the house which were used by his father, but the utensils in which Malagatti was having food were lying there. Malagatti did not mind washing his own plates even though he was a guest, because his senior had kept him informed that his wife had gone to her father's house. But he was shocked when the utensils used by him were not allowed inside the house; it was difficult for him to believe that a person,

who talks of pro-Dalit literature, reformation and of being progressive, secretly cultivates caste in his own house. This hypocritical behavior left him with excruciating mental pain and reminded him of the words of his grandmother:

> If a dalit happened to touch an upper caste person's vessel, it had to be smeared with cow dung and burnt in fire. It would then be immersed in a solution of tamarind and salt. Afterwards, it would be immersed in cow's urine, and only then would it be placed along with the other vessels of house. (102)

Such incidents create a deep sense of insecurity in a Dalit's psyche and develop suspicion about every person whoever treats him / her with generosity and looks upon them with sympathy. This is the reason why Malagatti feels humiliated while having a cup of tea in the upper caste friend's house, as the upper caste friend says, "I don't believe in caste discrimination. Many harijans come home, have tea and food…" (Malagatti 97). Malagatti's inner self starts revolting as he questions himself, "Why was I invited here? To be offered tea? Or to be reminded that I am a harijan?" (98). Malagatti feels that he was invited to be reminded of his harijan identity, rather than being offered a cup of tea. Any Dalit in this situation would have taken it in the same way as the rhetoric used here is evident enough to humiliate a Dalit in this situation. There could be a possibility that the upper caste friend does not have any ill intention of referring to Malagatti as a harijan, but the deep seated sense of inequality among the Dalits which has been ingrained for ages does not allow the them to take such comments easily. On many occasions the upper caste people don't realize that unknowingly they are being offensive toward the Dalits.

There will be hardly any Dalit who would like to cling to the insecurity, suspicion and fear, but they are looked down upon in such a way by the upper caste Hindu society that such feelings remain in their consciousness till the end of their lives. Even when they are educated, try to forget their tormented past life and assimilate themselves in the mainstream, the caste Hindu society treats them in no different way. In his autobiographical narrative, Valmiki writes an account of the caste experience in an urban setting, wherein he explicates how the exposition of

his Dalit identity brings an end to the relationship between a well educated upper caste family and him. The incident takes place in Bombay when Valmiki was doing his draftsman training in the Ordnance Factory Training Institute. During his training he develops friendship with Vinayak Sadashiv Kulkarni, a Brahmin and a cultural activist, who was staying in a flat near Valmiki's hostel. Kulkarni had mistaken Valmiki as a Brahmin and never asked about his caste identity, neither did Valmiki realize that he was mistaken as a Brahmin. Kulkarni was nearly of Balmiki's father's age and so developed a fatherly affection towards Valmiki. The intimacy became so strong that Valmiki was frequently invited to Kulkarni's house on different occasions and Mrs. Kulkarni was motherly to him. Valmiki describes his closeness with the Kulkarni family that: "the Kulkarni family has given me unstinting affection. They never made me feel like an outsider." (95). But one incident changes the whole scenario. In Kulkarni's house, Prof. Kamble who was a Dalit, was served tea in a different cup whereas the cups in which Mr. Kulkarni, Valmiki and his friend were having tea were similar. When Valmiki asked about this matter to Savita, Kulkarni's daughter, she replied with disgust, "That Mahar… SC?... The SCs and the Muslims who come to our house, we keep their dishes separate… How can we feed them in the same dishes" (97). Sabita had started liking Valmiki, but when Valmiki revealed the truth that he was also an SC, she broke down and started crying. And thus, Valmiki writes, "she started to cry, as though my being an SC was a crime… Suddenly the distance between us had increased. The hatred of thousands of years had entered our hearts" (98). When such incidents happen at every stage of a Dalit's life, an insecurity about his / her caste identity builds up in them and remains forever as similar incidents are repeated from time to time. He / she always remains petrified that mere exposition of his caste identity at any point of time may change the whole scenario; his relationship with people may breakdown at once and he may have to face indignity and inequality.

In his autobiographical narrative *The Outcaste*: *Akkarmashi*, Limbale describes one such incident where he explains how he was unable to find a place to live in a big town like Latur, during his service as a telephone operator and

finally he had to live in the slum. He could get a room in the city when he kept his caste secret but was always scared of the thought that he could be humiliated and beaten off at the exposition of his caste identity. In fear of being humiliated and losing his living place he was compelled to keep his caste secret and for the same reason, on many occasions he had to behave like an upper caste:

> If I happened to see a Dalit friend approaching I quickly altered my rout. If he abruptly appeared in front of me I greeted him with a 'Namaskar' instead of 'Jai Bhim[5]'. Even if someone said 'Jai Bhim' to me I responded with a namaskar. If I happened to be going with a high-caste friend and someone greeted me with a 'Jai Bhim' I felt like an outsider. I was worried that my caste would be revealed. (104)

A Dalit carries this burden of insecurity, suspicion, fear and tension which torments him throughout his life. This 'Dalitness' cannot be shared or achieved by a non-Dalit as it essentially belongs to the person who has lived a life as a Dalit. This is only one part of the 'Dalitness' and its other part leads us to a critical study of the Dalit body.

The other aspect of 'Dalitness' is associated with the Dalit body, primarily because of its treatment as an object of untouchability. Secondly, Dalit body becomes a repository of caste experience as it is attached with certain kind of works which are forced on it by the upper caste Hindu society. Thirdly, the Dalit body carries the stinks of caste violence perpetrated on it, and by doing so it becomes a register of the material history of caste. In her article "Caste and Writing History" Prathama Banerjee, one of the contemporary historians of India, explains her understanding of "materiality of caste" and how Dalit body becomes an important tool through which the materiality of caste can be well understood. According to Banerjee, her understanding of the materiality of caste is not based on Marxist ideology which analyses everything from economistic point of view and often accused of being reductionist, rather her understanding of materiality is

> shared across ideological divides, which understand materiality as a domain, in which the human body becomes the locus of the operations of larger historical forces. The body-whether starved, bonded, sick or violated – becomes proof and product of material

> processes. The body is recognized precisely because it carries the mark of such material histories. (232)

The material history of the caste experience, which is carried by the Dalit body, acts as an imprint of unavoidable caste reality, and holds a Dalit intact with his / her 'Dalitness'. There is a section in Valmiki's autobiographical narrative where the author describes how the school teacher vows to engrave an epic on the author's body and brutally does so with a teak stick. The incident happens when Valmiki was in fourth standard and the teacher was explaining how in utter poverty, Dronacharya, the great guru had to feed his son Ashwatthama flour dissolved in water because he could not afford to buy milk. When the teacher was describing this story of Dronacharya with tearful eyes, Valmiki, who was barely eight or nine years old at that time, disturbed the teacher asking a question that at least Dronacharya had flour to give his son with water even though he did not get milk, "…but what about us who had to drink mar? How come we are never mentioned in any epic? Why did not an epic poet ever write a word on our lives?" The question which came to the innocent mind of a child is loaded with historical implications; it interrogates the dominant Brahminical history that has sidelined the Dalit lives from the history. But the answer to this question certainly carries a visible history which cannot be overshadowed by the dominant history. The teacher responded as if the child had committed a great sin by asking such a question, and with utter disgust he says, "Darkest *Kaliyug* has descended upon us so that an untouchable is daring to talk back" (23). He orders Valmiki to stand in rooster pose and starts beating him brutally with a teak stick with a shower of abuses along with it. The whole act, as described by Valmiki can horrify any sympathetic reader:

> 'Chuhre ke, you dare compare yourself with Dronacharya… Here, take this, I will write an epic on your body.' He had rapidly created an epic on my back with the swishes of his stick. That epic is still inscribed on my back. (23)

The epic written on the author's body remains throughout his life as a marker of caste oppression. Such caste markers do not allow a Dalit to forget his 'Dalitness', neither can it be shared by any non-Dalits.

Except such markers of direct caste violence, the Dalit body carries other caste markers – for example, in many parts of India, Dalits who worked as bonded labors, had to wear certain kind of jewellery which worked as their identity markers. In south India, especially in Kerala, Dalits were forbidden to cover the upper part of their body as a symbol of honor to the upper caste people. Besides, there are some occasions where the Dalit bodies are used by the upper castes to perform ritual rights. For instance Urmila Pawar talks about a ritual performed in the nearby village in which "An upper-caste man would inflict a big wound on a Mahar Man's back and his wife has to cover the wound with some cloth and go on walking around howling! … The Mahar symbolizes the animal sacrificed" (72). In some Hindu rituals, Dalit women bodies are used as the objects of entertainment by the upper-caste Hindus. In his autobiographical narrative, Aravind Malagatti brings forth one such incident which is utterly humiliating for the Dalit community. The story is about a festival called Okuli which is celebrated in many parts of Karnataka in the Month of Shravan according to the Hindu calendar. But the way it was celebrated in the village Bidarakundi, a nearby village to Malagatti's, is quite unusual and shameful:

> The tradition went like this: Dalit women had to remove their blouses and wear andugachche, a lower garment worn above the kneecaps, hemmed tightly and tucked into the waist band. A sari was worn to cover the waist and the loose end of it used to cover the head. (42)

The audience who surrounded these women were non-Dalit and non-Brahmin, men as well as women. According to the tradition, the upper caste men poured water on the Dalit women, mixed with vermilion and turmeric powder. The Dalit women ran to take revenge on the men without taking care of their clothes. Malagatti writes, "Their wet bodies, breasts and thighs – all bared to give free entertainment to the lecherous audience and the lustful players" (43). The author

also explains, in some places of Dharwad district of Karnataka, the celebration of Okuli was nastier than this, as both Dalit women and men were made to dance being completely nude. At the end of this show the Dalit women were offered new clothes by the upper caste men. In the name of festival the Dalit woman's body is treated no better than an instrument of entertainment and a prey to the upper caste man's desire. The custom of giving new clothes at the end of the celebration is more of an act of claiming the ownership on the Dalit woman's body.

The Dalit body operates as a repository of caste experience which is sometimes experienced through direct caste violence and sometimes through caste Hindu religious customs. The body markers of the caste experience which a Dalit body carries keep him / her aware of their 'Dalitness'. None other than a Dalit can claim to have 'Dalit lived experience, precisely because a non-Dalit cannot ever experience the burden of 'Dalitness'. Therefore, I assert the fact that the literary expressions born out of the Dalit 'lived experience' essentially bring in the imprint of Dalit life as it is experienced in real.

2.7 Literary Misrepresentations and the Politics of Authenticity in Dalit Literature

Manipulation and misrepresentation of Dalit reality have been a major problem with the non-Dalit writing for which the question of authenticity has emerged as being one of the most important issues in Dalit literature. Very often, the Dalit reality has been misrepresented with a nationalist approach and sometimes it is molded into the reductive analysis of class. Many non-Dalit writers have done it consciously and some of them have done it because of not having a comprehensive understanding of the ground reality of caste. However, because of such misrepresentations in non-Dalit writings, the Dalit writings emerged as being a separate literary genre. Writers such as Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao have tried to depict Dalit lives through their novels even before Dalit literature developed into a literary paradigm. Though their novels such as *Rangbhoomi* (1925), *Untouchable* (1935) and *Kanthapura* (1938) were widely

accepted by the upper caste readers, they are often criticized by the Dalit critics for misrepresenting Dalit lives and treating the Dalit characters in their works with condescending sympathy and pity. Premchand's *Rangbhoomi* was burnt publicly in 2004 by the members of Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Academi as they found that the Dalit characters were being projected through a casteist lens. In this novel, the Sudra protagonist who is a patriot, is referred to as Sudra Chamar whereas the Brahmin is addressed with utmost respect as *garib panditji*. In the 2005 issue of the Dalit journal *Apeksha*, Sohanpal Sunamaskar, the President of Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Academy, writes,

> "We have no opposition to Munshi Premchand or his creative works. We are rather opposed to his *jaativadi-varnavadi* perspective. There are poor Chamars, and poor Brahmins as well. But in Premchand's work the poor Brahmin is worthy of respect and the poor Chamar is treated with scorn" (quoted in Gajarawala 7).

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* carries a nationalist project as it was published in 1938, a time when Gandhi's freedom struggle against the British was at peak and there was a massive current of nationalism throughout the country. Because caste was appearing as an obstacle on the way of nationalism, Rao felt its necessity to be addressed as a subordinate problem. The protagonist, Moorthy's effort to erase casteism from the village is an alternative way to gather and channelize the villagers towards national struggle. Moorthy is not a Dalit leader; rather he acts as a sympathizer of the Dalit community. If judged from a Dalit point of view, *Kanthapura* is more an attempt to put a cover of nationalism on the problems of caste; Rao seems least bothered to project the main focus of his novel on caste. Critics like Gajarawala finds problems also with Mulk Rajanand's *Untouchable*, as she contends, "Anand glorifies and beautifies the labor of latrine cleaning and directs Bakha towards modernity via the innovation of the flush toilet and Gandhian reconciliation" (135). In this novel the Dalit hero Bakha is not made free from the ancestral duty of cleaning toilets; rather his menial job is made easy with the arrival of flush so that remain associated with the job. In other words the caste stratification gets reproduced with its modern incarnation. It is also

interesting how Anand describes Bakha while he performs his duty of toilet cleaning.

> Brisk, yet steady, his capacity for active application to the task he had in hand seemed to flow like constant water from a natural spring. Each muscle of his body, hard as rock when it came to play, seemed to shine forth like glass … He seemed as easy as a wave sailing away on a deep-bedded river. (15)

Here, Anand describes Bakha's body movement while cleaning the toilet in such a way as if his body is naturally designed for toilet cleaning. Therefore, Anand naturalizes the association of Dalit body with the menial job it is assigned to perform.

The misrepresentation of Dalit community starts from the very socio-political level with Gandhi, when he started projecting himself as a representative of the Harijans. Firstly, the Gandhian nomenclature of the untouchables as 'Harijan' (children of God) itself is a sympathetic and derogatory disposition towards the Dalit community, because the term originally refers to the children born from the illegal relationship between the Devadasis and the Brahmins. Secondly, Gandhi's understanding of caste was really problematic as he holds the view that untouchability should be abolished but the caste system must remain because caste system as a social structure holds the Indian society together. The rise of Ambedkar as a Dalit leader vis-à-vis Gandhi is a result of such misrepresentation as well as the inability to analyze the various operations of caste. Gandhi's misunderstanding of the caste operations was twofold – the first reason being his upper caste mindset which made him believe that caste structure holds the society together and second being lack of Dalit lived experience in him because he himself was not a Dalit. Gandhi considers caste system inevitable for the sustenance of Hindu society, and he makes his view point clear in the much discussed *Naava Jivan* article (1921) where he states that, "I believe that if Hindu society has been able to stand, it is because it is founded on the caste system" (quoted in Ambedkar 275) Gandhi believes 'caste' to be the "eternal principle" of Hindu society and it may cause harm to the social order if the principle is broken.

According to him *Varna* or 'caste' is "the determination of man's occupation before he is born" (278). It is Gandhi who used the term *Harijan* (children of god) to address the lower caste people, but unfortunately the implied meaning of the word is found to be derogatory. It would be naive to state that Gandhi had any ill intention of using the term, but the word *Harijan* was used before to categorize "the illegitimate children of the dancing girls (Devadasis) fathered by Brahmin priests of Hindu temples" (qtd. in Sharma 242-243). It was a gross failure of Gandhi in terms of understanding caste realities because he did not have the lived experience of being a Dalit. Ambedkar, in contrast could understand the caste operations because he had himself experienced it as a Dalit. The romanticization and misrepresentation of the Dalit subjects by the non-Dalit writers is a reflection of what Gandhi did with Dalits calling them *Harijan*. Therefore, the question of authenticity in representing Dalit lives which Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai raise in their critical work *The Cracked Mirror* is a valid one.

2.8 Conclusion

The very debate of Dalit lived-experience invokes certain questions from the mainstream critics. There is a general complaint among the mainstream critics that Dalit literature is restricting dialogues from other paradigms by making 'lived experience' a standard apparatus in representing Dalit lives. There are non-Dalit critics such as Sharmila Rege, Sundar Sarukkai, Toral Jatin Gajarawal and many others who have addressed Dalit issues in their critical works but they do not necessarily claim to represent Dalit lives as they are aware of the insider / outsider politics. Such kinds of works open avenues for dialogues from outside but do not occupy the Dalit literary space from which Dalits speak for themselves. There are also questions raised against the homogeneity of Dalit lived experience as some mainstream critics argue that different Dalit communities have different caste experiences and therefore Dalit lived-experience cannot be considered as a homogeneous entity. But even in those different caste experiences, the 'Dalitness' which has been discussed above in detail, remains common to all Dalits and allows a Dalit to represent the whole Dalit community. The experiential

authenticity in Dalit literature is largely a political standpoint, which is necessary, partly because it restricts the other from occupying the Dalit space, and partly because, by doing so it garners attention of the other.

End Notes

1. Chaturvarnya refers to the division four castes i.e. Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra
2. The second among the five Pandavas described in Mahabharat who was always accompanied by Lord Krishna
3. Upper caste land lord
4. A ritual practice done by the Brahmins and other upper castes when they take bath. After they finish bathing, they take some water from the river or pond with joined palms and pour it down as a symbolic way doing an offering to their ancestors.
5. 'Jai' means long live and 'Bhim' is an abbreviation for Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. So the phrase 'Jai Bhim' means 'long live Ambedkar'. It is used among the Dalits as a symbolic way of asserting their Dalit identity.

Chapter 3

Claiming the Difference: Departure from Feminism to Dalit Womanism

> Some of us may experience ourselves as minor in a world that privileges the masculine gender. But our own centrality in terms of race, class, ethnicity, religious identity, age, nationality, sexual preference, and levels of disabilities is often ignored in our own work. All women are not equal, and we do not all have the same experiences (even of gender oppression). When we insist upon gender alone as a universal system of explanation we sever ourselves from other women. How can we speak to each other if we deny our particularities? (Kaplan1987)

3.1 Introduction:

With the rise of marginal literatures which stress upon the authenticity of experience, in terms of caste, class, color, race, gender and sexuality such as African American literature, Dalit literature, feminist literature and Australian aboriginal literature, literary representation of such lives by any 'outsider' has legibly been brought into interrogation with an intention to create a space for the subjects to voice their own experience and to restrict the 'other' from misrepresenting them. The case is even more exclusive and difficult to draw upon when one argues for a subcategory like 'Dalit women', not only to demonstrate their multiple marginalities in terms of caste and gender but also to pin down their silences and misrepresentation in the mainstream Indian feminism. While the insider/outsider debate, hich emphasizes on the authenticity of lived-experience, ushers the demand for a separate literary space for 'Dalit women', a community 'doubly parted apart'[1] from the mainstream both in terms of caste and gender, at the same time the failure of mainstream Indian feminism in capturing Dalit women's issues adds legitimacy to the argument. This chapter, firstly, through a

historical investigation of Indian feminist movements, tries to find out how and why Indian feminism fails in addressing Dalit women's issues for which Dalit women feel left out and come up with their own agency of expression. Secondly, it points out the glaring absence of Dalit woman in the literary productions of the mainstream feminist writers in the Indian literary context. Thirdly, the paper asserts the concept of 'difference' in the feminist context as claimed by African American and Dalit feminist scholars such as Mary Maynard, Caren Kaplan, Sharmila Rege, Cynthia Stephen, etc, as a theoretical tool that is capable of mapping the differences in degree and nature of exploitation between the women who confirm to the dominant feminist discourse and the women with a subjugated cultural identity in terms of race, caste or ethnicity. The paper further discusses 'Dalit feminist stand point' (Rege 1998) and 'Dalit womanism' (Stephen 2009) as concepts of 'difference' that marks a departure from mainstream Indian feminism which has been discriminatory and casteist.

3.2 Discontents of Dalit Women:

The analysis is drawn upon the observations of a few feminist critics who rightly point out that there is a growing dissatisfaction among the Dalit women against the mainstream Indian feminism of being indifferent towards the issues of Dalit women. Nivedita Menon (2012) points out that "Among Dalit women, there is a suspicion of mainstream Indian feminism: they see it as being dominated by dominant caste and upper-class, urban feminists and their issues" (*Seeing Like a Feminist* 167). Like Menon, Uma Chakravarti (2003) also comes up with a similar observation as she writes, "The women's movement was also critiqued by dalit feminists for not paying attention to the specific and more extreme forms of oppression experienced by dalit women …" (*Theorizing Feminism* 4). What remains unexplained here is the cause of the apprehension of Dalit women about mainstream Indian feminism. Surbani Guha Ghosal, in her article "Major Trends of Feminism in India", tries to understand the cause of dissatisfaction of Dalit women against Indian feminism, as she contends that the "analysis of women's question in colonial India was very much limited in its scope and approach as it

was concerned with the upper caste Hindu bhadromahilas[2] of the society only" (794). She elucidates the issue further that "in colonial India social reform movements modernized gendered relations in some upper caste families while dispossessing lower caste women of their rights in attempt to homogenize the women as a group renouncing caste and community specific practices and problems" (794). Anupama Rao (2001) aptly characterizes this exclusive upper caste approach towards feminist issues as 'Brahminical feminism'. However, the case is not peculiar to colonial India as Ghosal mentions here, but to a large extent, the same state of feminist approach persists even after independence.

3.3 Feminism in India in Early Nineteenth Century:

The discontent of Dalit women against Indian feminism is not baseless as a careful analysis of the history of feminist movements in India and Indian feminist literature shows that there is a huge absence of the scholarship as well as activism that could have understood and addressed the intricate issues of caste/gender dynamics. A short historical sketch of Indian feminism is brought in here to pinpoint its indifference towards the Dalit women's issues which has already been claimed by the critics discussed above. As an overview shaped through the works of Radha Kumar (1993), Padma Anagol (2005), Geetanjali Gangooli (2007) and Partha Chatterjee (1993), the emergence and transitions of feminism in India can presumably be recorded in three phases. In the first phase, the feminist movements emerged as a part of a series of social reformation movements that broke out in early 19th century as an outcome of the effect of the British education on the bourgeois upper caste society of India, especially in Bengal. The feminist movement which mainly started as a movement against the practice of "Sati" by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of Brahmo Sabha, gradually picked up issues such as women's education and widow marriage as important agendas of the movement. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj, who was basically a Hindu religious and social reformer, and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar had considerable contributions in propagating women's education and equal rights. But ironically enough, all these reformative actions were confined to the

upper caste Hindu women only, which leads Ghosal to argue that "Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar, though have made important contributions towards the emancipation of women in our country, unfortunately their efforts largely remained confined to particular echelons of society and failed to touch the grassroot" (794-795). Ghosal proves to be correct in this context, because Sati and widow marriage were real concerns among the upper castes but not among Dalits because Sati tradition "was practiced particularly among the upper caste echelon of high caste groups, including the nobility" (qtd. in Nanda R 130) as an implication of caste pride and purity of upper caste women. For instance, Dalit feminist writer Bama, in her autobiographical narrative *Sangati* (1994), while talking about the tradition of widow remarriage in her community, explains that remarriage of the widowed women in her community was not a problem at all. Widows of her community were treated equally with the other women, whereas among the upper-castes, widows faced major social discriminations. In Bama's words,

> Some women marry a second time after the death of a husband. That is quite normal among us. On the other hand, among the other communities of our village, you can see straight away, the indignities suffered by widows. In our street though, everyone is held the same; widows are not treated differently (90).

This makes the argument even stronger that the issues like Sati and widow marriage which were taken as principal issues of women by the reformists could not really touch the lives of Dalit women as their issues were different.

Women's education, which was emphasized by the reformers of the period, did not encompass Dalit women, precisely because, then in the Hindu religious-social order, learning for Dalits was considered to be a taboo. Moreover, in a society where even upper caste women were rarely allowed to be educated, education for Dalit women was very much like a dream. However, there are some instances, albeit very few wherein the issues of caste was raised through the reformative actions of Brahmo Sabha and Arya Samaj, but the plight of Dalit women and the caste/gender dynamics had never been understood by any of the upper caste reformers of the era. While explaining the limitations of the reforms,

Anupama Rao states that "Beginning with the debates about the abolition of sati in 1829, the reformers' attention to practices such as widow remarriage and the age of consent focused solely on upper-caste women and their lives" (qtd. in Ghasal 795). Nevertheless, it is important here to note that Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was the only one among the revolutionaries of the period who extensively worked for the Dalit women and Phule was the first person to establish a school for the untouchable girls in 1848. Phule was "the first shudra thinker … to have thought about the gender question" (Deshpande IV) along with the caste issues. His activism was not restricted to Dalit women only, rather addressed issues of women in general as he established first school for girls in 1842 and established a widow home in 1963. Not only Phule but also his wife Sabitribai Phule had considerable contribution for Dalit women's education and women at large.

3.4 Feminism and the Indian National Freedom Struggle:

Towards the last decades of the 19th century, under the influence of growing nationalism, feminism took a new turn and was reoriented to function as a complementary asset for achieving nationalist goals. The nationalist upsurge had two major agendas: firstly, to unite and prepare its folk for the national freedom fight against the British; secondly, to "glorify India" and "defend everything traditional" (Chatterjee 116) as the western modernity was seen to be a major threat to the Indian tradition and cultural codes of Hindu religion. Therefore the concept 'Indian Woman' which was always associated with tradition and perceived as an embodiment of culture and morality, needed to be worked on to reproduce a docile 'femininity'. It is because, the elite upper caste society felt that the "new woman", who was becoming conscious of her rights with the effect of western modernity and British education, has become "coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous" (127). Thus the women were educated and trained to acquire 'feminine' qualities like "chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience, and … love" (Chatterjee 129). In fact, with the nationalist undertaking, the elite upper caste was able to reproduce a new patriarchal framework to confine the women within

the domestic sphere, and represented the women as self-sacrificing and spiritual symbols of nation. Radha Kumar rightly states that, "the first half of the twentieth century saw a symbolic use of mother as a rallying device, from feminist assertion of women's power as mother of the nation…" (2). Therefore the whole idea of women's liberation was reduced to the symbolic representation of woman as the 'mother of the nation'. Uma Chakravarty comes up with a valid point as to why nationalism encompassed the woman into its fold. It is because, as Chakravarty argues, "the nation's identity lay in the culture and more specifically in its womanhood. In the changed political and social environment the image of womanhood was more important than reality" (qtd. in Ghosal 796). The Indian nationalist project had to represent a unified and culturally rich national identity against the colonial power for which women's association was indispensable, and therefore the representation of woman as the 'mother of the nation' came into the nationalist picture. In the meantime the women nationalist figures such as Sister Nibedita, Sarala Devi and Sarojini Naidu motivated women towards nationalist movements. In this bigger picture of nationalism, women's liberation was almost a forgotten agenda because the nationalists did see it as a major distraction from the freedom fight against the British government. However, the women who were represented in the political forefront of the national struggle were upper caste elite women only, and thus, the women from the lower rungs of the society were sidelined.

3.5 Feminist Reawakening in the Post-Independent India:

There was silence over the feminist concerns in the early independent India since the national independence had given the people an assurance and the hope that they were free and independent individuals and could have control over their own lives with equal rights and freedom. In addition, there was an expectation from almost every section of the society that the new independent government will be able to address the existing problems to maintain peace and equality in the society. Ghosal rightly points out that, "there was belief during the Nehruvian period of political compromise that egalitarianism, democracy, secularism and

socialistic pattern of modernization will eliminate all social evils including caste, religious fundamentalism and discrimination against women" (799). But the Nehruvian period proved to be an utter disappointment from feminist viewpoints for there was no significant change in women's status and their structural subjugation continued to persist through different socio-religious patriarchal systems. Though the constitutional rules were made to deal with different kinds of women's issues, it had no serious effect when it came to practice. Women were barely given any chance to register their equal participation in any developmental works, but were exploited in the name of different developmental schemes of the state. Neera Desai and Maithreyi Krishnaraj argue that, "women have been looked upon either as victim of social practices or target for development as in the post-independence period, but never as participants in development" (qtd. in Ghosal 799). Such socio-cultural immobility in terms of giving women equal space and the inaction of state policies to bring in gender equality results in growing rage and frustration among women.

Besides the growing frustration among women against the failure of the state policies, there were other factors that helped in feminist reawakening in the post-independent India; fist being the national independence itself, which in some way or the other boosted every individual with the feeling of 'free individual' having equal rights in a democratic state. This concept of 'free individual' prompted the 'free Indian woman' to look objectively into different social domains wherein the intrinsic patriarchal framework denied equal rights to women and perpetrated different forms of violence both in domestic and public spheres. Secondly, women did not have an external enemy as they had the colonizer in the colonial India, and therefore there was no need to ascribe to the concept of woman as self-sacrificing 'mother of nation' or "the sahadharmini model" (Ghosal 797) of femininity which was appropriated by the nationalist project. Such kind of womanhood unfortunately had produced new forms of patriarchy under nationalist camouflage. A politically free nation state provided women a chance to look into the problems inside, rejected the patriarchal constructs of femininity and womanhood, and started claiming for equal rights as

opposed to their counterparts. Feminist movements in the early post-independence India began by relying on the "principles of equality and asserting that gender-based structures, such as the sexual division of labor, oppressed and subordinated women" (Radhakumar 2). The conventional nationalist projection of woman as "wife-mother-power" was overthrown by "the image of economically independent woman" (Radhakumar 2). Feminist movements during 1970- 1980 such as formation of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in 1972, the Progressive Organization of Women (1973), the anti-price-rise agitation (1973), Chipko Movement (1973-1974), the Nav Nirman Movement (1974) and the Forum Against Rape (set up in 1980, now redefined as Forum Against Oppression of Women) were the early signs of feminist reawakening in modern India.

The Self Employed Women's Association was a trade union initiated by Ela Bhatt in Ahmadabad and the main goal of this association was to organize women workers for full employment and self-reliance. The Progressive Organization of Women was basically a students' organization from Hyderabad which became popular for its campaigns against various women's issues such as "the harassment of women students in buses and on the roads, against giving or taking dowry, and against the obscene portrayal of women on cinema hoardings" (Tharu and Lalita II 98). This organization became quite popular for its activities which were specifically focused on gender issues and had considerable participation in other feminist movements as well. Though the anti-price agitation in Maharashtra and the Chipko Movement in Himalaya region were not exclusively dealing with women's issues, such movements did exhibit women's active participation in social issues which was a sign of changing power dynamics of Indian patriarchal society. However, Chipko movement in which the women activists demonstrated the act of clinging to the trees as a gesture to save the trees, not only was a huge success but also led to the rise of ecofeminist discourse in India. The Forum Against Rape, as Menon states, was a "feminist collective that was formed in the aftermath of the historic Mathura rape case in 1980" (*Kafila.org*), in which two policemen had allegedly raped a tribal girl in the police

station. This was a major outrage against the custodial rape and sensitized the issue of sexual exploitation of women that became a major point of debate in media and academia.

Feminism in fact had caught the academic attention much before in 1974 when the report titled "Towards Equality" was placed in the parliament by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) that revealed the persistent discrimination of women in every sphere, despite the implication of state policies to bring gender equality. This shocking report alarmed the administrative, political and academic spheres to render more focus on gender issues. Ghosal rightly observes '"since 1975 both in academics and in administration a serious change crept in. From this time women's study, to some extent, provides theoretical basis for the women's movement and sociopolitical context of 'gender politics'" (800). Women's studies was recognized as a discipline with the establishment of the Indian Association of Women's Studies in1981. The idea of such an academic establishment was inspired by the emergence of women's studies in USA during 1960s based on the writings of Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Wolf. However, after garnering the academic attention, Indian feminism started addressing various women's issues such as dowry, bride burning, rape, wage discrimination, wife beating and the existing patriarchy in the domestic sphere and socio-religious traditions.

3.6 Indian Feminism and Othering of Dalit Woman:

To come back to the point which necessitates this short analysis of history of feminism in India till the last decades of 20th century, as the study indicates, there is an absence of caste even in the post independent feminist movements. So far as the analysis is concerned, one can firmly argue that feminism at a political level had managed to address the women's issues in general along with the class/gender dynamics by addressing the issues of women laborers but the complex caste/gender undercurrents and its causalities remained unrecognized by the feminists of this era. Sharmila Rege observes that in Indian feminism, there is a conscious operation of upper-caste authority that results in producing an ideal

casteless feminist subject which undermines the differences that the lives of Dalit women carry. Rege, therefore, argues,

> The upper caste of feminist modern is thus signified as absence of caste in claiming to represent the ideal subject of feminist politics… The question and analytical gaze of the difference of dalit women is therefore not directed towards an interrogation of the theoretical frames of reference and normative status of 'unmarked' feminism (*Writing Caste* 66-67).

The absence of the analytical gaze in registering the difference of Dalit women is not due to the upper caste domination in feminism only, but also because of their casteist stereotyping of Dalit women as brainless and unintelligible subjects. According to Gangoli, there are many Dalit women's organizations which feel that in Indian feminist Movements "Dalit women are projected as 'having only experience, not intelligence' therefore alluding to the ways in which the interests of Dalit women have been marginalized within Indian women's movements" (10). In other words, Dalit women are looked down upon and objectified as mere accumulations of experience but devoid of cognitive attributes and thus are voiceless entities. Such a projection of Dalit women as brainless and voiceless entities in the mainstream feminism can better be understood through Gopal Guru's analogy of "theoretical brahmins and empirical shudras" in his essay "How Egalitarian Are the Social Sciences in India?" (2002). Here Guru points out the discriminatory practice of Social Sciences in India as being dominated by the upper-castes which results in reproducing and galvanizing the Brahminical epistemology and thus preventing the caste-subaltern voices from the sphere of knowledge production. There is a claim among the upper-caste intellectuals that the caste-subalterns have the experience only, but lack in "reflective capacities" (5005) which is required for theorization. In other words, the upper-caste intelligentsia claims that they only have the ability to theorize and therefore are satirically referred to as the "theoretical brahmins" (5003) by Guru, and the caste-subalterns who are claimed to have the experience only are defined as the "empirical sudras" (5003). The intention of bringing this analogy here is to show that Dalit women are also perceived and represented in the same way in the

mainstream feminist context as brainless beings who are unable to voice their own experiences. Such dismissals of Dalit women alienate them from the mainstream feminism. Anveshi Law Committee in 1997 comes up with similar kind of an opinion as it observes that the issue of Dalit women and women from Muslim community are undermined because the feminist movements in India are "urban, Hindu upper caste-class" and the woman identity which is projected through these movement is a homogeneous one, "neither Dalit nor Muslim, but woman" (qtd. in Grabham, Cooper, Krishnadas and Herman 330). In the Indian feminist movements, as Dietrich (1992) claims, minority groups such as Dalit and Muslim women feel alienated due to the use of Hindu religious symbols such as Kali and Shakti (12). Shahnaaz, a feminist activist who belongs to the Muslim community, complains that "… even within the women's movement, I felt my minority status, felt that this is Hindu feminism" (qtd. in Gangoli 28). From the above discussion and analysis, it is evident that Indian mainstream feminism is largely Hindu upper caste-class by nature and thus neglects the other minority groups.

Apart from being Hindu upper caste-class, as Anveshi Law Committee observes, Indian feminism is largely an urban phenomenon. A tint of the claim can be felt even in the recent years through a comparative analysis of the media coverage and the feminist response to the two heart-rending rape and murder cases: Kherlanji Massacre (2006) and Delhi gang rape (2012). In September 29, 2006, in the Bhandara district of Maharashtra, in a small village called Kherlanji, out of five members of a Dalit family, four of them i.e. Surekha Bhotmange (mother, 40 years old) Priyanka Bhotmange (daughter, 17 years old), Sudhir Bhotmange (son, 21 years old) and Roshan Bhotmange (son 19 years old), except Bhaiyalal Bhotmange (father, 55 years old) were killed by a group of upper caste people which included both men and women. The women were gang raped before being murdered. According to Anand Tultumbde (2010), at the time of the incident, there were only three Dalit families in the village including the Bhotmanges and the remaining were OBCs with a huge majority. Tension between the Bhotmange family and the OBCs arose and grew because of a series of clashes centering around the land issue. The courage of Bhotmange family to

challenge the OBC landowners had hurt their caste pride. The OBCs were also jealous of the educational and economic progress of the Bhotmange family. The growing anger resulted in a mass-murder when a group of OBCs were arrested because of their attack on Siddharth Gajbhiye (brother of Surekha Bhotmange) who always stood for the Bhotmange family. The attackers were arrested on the basis of the statements of Surekha and Priyanka as the eyewitnesses of the attack. The attackers were released on bail on the same day of their arrest and conspired the massacre to avenge against Bhotmanges. The massacre occurred just after a few hours of the release of the attackers. According to Teltumbde,

> Between 6.00 and 6.30 p.m., mania raged at the Bhotmange house. Women were active participants, say such witnesses as were willing to speak. Everybody was armed – with sticks, axes, cycle chains, iron rods, knives… Rushing into the hut, the women in the mob first dragged Priyanka and Surekha out by their hair, beat them and tore off their clothes. Priyanka was then taken to a nearby cattle shed where she was raped, possibly by many people. It is likely that Surekha also met with the same fate. Sudhir and Roshan were, meanwhile, beaten mercilessly. It is said that they were ordered to rape their sister and mother. When they did not comply, their genitals were crushed and mutilated. All four lay helpless as anyone and everyone did whatever they wanted to them. It is said the rapes continued even after the women had died. The horror continued for about two hours. When it finally ended, everything suddenly returned to normal, as though nothing had happened. Some people brought a bullock cart, loaded the bodies into it and dumped them about four kilometers away in the irrigation canal… (Teltumbde 101).

Before the incident happened, being aware of the tension, the family had asked for protection from the local police, but no necessary steps were taken by the police. As per the report "Suppressing the Voice of the Oppressed: State Terror on Protests Against the Khairlanji Massacre, A Report to the Nation", the police were informed when the massacre was in progress, but the silence prevailed. The case was not even registered many hours after the mutilated dead bodies were found in the canal. No proper investigation was carried out as "the postmortem report failed to find evidence of rape; the complaint was recorded improperly under the Protection of Civil Rights Act rather than the Prevention of Atrocities (on SC/ST) Act…" (*Pucl.org*). State machineries, politicians from local MLAs to

ministers tried to cover up the incident. The unusual silence of the media also played an important role in preventing the news spread quickly and when the Dalits came on the streets protesting against silence of the state, it was characterized as "senseless violence", "meaningless destruction", and "mob fury" (*Pucl.org*). The Dalit protesters faced harsh consequences like death and serious injury as the police reacted violently. Besides all these organized state and caste conspiracy in this case, what attracts the attention here is the silence of the mainstream feminist organizations, groups and intellectuals over the brutal murder and brutal sexual violence meted upon the two Dalit women by the upper castes. According to the report, Dalit women were the ones who came out for protest against the rape.

An equally brutal rape and murder took place in Delhi on 16th of December 2012. The incident happened while a 23 year old paramedical student was travelling in a private bus late in the night with her male friend. Both of them were terribly beaten up and the girl was gang raped by six people for multiple times in the moving bus, and subsequently both of them were thrown out to the roadside. The girl could not survive the multiple injuries and died in the hospital after few days of the incident. Unlike Kherlanji massacre, the incident gathered unparalleled media and public attention; people broke into the streets for protest irrespective of caste, class or community; news channels and newspapers were flooded with the same news. From chief ministers to prime minister, everyone expressed their heartfelt concerns and assured the people to take quick and strict actions. Many celebrities from the film industry, sports and business sectors condemned the barbarism and participated in the candle light protests. As Urvashi Bhutalia writes,

> Unusually, these protests included not only women, but also men: they cut across class and caste, region and geography, urban and rural or semi-rural, and they drew unprecedented media attention both at the national and international levels. Questions were raised in the media, in political forums, in international media and indeed at the governmental level (1-2).

This incident brought considerable changes as new constitutional amendments were made to strengthen laws against rape and other forms of sexual violence against women. What is striking here is the difference in the response that the two incidents received from the state, media, public and feminist intellectuals. Why was there a silence of the state, mainstream media and feminist politics over Kherlanji massacre? Why did not the main stream population break into the street for protest and mainstream feminist organizations were silent, though the degree of violence inflected on the Dalit women in Kherlanji was no less than in the Delhi case? An objective analysis of the two incidents delineate two basic differences: the caste bias and the geographical location. Firstly, unlike the Delhi case, the victims belong to the Dalit caste in case of Kherlanji for which mainstream caste bias was involved in it but not the same in Delhi case. Secondly, Delhi being the capital of the country is one of the metro cities of India, whereas Kherlanji as a small village is located in a rural area. It is clear that the media coverage and the feminist attention are focused more in the urban areas whereas the feminist concerns in rural areas remain neglected.

The intention of the argument here is to indicate that, due to its exclusive and selective approach, Indian feminism has failed to touch upon the feminist concerns from the lower rungs of the society which gives rise to a sense of dissatisfaction and alienation among the doubly deprived female communities like 'Dalit women'. With the recognition of the layered differences, Dalit feminism has realized the necessity to represent the community separately not only as an act of projecting the multifold marginality but also as an act of assertion of the difference that encapsulates them as 'Dalit women'. While describing about her involvement in Dalit feminist activism, Kumud Pawade, in her autobiographical narrative *Antasphot* (Originally published in Marathi in 1981) gives a glimpse of how Dalit women start to pursue and represent their marginal woman selves in opposition to the upper caste women. In her autobiographical narrative, she talks about the following incident to highlight the same. In the national convention of Dalit women organized in Delhi, seeing the focus of the discussion exclusively centering around 'Dalit women' as a separate category, a few mainstream women

participants who were present there felt that "such a category" such as 'Dalit women' "should not be used", because, according to their understanding "the entire woman caste is Dalit" (316). Though, Pawade holds a similar kind of view, she still considers "Indian dalit woman is the most dalit (oppressed) among all women" (316). In the same meeting, a Dalit girl delivers a brave speech making the difference clear between the Dalit women and the upper caste women:

> We live in the hutments outside the village, like insignificant worms in drainage water. Have you ever given 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 also is the reason why we suffer, why we are exploited (316).

The important point which is put across by the girl here is the complementarity of gender and caste that contributes in producing doubly oppressed subjects like 'Dalit women'.

The mutual operation of caste and gender in relation to Dalit women is a complex network conditioned in Hindu social order and its outcomes are extremely humiliating. Through an objective analysis of the real life situation of Dalit women, one can realize how true the words of the Dalit girl were. But at the same time, it is also imperative to look into the matter as to why the upper caste feminist agents who were present in the meeting felt uncomfortable with such a proclamation. Why did they fail to reason the difference in the degree of violence that exists between an upper caste woman and a Dalit woman due to their caste differences? Anupama Rao tries to explain such a problematic when she argues that the attempt to understand and theorize Dalit women's life world and their problems through the established academic apparatus is not just a simple act of accommodating differences into the academic sphere, rather the very process embeds the "… risk of appropriating dalit women's lived realities through the inaccessible modes of theorization and equalization that point to a persistent neo-Brahmanism in the modes of academic conversation" (207). In other words, she tries to explicate the fact that the academia tries to fit the 'lived realities' of Dalit women in the theoretical proximities of textualisation, but ignores the fact that the

historicity of the academic discourse is indicative of the Brahminical inheritance. Thus there is always a danger of 'lived realities' of Dalit women being misunderstood and misrepresented in the Brahminical way of knowledge production. The upper caste feminists present in that meeting committed the same mistake by equalizing Dalit women with the upper caste women while ignoring the caste agent in the context of Dalit women's oppression. On the other hand, the Dalit girl's knowledge about mutual oppression of caste and gender was an outcome of the 'lived realities' of her life. Rao indicates to one more important cause why mainstream feminism is reluctant to take caste into consideration along with gender. According to her, the upper-caste feminism has the "… luxury, in some sense to escape their caste persona through a turn to the (progressive) problem of gender and 'woman'…" (208). Under the shade of feminism, the upper-caste women who talk about gender inequality but practice casteism against the Dalit women, it becomes an easy way for them to hide their casteist selves by holding the entire focus on the issues of gender only. But in case of Dalit women, there is no way to escape neither in case of gender nor in case of caste. The 'double jeopardy', as Frances Beale talks of in her essay "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" in the context of African American women, is also experience by the Dalit women: of being Dalit and of being woman.

There are numerous instances in the history of the physical and sexual violence of Dalit women perpetrated by upper-caste males. Out of those, the Sirasgaon incident, as analyzed by Rao, exposes multiple agents that add intensity of the violence committed against Dalit women. It shows how the whole scenario changes when 'Dalit' is added to a woman's identity. It is worthwhile to observe how state legal apparatus and every socio-political agent conspire together to produce the multifold victimhood of Dalit woman. The incident which took place in village Sirasgaon, Gangapur, Taluka, Auranga District, Maharashtra, on the 22nd of December 1963 was a case of stripping and parading naked four Dalit women namely Laxmibai Vithal Amrita Sirsat, and her three daughters-in-law, Sonabai, Kadubai and Sakrabai. The incident happened as a revengeful reaction against a quarrel between Vithal Amrita Sirsat's youngest son Kishan and his

employer Yedu Kale. Kishan worked as an agricultural laborer under Yedu Kale and Kishan's wife Sonabai often brought food for Kishan to the field. According to the judgement notes, few months before the incidence, while Sonabai was returning home after giving breakfast to her husband,

> some gestures were made to her [Sonabai] by Yedu Kale calculated to outrage her modesty. [Sonabai] had narrated the incident to her mother-in-law Laxmibai. The two had approached Yedu's wife Shevantibai. She apologized on behalf of her husband. However about a week before 22-12-1963 Kishan declared his intention of discontinuing Yedu's work. That time he suggested [to] Shebantibai that he had taken very ill of the incident with Sonabai and asked her to imagine what she would have felt if Kishan himself was to touch her Sari or to outrage her modesty. Perhaps Shevantibai spoke about it to her husband with some relishments. (qtd. in Rao 219-20)

On the day of the incident, late in the morning, Yadu Kale with his upper caste friends reached Vithal Amrita in search of Kishan. Incidentally Kishan was away from home, while Yadu Kale accused Krishna of playing mischief with his (Yadu's) wife. Yadu started beating Vithal (Kishan's Father) while his two elder sons ran away. On his way home, when Kishan saw the crowd near his house, expecting the danger he kept himself away from the situation. The group of upper-castes accompanying Yadu beat Laxmibai and three of her daughters-in-law. They draged the four Dalit women out of the house, stripped them naked and paraded them through the village. Yadu ordered the women to stop in front of his house so that his wife could see them. Yadu, then threw a sari to the four women with which they wrapped themselves together and returned home. To add to the humiliation, the women were beaten badly on their hands when they tried to cover their genitals with their hands during the parade. When the case was filed, the local PSI who was a Patil (an upper caste), tried to hush up the case, the local politicians tried to bribe the family and ultimately when nothing worked, they threatened the family of making their life difficult in the village.

The intention of bringing the incident into discussion here is not only to exhibit the difference between the degree of vulnerability between the upper caste women and the Dalit women as the subjects of violence but also to expose the

upper-caste favoritism in Indian feminism. Being an upper caste land owner, when Yadu Kale tries to outrage the modesty of Sonabai nothing really happens precisely because she is a Dalit woman. But Kishan's wife, mother and sisters-in-law are dragged out of the home, beaten, stripped and paraded naked in the village, when Kishna, in order to make Shebantabai feel the gravity of obscenity which her husband has committed, asks her to 'imagine what she would have felt if Kishan himself was to touch her sari or outrage her modesty'. Though, Kishan's act of asking Shevantibai to imagine the possibility of similar kind of violence being committed upon her by him, exhibits a patriarchal power relation, there is no parallel to the degree of violence perpetrated on the Dalit women. What is ironical here in both the cases is the fact that it is the women who suffer for the mistakes committed by men. For the mistake committed by Yadu it is his wife who faces the harsh words of Kishan. But Kishan does not dare to commit any physical or sexual violence against Yadu's wife being aware of her upper caste status. For Kishan's mistake of telling harsh words to Yadu's wife, it is the women of her family who face extreme physical and psychological violence. Yadu and his other upper caste friends are able to humiliate Kishan's female family members easily not only because they are women but mainly because they are 'Dalit women'. Such kinds of instances are indicative of two major operations of caste and gender: first being the fact that caste and gender mutually reproduce multifold marginal selves such as 'Dalit women'. Secondly, Dalit women's bodies become the primary subjects to the sexual and physical violence perpetrated by the upper caste men through which they claim their domination in the society and maintain the caste structure. Dalit women become easily accessible object of enjoyment for the upper caste men since they work as laborers and servants in their houses and fields. They are often forced to compromise with the sexual and physical exploitations meted on them by the upper caste men primarily because in most of the cases any action against the upper caste men goes futile because of the power they enjoy for their upper caste inheritance, and in return Dalit women face the wrath of upper caste men which results in many other forms of violence. Secondly, Dalit women cannot afford to stand against the upper caste men since

they earn their livelihood by working for the upper castes. Such a forced silence of Dalit women to their sexual exploitation helps the upper castes to objectify Dalit women as hypersexual bodies and thus promiscuous beings. Viramma rightly explains the upper caste construction of Dalit woman as a lustful and immoral being, as she says "We Paratchi[3] have the reputation of being easy women who'll jump into bed with any one if they whistle" (52). But at the same time she also exposes the hypocrisy of the so called gentlemen of the upper castes who characterize Dalit women as dirty and foul. She argues with her raw words, "those gentlemen of the *ur*[4] talk about the uncleanness of Untouchables, but our holes always turn them on. We're the ones they get up all their dirty tricks with; it makes you think our juices taste better than their wives'!" (52). According to Viramma, like many other workplaces and institutions, Dalit women are sexually exploited in the hospitals by the upper caste doctors and staff members. In her words "The doctors pretend to listen to our hearts so that they can feel our breasts. Others just go ahead and get their packet out and tell us to touch it" (52). But they choose to remain silent because if they complain against it they would be "called liars", their names would be "crossed off the hospital registers" and they "would not be given any more treatment" (52). Instances like Sirasgaon case and the lived experiences of Dalit women of their physical and sexual exploitations by the upper caste men which have been portrayed in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives are suggestive of the fact that caste and gender mutually reproduce doubly marginalized selves such as 'Dalit women' and force them into silence. Upper caste men are found to be the active agents in terms of using Dalit women as their subjects of violence which helps them in keeping the caste-power structure intact.

Apart from exhibiting the vulnerability of Dalit women due to their caste and gender, Sirasgaon case also exposes the existing upper caste favoritism in Indian feminism. While doing a field study of this case, Anupama Rao meets a person whom she calls S, who is a government employee in Bombay High Court. Rao asks S whether there is any feminist intervention in this case and S answers there is not even a single one. In order to explain the discriminatory nature of

feminism on the basis of caste, S brings another case into discussion which takes place just after Sirasgaon case and is reported in the *Maharashtra Times*. While travelling in the Bombay local, someone snatches away the *Mangalsutra* [symbolic of the marital status of a married Hindu woman] of Swati Patankar [Patankar is an upper-caste title] and as S mentions "many activists, academics, etc. were incensed by this case and wrote in about the threat of women's safety" (217). But ironically, hardly any of these academics make any response to the Sirasgaon case. Therefore the question which Rao raises here is unavoidable, as she asks "How was it that they were so incensed about Swati Patankar. Was it because she was a *Patankar*?" (217). There is hardly any doubt that, Indian feminism is not at all free from the caste prejudice as it treats upper-caste women and Dalit women differently. However, the point of argument is not just to accuse Indian feminism of being casteist, but more importantly to reflect on how this discriminatory approach alienates Dalit women from the mainstream feminist scenario which compels them to search for a separate space for themselves.

The caste-bias and the wide absence of the Dalit women's concerns in Indian feminism are not only found in socio-political scenario but also in feminist writings of the upper-caste women. Beginning with the critical and autobiographical writing from the nineteenth and early twentieth century to the rise of modern feminist fictions produced by the upper-caste women, the primary concern has been the issues of the upper-caste women in a patriarchal society. It is rare to come across an upper-caste feminist writer and activist like Mahashweta Devi who has shown sincere commitment both in terms of activism and writing in addressing the issues of tribal and Dalit women. Her translated short story collection *Outcaste: Four Stories* (2002) is an attempt to represent the plight of tribal and Dalit women through the socially and economically deprived women characters such as Dhouli, Shanichari, Josmina and Chinta. Except such exceptional cases which focus on the lives of the women from the lower rungs of the society, the upper-caste woman has been the primary subject of feminist writings that are produced by upper caste women. In some of the writings the 'woman' is treated just as a gendered subject which undermines the socio-cultural

differences among the women and thus avoids registering the multifold marginality that results from such socio-cultural differences like caste or class. Being one of the founding texts of feminism in India, Tarabai Sindhe's polemical essay "Stri Purush Tulna" (A Comparison of Men and Women), which offers a scathing criticism of dominant male sex is not free from such an error as it represents woman as a monolithic category. This long essay was originally written in Marathi and published as a book in1882. The 'woman' whom Sindhe defends in her essay, gives an impression of a casteless Hindu woman as the criticism is pitched against the Hindu males in general. Therefore, the additional burden of caste(d) women selves has not been taken into consideration. It is very unlikely to think that Sindhe was not aware of the predicament of the Dalit women, because she was a member of Satyashodhak Samaj (1873), an organization established by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule for the eradication of social discrimination against Dalits and special focus was given to Dalit women as they were the most deprived. Like Sindhe, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, who is known as "the one to lay the foundation for a movement for women's liberation in India" (Tharu and Lalita I 243), was much concerned about the upper-caste women only. Her masterpiece *High Caste Hindu Woman* (1888) specifically focuses on issues of upper caste women. In fact, the title itself is very much suggestive of her exclusive focus on upper-caste Hindu women. What is being argued here is that the othering of the Dalit women in the sphere of feminist literary representation has occurred from the very inception of feminism in India.

On a similar note, it is also observed that most of the upper caste women's autobiographies have been the narratives of their struggle against tradition in the pursuit of being modern and there is a dearth of caste-critique in these autobiographies. With a specific reference to Marathi upper-caste women's autobiography, Sharmila Rege states that "… the modern Marathi women's autobiographies have been narratives of upper caste women, their struggle with tradition and their desire to be modern…Caste is the 'other' of the modern as if it belongs only to dalit women" (*Writing Caste* 66). In other words, in the guise of modernity the progressive upper caste woman denies recognition to caste as a

social reality so that her casteist self remains unexposed and the focus remains undivided on her eventful narrative of struggle and achievement. M.S.S. Pandian also makes similar observation as he argues that "… caste in upper caste autobiography – and in Marathi women's autobiographies – always belongs to someone else or to some other time, especially to the lower caste women in the mills or to vegetable vendors or to a time gone past" (qtd. in Rege, *Writing Caste* 65). The unwillingness among the upper caste women to recognize caste as a problem signifies that they enjoy their privileged status of upper caste inheritance which gets reflected in their autobiographies. The absence of caste is not a case specific to Marathi upper caste women's autobiographies, rather it is a common trend among the upper caste women's autobiography in general. Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jiban*, 1876 (considered to be the first women's autobiography), Sunity Devee's *The Autobiography of an Indian Princess* (1921), Mrinal Pandey's *Daughter's Daughter* (1993), Amrita Pritam's *The Revenue Stamp* (1976), Kamala Das' *My story* (1973), Shobha De's *Selective Memory* (1998) are a few to name in the same catalog where caste is roundly ignored. Except their upper caste bequest, almost all these women writers are part of the upper class or upper middle class legacy where caste does not seem to carry any such importance to be discussed in their lives. Some of the women's autobiographies such as Krishna Hutheesing's *With No Regrets: an Autobiography* (1943) Nayan Tara Sahgal's *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954) and *From Fear set Free* (1962), Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's *Prison Days* (1946) record their contribution to the Indian national freedom as a part of the Nehruvian legacy. But in this nationalist outlook, caste does not feature as a potential problem; rather caste is left untouched to highlight their contributions to the nation building.

However, it is arguable that autobiography, being a personal narrative space, allows a writer to hold focus on her personal life, and caste may not necessarily intersect an upper caste writer's life or she may not feel caste as an important agenda to be discussed in the purview of her life. In other words, the notion that the genre (autobiography) allows the author to represent only her problems and achievements without being bothered about the other can be

justified, but at the same time, while living in a caste-ridden society, it seems implausible that caste does not affect an upper caste person's life enough to be talked about even in her autobiography. The argument here is that, while fighting against the conservatism, tradition and patriarchy on one hand, the upper caste women, on the other hand, enjoy the supremacy which their upper caste status claims over the Dalit women. Hence, the upper caste women do not want to lose their power over the Dalit women subjects by treating caste as a problem. In addition, the dominant-dominated power relation which has been maintained through the socio-cultural practices, gets reproduced in the process of knowledge production. Therefore, irrespective of genres, the silencing of caste and othering of Dalit women is embedded in upper caste feminist writings.

Besides upper caste women's critical writing and autobiography which have been discussed, upper caste feminist fictions, especially novels, acquire an important place in feminist literary movement in India. A careful investigation of such fictions shows that there are few fictional works by the upper caste feminist writers which focus on the problems of Dalit women. Most of the upper caste feminist novels have upper-caste woman as their protagonists in common – for example, Sarita in Shashi Despandey's *The Dark Holds no Terror* (1980) and Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1988), Virmati in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters* (1988) and Nina in *The Immigrant* (2008), Nanda in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Rukmani in Kamala Markandya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and Mira in *Some Inner Fury* (1956), Rose in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985) Nisha in Sobha De's *Sultry Days* (1994), Ammu in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and the mythical character Panchali in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusion* (2008), all of them are upper-caste women.

Some of the major themes of these feminist novels are the Brahminical patriarchy, women's struggle against the exploitative Hindu tradition and the problems they face inside marriage. Nevertheless, a few works such as Anita Desai's *Two Virgins* (1973) and Kamala Markandaya's *The Village by the Sea* (1982), etc. touch upon the lives of the impoverished women, but it is rare to see a

Dalit woman as a protagonist in the upper caste feminist novels. In her novel, *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy problematizes caste/gender issues and challenges the Brahminical orthodoxy by bringing in the tragic love story between Velutha, a Dalit man and Ammu an upper-caste woman who has an unsuccessful married life. But Roy's concern in this novel seems to be limited to the predicament of upper-caste woman and Dalit man only. The issues of Dalit woman remain unregistered since there is an absolute absence of Dalit women in the novel.

This selective approach of Indian feminist fictions apparently create an impression as if women have a universal social identity i.e. upper-caste/middle-class. In a slightly different context, Rege's analogy of "Savarnisation of Womanhood' in her article "Dailt Women Talk Differently: A critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position" explains how the generalization of women as Savarnas excluded Dalit women from feminist movements during the last decades of the 20th century in India. According to Rege, the feminist movements during 1970s and 1980s which were largely influenced by leftist ideology made a significant effect in terms of politicizing the women's issues in terms of economic and work related problems. Serious debates were raised concerning class versus patriarchy and the sexual exploitation of women. But in the feminist movements of this period "All women came to be conceived as 'victims' and therefore 'dalit'; so that what results is a classical exclusion" (Rege, *Dalit Women* WS-42) of Dalit women. To put it differently, there was no distinction between Dalit women and upper-caste women. In other words, 'woman' meant the upper-caste woman or the 'Savarna woman'. This is what Rege calls 'Savanrnisation of Womanhood' which strategically ignores the distinct forms of violence against Dalit women and refuses to recognize the fact that a category like 'Dalit woman' exists, and thus, Dalit women are excluded from the feminist discourse. As a matter of consequence the very 'Savarnazation of Womanhood' gets reproduced in the literary representation which gets reflected in the Indian feminist novels. The omnipresence of upper caste women protagonists and the absence of Dalit women in the Indian feminist novels, as

examined above, have their roots in the Indian feminist movement. Through the brief analysis of the socio-political and literary history of Indian feminism, which this paper brings in, it is quite evident that, othering of the Dalit women by the mainstream feminism happens both at socio-political and literary levels.

3.7 Claiming the Difference: A Dalit Womanist Standpoint

Such othering of Dalit women is one of the reasons that prompt them to seek for their own independent agency of expression where they can voice their own experience and address their own specific issues. Emergence of the organizations like All Indian Dalit Women's Forum and National Federation of Dalit Women and Dalit Solidarity during 1990s was indicative of the breakaway of Dalit women from the mainstream feminism. The other and the most important reason for which 'Dalit women' claim to be recognized with a separate identity, in difference to the upper caste women, is the difference in experience due to their varied socio-cultural endowment which has been shaped through a casteist stratification of the social order. Because of this experiential difference, Indian mainstream feminism has not been able to capture the realities of Dalit women's lives. Therefore, 'Dalit women' claim their 'difference' not only by establishing organizations exclusively meant to address Dalit women's issues but also by producing a new epistemological framework, as Rege calls it, the 'Dalit feminist standpoint', conditioned to map the realities of Dalit women's lives. In the recent years, among the Dalit women writers and activists, there is an attempt to make the distinction even clearer since they redefine the 'Dalit feminist standpoint' as 'Dalit Womanism'. In her essay "Feminism and Dalit Women in India" (2009) Cynthia Stephen explains that the term 'Dalit womanism' is coined to "define and understand" the lives of Dalit women in "a more holistic way rather than the term 'Feminism' which comes with a lot of baggage and which, further, fails to be inclusive enough of our aspirations and concerns" (*Countercurrents.org*). In other words, 'Dalit womanism' proposes a new theoretical scale which is capable of mapping multiple marginalities of Dalit women.

The term 'womanist' was first used by Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). It is derived from the Black expression "You acting womanish" which is usually used by the Black mothers to address their girl children who are "outrageous, audacious, courageous" or having "*willful* behavior". According to Walker the term 'womanist' refers to a woman who "loves women, sexually and/or nonesexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility …, and women's strength. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female" (xi). In short, 'womanist' refers to a woman who stands for women's cause with all her maturity, responsibility, power and consciousness. By 'womanist', though Walker does not make any explicit reference to a particular group of woman having a certain socio-cultural identity and consciouness, the very derivation of the term from the Black cultural expression is clearly indicative of the fact that the term largely refers to the Black women. In other words, one can say that, Walker is using the term 'womanist' from "a self-defined, collective black women's standpoint" (Collins 2006). However, Walker does not want to limit the scope of the term by confining it among the Black women only as she says that a womanist is not a "separatist" rather a "universalist". In her words, a womanist is a ""Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama why are we brown, pink and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?" Ans: "Well you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower presented"" (xi). The conversation is carried out from a Black woman's or a colored woman's point of view as Walker considers the whole human race as part of the 'colored race'. Though Walker has universalist outlook in using the term 'womanist', her universalist outlook is an integral part of black woman's standpoint. Firstly, by choosing the term 'womanist' over 'feminist', Walker is claiming a 'difference' i.e., a Black woman's standpoint. Walker's 'womanist' concerns are much broader than the feminist concerns which are limited to sex / gender issues. To be precise, womanism can be understood as a "consciousness that incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, and political considerations" (Brown 2006). In other words, unlike feminism, womanism, apart from considering sex /

gender issues, also focuses on other distinct forms of marginalization in relation to race, culture, nation, politics and economy which has largely been overlooked by feminism.

In the western context, seeking a different space for articulation under the definition of 'womanism' is twofold. First being the exclusionist nature of feminism, confined to and operated by the mainstream White women with its "homogenized and white assumptions about women" (Maynard 2001). And the secondly reason is the differences in experience among women because of their sociocultural, ethnic and racial bequest which were not registered by feminism because of its homogenized measures. In particular, the mutual operation of race and gender in African American women's context which resulted in various forms of marginalization in a White dominated society was largely ignored by the feminist scholars. It is needless here to get into the details as the Black women critics such as Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Bell Hooks (1982, 1984) and many others have extensively talked about the dismissal of Black women and their specific problems by the White feminist scholars. Therefore standpoint of 'difference' is needed to capture the specific forms of marginalization which 'womanism' strives for. Marry Maynard rightly says that "difference enables us to explore not just the way in which women may be distinguished from each other but the mechanisms and processes through which distinct and specific forms of subordination are brought about" (301). By borrowing the term 'womanism' from Black women's context and using it in Dalit women's context to redefine the Dalit women's standpoint as 'Dalit womanism', Dalit women take a similar position of 'difference' to create a space for their own that enables them to address their specific forms of marginalization.

3.8 Conclusion:

A few questions may come into readers' mind with the application of the term 'womanism' in the Dalit women's context. Firstly, the term 'Dalit feminism' may suffice if 'womanism' is just about claiming the difference, in which case, what is the need for the term 'Dalit womanism'? Secondly, does the 'difference' confine

Dalit woman's discourse within itself or it has scope for exchange of dialogues from the other feminist paradigms? As an answer to the first question, it is imperative to mention that the term 'Dalit feminism' is very much in use, and thus, 'Dalit womanism' does not declare the dismissal of the earlier one, rather it suggests a further development. It also makes the readers conscious about the different ways through which Dalit women's standpoint can be understood. But what is promising about 'womanism' at its terminological level is its rejection of the term 'feminism' which in consequence rejects a whole knowledge structure that is casteist, discriminatory and exclusionist in practice. According to Stephen the fundamental principles of 'Dalit womanism' are "equality, complementarity and non-hierarchy" (*Countercurrent.org*). Since Dalit womanism strives for equality and non-hierarchy, it rejects leadership which has been an unavoidable part of the mainstream Indian feminism. It is because; leadership itself is based on the principle of hierarchy and thus disrupts equality within the community.

The second question can be answered through a humanitarian point of view which allows everyone to have interaction with each other and to take stand for each other but that should not undermine the community specific experiences. For example, an upper caste woman can take a Dalit womanist stand but she cannot claim to have Dalit woman's experience. In other words, an upper caste woman cannot speak in the voice of a Dalit woman or as a Dalit woman, though she can speak from a Dalit womanist position. Rege puts it more precisely as she says "we do not argue that non-dalit feminists can 'speak as' or 'for the' dalit women but they can 'reinvent themselves as dalit feminists" (*Dalit Woman* WS 45). There is always a danger of misrepresentation of Dalit women and their space getting occupied by the non-Dalit feminists if they are given a chance to 'speak for' or to 'speak as' Dalit women. But there should be interaction between them which will provide a scope to educate each other about their experiential and sociocultural communalities and specificities. To be precise, Dalit feminist critics are seeking for "A private open space" (Cliff 52) which signifies the emergence of

> … a new terrain, a new location, in feminist poetics. Not a room of one's own, not a fully public or collective self, not a domestic realm … which allows for the inside, the outside, and the liminal elements of in between" (Kaplan 197).

Though the inside and outside spaces are demarcated, they are not restricted to each other. The insider does not resist the outsider, neither do they try to dismiss or possess each other's differences and specificities, but they are in a constant process of conversation to be sensitized and informed about each other.

End notes

1. When Ambedkar demanded a separate electorate for Dalits in October 1939, G. B Kher, the Chief Minister of Bombay Presidency, opposed Ambedkar as he held the view that Dalits are a part of the nation and hence cannot be separated from the whole. In response to Kher, Ambedkar had given the famous reply "I am not a part of the whole at all; I am a part apart" which represented the deprived status of a Dalit and Dalits as a whole in India. The phrase 'doubly parted apart' is derived from Ambedkar's reply to represent double deprivation of Dalit woman in India both in terms of caste and gender (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 10, Bombay Govt. of Maharastra, 1991, p. 261)
2. Bhadromahilas- plural form of 'bhadromahila' which refers to upper-caste elite women.
3. Paratchi refer to the women of the Paraiyar caste, a Dalit sub-caste in Tamilnadu.
4. *ur* refers to the village itself in Tamil as opposed to the *ceri*, a separate place outside the village where the Dalits live.

Chapter 4

Mapping Multiple Marginalities of Dalit Women: A Comparative Study of Dalit Men's and Women's Autobiographical Narratives

4.1 Introduction

Gopal Guru in his article "Dalit Women Talk Differently" states that "dalit men are reproducing the same mechanisms against their women which their high caste adversaries had used to dominate them" (2548) which suggests that an oppressed in a given context can be a potential oppressor in a condition that favors him/her to exercise their power. Not only Guru but Sharmila Rege (1998) also have similar observations as she explains that the post-Ambedkar Dalit movements has been male-centric and largely ignore the specific issues of Dalit women. Dalit feminist writers such as Bama, Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, and many others through their autobiographical narratives expose the ingrained patriarchy within the Dalit community which strengthens the arguments of critics like Guru and Rege. Taking it forward from Guru, Rege and the likes, this chapter intends a comparative analysis between select Dalit men's and Dalit women's autobiographical narratives to observe how differently Dalit women are portrayed in Dalit men's autobiographical narratives in comparison to Dalit women's autobiographical narratives. Firstly, this comparative study intends to locate the silencing and misrepresentation of Dalit woman-hood in Dalit men's autobiographical narratives. Secondly, the study exposes how Dalit men writers have been reluctant in addressing the inbuilt patriarchy and exploitation of Dalit women within the community. What is even more ironical here is that the Dalit men writers, who talk about the marginalization of Dalit women by the upper-caste men, are not free from patriarchal considerations. Thirdly, the chapter explores how Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, in contrast to Dalit men's autobiographical narratives, constantly interrogate the patriarchy within the

community along with questioning their exploitation by the upper-castes. The chapter concludes by bringing in Dalit women's critiques of marriage as an inescapable trap and home as one of the most violent spaces for Dalit women which provides the reader an opportunity to look at conjugality and domestic space through a different lens. In other words, Dalit women's autobiographical narratives expose the intricate operation of patriarchal power embedded in the concepts like marriage and home, which cracks down the established narrative of marriage as a sacred institution and home as a space of security. Hence, the chapter exposes the multiple marginalities of Dalit women which they experience both outside and within the community.

4.2 Dalit Women's Issues and the post-Ambedkar Dalit Movements

As observed by Rege, Dalit Panthers organization which is considered to be the principal force in reinforcing Dalit consciousness and revitalizing Dalit activism both in socio-political and literary spheres in the post-Ambedkar India hardly had any agenda of addressing Dalit women's issues and thus "the dalit women remained encapsulated firmly in the roles of the 'mother' and the 'victimized sexual being" (*Dailt Women Talk Differently* WS-42). Even in the Dalit literary productions of 1970s, a visible absence of Dalit women is noticed. The absence is twofold – firstly, there are few Dalit women writers who could claim their presence in Dalit literary sphere, and thus the Dalit writings of this era remain dominated by Dalit male writers. Secondly, Dalit woman has hardly been the subject of Dalit men's writings. Though there are rare instances of Dalit men's writings wherein Dalit woman becomes the subject of narration, most of these narratives fail to grasp the multiple marginality of Dalit women. In such occasional representation of Dalit women, they generally appear as sacrificing mothers, obedient housewives and sexually exploited beings. Having a close look into the *Poisoned Bread* (2009) which is a compilation of translated poems, short stories, autobiographical extracts, essays and speeches from Marathi of the post-Ambedkar era, one can realize how narrow the scope of Dalit women was in the sphere of Dalit literature during this period. Most of the writers enlisted in this

book are Dalit men which signify that Dalit literary production of this period has very little space for Dalit women. However a few poems and short stories in this collection by the Dalit Men writers such as L. S. Rokade's "To be or Not to be Born", Waman Nimbalkar's "Mother", Baban Chahande's "Labour Pains", Prakash Jadhav's "Under Dadar Bridge" and Baburao Bagul's short story "Mother" focus on Dalit women. But the problem in these works is that the whole Dalit womanhood is reduced to that of a suffering helpless mother. Such a selective representation of Dalit women results in misrepresenting Dalit womanhood and excluding Dalit women not only from the socio-political sphere, but also from the Dalit literary sphere.

4.3 Exclusion and Misrepresentations of Dalit Women in Dalit Men's Autobiographical Narratives

In the Dalit literary context, exclusion and misrepresentation of Dalit women not only happens in the poems or short stories but in Dalit men's autobiographical narratives also. Since the chapter focuses on Dalit autobiographical narratives specifically, it is pertinent here to do a close analysis of Dalit men's autobiographical narratives to locate the silencing and misrepresentation of Dalit women. Dalit autobiographical narratives emerged in the last decades of 20th century and towards the very beginning of 21st century Dalit autobiographical narrative was established as the most important vehicle of Dalit literature. Dalit men's autobiographical narratives came early among which Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (first published in Marathi as *Baluta* in1978, translated into English in 2015) is considered to be the first Dalit autobiographical narrative to be published. Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* (first published in Marathi as *Akkarmashi* in 1984, translated into English in 2003), Aravinda Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (first published in Kannada as *Government Brahmana* in 1994, translated into English in 2007), Siddalingaiah's *A Word with You, World: The Autobiography of a Poet* (first published in Kannad as *Ooru Keri* in 1994, translated into English in 2013), Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (first published in Hindi as *Joothan* in 1997, translated into English in 2001), B.

Kesharshivam's *The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth: A Dalit's Life* (first published in Gujarati as *Purnasatya* in 2002, translated into English in 2008) Narendra Jadhav's *Untouchable: My Family's Triumphant Escape from India's Caste System* (first published in Marathi as *Amcha Baap Aani Amhi* in 1993, translated into English in 2003), K. A Gunasekharan's *The Scar* (first published in Tamil as *Vadu* in 2005, translated into English in 2009) and Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh: Against the Night* (first published in Punjabi as *Changiya Rukh* in 1997, translated into English in 2010) are some of the Dalit men's autobiographical narratives which became popular among the readers. However, representations of Dalit women in these autobiographies are few and far between for which a noticeable absence of Dalit women in Dalit men's autobiography is experienced. Even in those occasional appearances, Dalit women are sketched in stereotypical terms as obedient and submissive housewives or affectionate and soft-spoken mothers who appear to be selfless for the cause of their family.

In the first Dalit autobiographical narrative *Baluta*, Daya Pawar does talk about the plight of Dalit women on many occasions and gives a detailed description of his mother's harsh struggle to bring her children up. But his representation of Dalit womanhood appears to be stereotypical, because as Rege says, it confines Dalit women in the roles of the 'mother' and the 'victimized sexual being' (*Dailt Women Talk Differently* WS-42). Pawar's mother who worked extremely hard to make ends meet did not raise her voice even once before her drunkard husband who spent almost all his earning in drinking. Though Pawar's mother sometimes got angry on her husband's irresponsibility, she chose to keep quiet in the presence of her husband and tried to manage the house on her own by doing some scavenging work. In the words of Pawar, "Aai (mother), poor thing, would keep us going with her scavenging. Sometimes she would get angry but she never expressed her rage when Dada (father) was around" (22). Pawar's mother was just a 'poor thing', a helpless mother and a docile wife who was unable to express her discontents and found no strength to protest against the misdeeds of her husband. Power's father was not only a drunkard but also a

womanizer who did not even bother to restrict himself from getting into such activities before his very young son. When Pawar, as a child, describes one such incident before her mother, she just "…smiles sadly. Perhaps she knows already. To womanize is a badge of honour, a sign of masculinity, or so it is believed around here" (26). Unlike many other Dalit men's autobiographical narratives, though Pawar's *Balutha* exposes the patriarchy and Dalit women's exploitation within the community, it fails to represent a holistic picture of the life of Dalit women as it confines them within the roles of passive housewives and sacrificial mothers.

Most of the Dalit men's autobiographical narratives following Pawar's *Balutha*, reflect similar limitations. Gujarati writer B. Kesharshivam's *The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth: A Dalit's Life* (2002) also reproduces stereotypical women characters as we see in Pawar's *Balutha*. Kesharshivam's narrative creation of his mother is quite similar to Pawar's character sketch of his mother – an extremely affectionate and hardworking mother who slogs throughout the day in a spinning mill for the financial support of her family. To showcase the affection of her mother for him, Kesharshivam romanticizes the mother-son relationship as he compares his mother's love for him with the love of mother Yasoda for Lord Krishna. At the same time, she plays the role of an obedient and defenseless housewife who tolerates blows from her drunkard husband at home. Kesharshivam describes in one of the incidents how brutally his mother is beaten by his drunkard father, but she never protests against the act. Kesharshivam writes,

> Once after drinking about, my father lost control over himself and started to beat Ma (mother) up. I watched and listened to her screams helplessly. Her loud wail made me cry. I came out weeping into the courtyard. At night I saw Ma applying a paste of turmeric and salt to her body. (17)

Domination of Kesharshivam's father over his mother was so much that she was just a mute and attentive follower of her husband's words. Even though she was very often beaten by her drunkard husband for the slightest mistakes, she would

defend her husband when people teased him by calling him a drunkard. She would say, "If he drinks, he drinks on his own money. He does not borrow from you, does he?" (8). She silently observed her husband spending each penny of his earning over drinking but never raised a question over it. The primary motif of this analysis is to show how Dalit women are stereotyped as defenseless, desire less and innocent victimized beings in the forms of mothers and housewives. One cannot completely deny the fact that such Dalit women exist, but this is not the whole truth of Dalit women's life, neither does it represent the complete identity of Dalit women. The contention here is that, by projecting Dalit women through the lens of victimization, Dalit men's autobiographical narratives fail to explore other important aspects, such as, how they fight back and find their own ways to enjoy the life.

In a few Dalit men's autobiographical narratives such as *Joothan:A Dalit's Life* and *Government Brahmana*, the space dedicated to Dalit women is so less that it seems as if Dalit women are almost absent in such works. In *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, Valmiki's mother and his wife are the two Dalit women characters who appear on a few occasions but their voices are rarely heard in the book. Valmiki's wife Chanda who has been portrayed as an innocent and obedient wife speaks only once when Valmiki proposes her to marry. In astonishment and disbelief to Valmiki's proposal Chanda says, "You're not joking, are you?" (102). This is the only occasion when Chanda speaks and the voice sounds grateful as if Valmiki has done her a great favor. Valmiki's mother whose role is confined within the domestic periphery has scarce appearance in the book. Except his mother and wife, Valmiki has a very short description of his widowed sister-in-law who sells her ornaments in a financial crisis to meet Valmiki's study expenses in the school. Such token representation of Dalit women not only neglects them but also results in silencing their voices. Aravind Malagatti's *Government Brahmana*, which is claimed to be the first Dalit autobiographical narrative published in Kannada, is found to have similar limitations. In Malagatti's case, it is only his mother who claims her presence in the book by virtue of taking the hardship of bringing up her children singlehandedly after the untimely death of

her husband. Malagatti dedicates a whole section of his autobiographical narrative to his upper-caste beloved who eventually betrays Malagatti, but fails to peep into other Dalit women's lives. It is important to note that on one occasion, Malagatti does give a very short description of how Dalit women are treated as the objects of entertainment by upper caste men in a festival called Okuli, but the space given to Dalit women is so less that their absence in Malagatti's autobiographical narrative can easily be felt.

Unlike Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* or Malagatti's *Government Brahmana*, Shararankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* provides ample space to Dalit women's lives in talking extensively about the difficult lives of his grandmother Santamai, mother Masamai and his sisters such as Nagi, Nirmi, Suni, Pami, etc. Limbale also talks about other Dalit women outside of the family such as Gangoobai, Kondamai and Ambumai who shared a good relation with his mother. In contrast to the extremely affectionate mother-son relationship that is commonly observed among the Dalit autobiographical narratives, Limbale shares rather a less-affectionate relationship with his mother as he finds his mother often being rude to him. Limbale describes his mother as a sharp tonged woman who often forces him to go for begging when he asks for food. Limbale writes '"Masamai used to force me to go, calling me names, pushing a plate in my hand driving me away. 'Do you want me to feed you with dust – there is nothing else in this house'" (9). In addition, Limbale is thrashed a number of times by his mother for his slightest mistakes. Such a behavior of his mother makes Limbale feel as if he were a step son to her. Limbale therefore writes, "Masamai, my mother, always treated me as if I were her stepson. I was more attached to Santamai, my grandmother. Whenever Masamai began to hit me Santamai would intervene and save me" (42). However, while talking about his mother, Limbale navigates into other important aspects of her life as a Dalit woman and exposes how poor Dalit women fall easy prey to the sexual appetite of upper-caste men. His mother herself is a victim of such exploitation, of being Dalit, woman and poor. Masamai, being the only child of a poor old woman Masamai, gets married to a very poor man called Ithal Kamble who works in a farm owned by Hanmanta

Limbale, an upper caste landlord. Hanmanta Limbale often helps Ithal Kamble during his hard times but at the same time Hanmanta Limbal has an evil eye on Ithal Kamble's wife Masamai. Eventually Masamai is accused of having an illicit relationship with Hanmanta Limbale for which the caste council forces Masamai to divorce her husband Ithal Kamble. After the divorce, Hanmanta Limbale lures Masamai and keeps her in a rented house where they stay together. But when Masamai gets pregnant and delivers a baby boy, who turns out to be Sharankumar Limbale, Hanmanta Limbale tries to avoid her and disowns the child. Finally Masamai returns to her mother Santamai's house with the child, but even then their extreme poverty traps Masamai to become a keep of an upper-caste person called Yeshwantrao Sidramappa Patil who is the head of a nearby village.

Masamai's life itself gives a clear account of how vulnerable Dalit women's dignity and lives are in an upper caste-male dominated society. Not only Masamai, but a majority of the Dalit girls in the Dalit locality have the same fate as it has been put forth by Limabale in the following paragraph:

> The Patils in every village have made whores of the wives of Dalit farm labourers. A poor Dalit girl on attaining puberty has invariably been a victim of their lust. There is a whole breed born to adulterous Patils. There are Dalit families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of the Patil's whore. Even the children born to her from her husband are considered the children of a Patil. (38)

With this insightful observation of Dalit women's susceptibility in terms of being exposed to the lustful eyes of upper-caste men because of their deprived social and economic condition, Limbale exposes the physical and sexual exploitations of Dalit women by the upper-caste men. But what remains unexplained is the exploitation of Dalit women by their own men. There is hardly any instance where Limbale reflects upon the domestic violence on the Dalit women by their own husbands which are invariably found in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives. In addition, Limbale, like other Dalit male writers, typifies Dalit women as helpless victimized selves and thus fails to explore other facets of their lives. There are a few more Dalit men's autobiographical narratives such as Balbir

Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh: Against the Night* and K.A Gunasekaran's *The Scar* which occasionally talk about Dalit women's issues, but those are few and far between. Like other Dalit men's autobiographical narratives, these two also fail to overcome the stereotypical representation of Dalit women as helpless victimized selves and thus other aspects of Dalit women remains unexplored.

4.4 Reproducing Patriarchy: Dalit Men Writers and their Patriarchal Mindset

The patriarchal forces are so very structured within the Dalit community that, the Dalit men writers, even though they are well educated and occasionally talk about the oppression of Dalit women by their own men, they themselves are found to be having similar patriarchal notions which gets reflected in the way they treat their wives and sisters. For instance, Daya Pawar in his autobiographical narrative *Baluta* talks about the everyday oppression of his mother by his drunkard father, but Pawar himself does a grave injustice to his wife Saee when he abandons her only because of his false doubt on her of having an extramarital affair. During his stay at Kawakhana with his mother, wife and few months old daughter, Pawar develops a close friendship with Meheboob, a Muslim youth who works as a mechanic in the nearby cycle shop. One day, seeing Meheboob suffering from fever, Pawar brings him to his own house and instructs his wife to take care of him. Since then Meheboob develops a close association with Pawar's family and starts sleeping in the balcony of their house on a string cot. This is when the rumor spreads in the locality that there is an illicit relationship between Meheboob and Saee. Pawar does not believe the rumor in the beginning but in an evening, after returning from the work place, Pawar sees Meheboob and Saee together in his house in the absence of his mother. Though Pawar does not see them in an objectionable position, doubt germinates in the corner of his head and he interrogates Saee regarding this matter. Saee tries hard to prove her innocence but fails to convince her husband. Pawar writes, "That night I do not sleep. I interrogate Saee relentlessly. She starts to cry, swears her innocence on her child's head" (274). In the next morning, Pawar spies on his wife while she goes to the

market to buy some vegetables and finds his wife and Meheboob talking to each other. Pawar's doubt thickens for which he interrogates Meheboob about the whole matter. While being interrogated by Pawar, Meheboob begins to cry and says, "I swear on Quran, she is my sister…" (274). But Meheboob's words do not help Pawar in any way and he asks Meheboob to leave the town. Meheboob leaves the town and Pawar continues tormenting Saee demanding the truth. A few days later, on the pretext of Diwali, Pawar buys new clothes for Saee and his daughter and leaves them in his in-laws' house. Once or twice, Saee tries to come back to Pawar with her daughter, but on each occasion, Pawar sends them back by giving some money and clothes. Saee lives with the expectation that her husband will come back to take them but that day never comes and Pawar abandons his first wife and daughter permanently.

The intention of examining this episode is to show how easy it is for Pawar to abandon Saee though she cannot be held solely responsible for the situation, neither is there any strong proof of any illicit relationship between Saee and Meheboob. It is Pawar who brings Meheboob home otherwise Saee does not like Pawar's friends visit their house. Pawar even remembers how Saee once complains about the advances of one of his friends. Moreover Saee is an extremely loving wife who just loved to spend time with her husband. In Pawar's words, "She is so madly in love with me, she would hang around just to be in my company" (242). None of these attributes and loyalties of Saee stops Pawar from abandoning her. Neither Pawar ever explains Saee why he decides to abandon her nor does he go through a legal process of divorce. Pawar abandons his wife as someone abandons a piece of property owned by him. This mindset of treating women as pieces of properties by their male counterparts has developed historically through different cultural practices in many patriarchal societies. Marriage is one such cultural institution that commodifies women through the practices such as 'bride price', 'bride buying' and 'dowry'. Such practices are the integral parts of Hindu marriage system in India. The tradition of 'bride price' was in practice in a largescale in the ancient India and even today some communities practice the same. 'Bride price' can be seen as a contract in which

"material items (often cattle, pig or other animals) or money are paid by the groom to the bride's family in exchange for the bride for the labour and her capacity to produce children" (Sambe, Avanger, Agba 1). The tradition of bride price in the modern times appears as a practice of "buying a wife as a commodity" (Sambe, Avanger, Agba 1). In other words, such incidents are known as 'bride buying' which is currently very much in practice in some parts of India as it is found that the states such as Haryana, Punjab, parts of Rajasthan are "importing' foreign women …as marriage partners" from the states like Assam, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh (Kaur 2004). Such practices in the name of marriage which commodify women create a mindset among men to look down upon their wives as their own properties. The concept of dowry also creates an impression as if the bride is an object and for its lifetime maintenance, the bride's parents have to give money and other goods to the groom. The notion of 'Kanyadaan[1]' in Hindu marriage, which objectifies woman, is instrumental in a woman being treated as a piece of property by her husband. Same happens in case of Saee when Pawar abandons her as if she is one of his unwanted possessions. Pawar does not have to be answerable or justify his act before anybody, not even to his wife whom he abandons.

The principal reason which leads Pawar to abandon Saee is his doubt about her sexual purity. Sexual purity of women has been a sensitive issue in almost every society and religion has been working as the most active agent to promote and naturalize such ideas. Like many other religious communities, Hindu society also has set high moral codes to control women's sexuality through Brahminical texts. Concepts like *Sati*[2] and *Pativrata*[3] which have been propagated through the Hindu mythical woman characters such as Arundhati, Anasuya, Sita and Savitri, are part of a Brahminical patriarchy designed to control women's sexuality. The barbaric practice of *Sati*[4] in ancient India which continued even during British colonial period was based on such notions. In Hindu religious domain, *Manu Smriti* plays the most important role in laying down such strict rules for the restriction of women's sexuality. According to Manu, a woman needs to be guarded strictly by her husband and relatives to protect her from her "innate'

addiction to sensual enjoyment" because in Manu's consideration "women are innately promiscuous, fickle minded, lacking in love, and unfaithful to their husbands even when closely guarded" (quoted in Chakravarti, *Conceptualizing Brahminical Patriarchy* 581). Brahminical texts from the Vedic period such as *Arthasastra*, *Baudhayana Dharma Sutra* and *Manusmriti* prescribe serious punishments ranging from public humiliation to brutal death sentences for the women who are suspected or accused of adultery. But in contrast, there are plenty of examples present in the history and in Hindu mythology where men are found to have multiple women as their sexual allies. The same proposition of Brahminical patriarchy, to a large extent, continues even today, a reflection of which is found in Pawar's *Baluta*. When Pawar reports his mother about his father's extramarital affairs, his mother gives a helpless smile in response, as if having sexual relationship with more than one woman is an obvious aspect of masculine power. In contrast, Pawar abandons his wife only because of his suspicion though he did not have any concrete proof to suffice his suspicion, and in addition he acknowledges the fact that his wife had immeasurable love for him. Such patriarchal notions and their damaging effects get reproduced in the rules of the modern state. Nivedita Menon (2012), for example talks about the Section 497 of the Indian Penal code in relation to adultery, according to which "a man can bring a criminal case against another man for having an affair with his wife. The wife is not culpable under this provision, nor can a woman use this provision against another woman or against her husband" (38). The Brahminical patriarchy, which has been nurtured through socio-religious and cultural practices, is so resilient that a modern state like India which describes itself as liberal and democratic is not able set itself free from its effects. Pawar, being a part of such a patriarchal society, can be least expected to be an exception. Though, Pawar in his autobiographical narrative, tries to expose some of the patriarchal conventions of Dalit community, he himself is not free from them. Hence, it can be argued that, from the very beginning, the Dalit autobiographical narrative space is set as a patriarchal space that objectifies and typecasts Dalit women.

Kesharshivam in his autobiographical narrative, *The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth: A Dalit's Life* like Pawar's *Baluta* also reproduces similar patriarchal conventions. Kesharshivam explains how his drunkard father beats his mother, but he himself is not free from such behavior even though he is a well-educated person and serves as an administrative officer in Gujarat. While documenting his marital life in his autobiographical narrative, Kesharshivam proudly describes how on one occasion he slaps his wife Bharti because of a small disturbance between them. In the heat of the moment Bharati leaves her husband's house and goes to her parents expecting that they would stand by her. But to her surprise everybody makes fun of her and her younger brother Laxman ridicules her saying "Look what a tight slap my brother-in-law has given her!" (70). Her parents, along with the neighbors, make Bharti realize that such things are common in marriage and a woman leaving her husband's house is a serious mistake. By the advice of her parents, taking the whole blame on her head Bharti all alone comes back to her husband. In the evening, after coming back from his office, when Kesharshivam sees Bharti at home, he breaks into laughter but Bharti immediately apologizes to him and holding her husband's hands, she says "I'll never go away" (70). Kesharshivam considers Bharti's parents' act of not standing by Bharti and immediately sending her back to her husband's house as 'good guidance' of her parents. Kesharshivam has no sense of guilt for the incident; rather he feels proud about his act as he writes,

> After many years of marriage, my wife would burst out laughing, recalling her brother Laxman's comment, 'What a tight slap my brother-in-law gave you!' Her laughter reflected pure happiness that a happy marriage had provided. I too often remember her statement, 'I'll never ever leave you'. (71)

The very statement is nothing but a classic display of a patriarchal mindset of a well-educated person. Kesharshivam remembers his wife Bharti's apology only because it satisfies his male ego. The repetition of the statement 'What a tight slap…!' signifies that Kesharshivam takes pride in the act of slapping his wife. Poor woman does not have the slightest knowledge of how she is being fooled and exploited by deep-seated patriarchal conventions of a male dominated

society. At the end she is made to internalize that the physical violence perpetrated on her by her husband is a necessary part of a marital relationship.

The internalization of male supremacy is partly because of the repeated violence perpetrated on women by men which forces women to internalize that men are strong and they are weak inherently and therefore women should always please men and obey their words. And the other reason lies in the appropriation of the Brahminical ideology that defines husband as the master and wife as his slave. The Brahminical concept such as *Swami*[5] and *Pati Parmeswar*[6] are instrumental in indoctrinating the male supremacy in the female psyche. According to Manu, it is the moral responsibility of a wife to obey each word of her husband with a complete control over her "mind-and-heart, speech, and body." A woman who successfully does so is considered to be a "virtuous woman", and the one who disobeys and remains unfaithful to her husband in any circumstance is cursed to be "reborn in the womb of a jackal and is tormented by the diseases (born) of (her) evil" (Manu 198). Kesharshivam's wife is made to internalize the role of an ideal Hindu wife by her parents and neighbors, and thus she returns to her husband's house accepting that her husband is her master and has every right to slap her. Representation of women as the weaker sex, to a large extent, is also done through a cultural narrative of femininity which creates an aura about women of being an embodiment of "susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment,… refinement of test", "weak elegancy of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners" (Wollstonecraft 6-7). Internalization of such characteristics of women, which is largely thrust upon them by the patriarchal society, makes the women even weaker.

Kesharshivam explains one more similar incident wherein his sister Motiben comes back home being badly beaten by her husband and her father bluntly says "Go back this instant to your home. Remember now your parents-in-law's house is your house" (68). Her mother cries after Motiben leaves and complains regarding why Somo (Motiben's husband) should beat her. To her reply, Motiben's father says, "Our daughter is not a small child anymore. She has

to learn to manage her house" (68). Once again the woman is blamed though the violence is done by her husband. Irony is that Kesharshivam, being a well-educated person, reads his father's view in a positive light and considers his father's action as a matter of good guidance of a father to his daughter. This is just a reflection of Manu's view about woman that a woman should always be guarded and kept dependent on men as he writes, "Her father guards her in childhood, her husband guards her in youth, and her sons guard her in old age. A woman is not fit for independence" (197). Dalit women are no exception to escape from the structural patriarchy within the Dalit community. Though men Dalit writers hardly talk about the embedded patriarchy within the community, it gets reflected in their writing through the way they treat their women. It is also interesting to note down how Kesharshivam defines his father: even though his father is a drunkard who spends almost all his earning in drinking and beats his wife, Kesharshivam describes him as a "large hearted person" (18) only because he spends a lot of money on his friends. Not only Kesharshivam, but also Pawar in *Balutha* defines his father as a generous soul for the same reason. One can logically argue that, the domain of Dalit men's autobiographical narrative, except misrepresenting and limiting Dalit women within the roles of mothers and housewives, appears to be a patriarchal literary space as it entails strong patriarchal viewpoints. Therefore the observation of Dalit women's lives in the Dalit men's autobiographical narratives results in inappropriate understanding because it is looked through patriarchal lenses.

4.5 Staging the Comparison: Dalit Men's Autobiographical Narratives Versus Dalit Women's Autobiographical Narratives

After the close reading and critical analysis of the Dalit men's autobiographical narratives from Dalit feminist point of view, it is evident that Dalit women are typecasted and neglected in Dalit men's autobiographical narratives. Such misrepresentation of Dalit women in Dalit men's autobiographical narratives has two major reasons. Firstly, Dalit men do not and cannot have Dalit women's 'lived experience'. Secondly, Dalit men are not free from the patriarchal biases

which, to a large extent, prevent them from addressing Dalit women's issues from a Dalit feminist point of view. These shortcomings of Dalit men in representing Dalit women necessitate the need for Dalit women to speak for themselves so that they can put forth their own viewpoints. A close look into the Dalit women's autobiographical narratives viz-a-viz Dalit men's autobiographical narratives outlines many important differences in the representation of Dalit women. Firstly, Dalit men's autobiographical narratives do talk about the exploitation of Dalit women by the upper-caste women but rarely talk about the exploitation of Dalit women by their own men, whereas Dalit women's autobiographical narratives successfully expose the multifold marginalization of Dalit women both inside and outside the community. In fact, in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, Dalit men, especially the husbands, are found to be the main perpetrators of violence on their wives. Dalit women talk about many other patriarchal forms embedded in the Dalit socio-cultural practices, such as treating girls as inferior than boys, gender policing of the girls by the elderly women of the community, etc. which are hardly found in Dalit men's autobiographical narratives. Secondly, in Dalit men's autobiographical narratives Dalit women are stereotyped as defenseless exploited beings. They mostly appear in the forms of affectionate soft-spoken mothers and obedient housewives who seldom express their desire and remain silent against violence perpetrated on them. In contrast, Dalit women in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives are found in diverse characters. There are examples of soft spoken Dalit women but there are also many instances of fiery characters who do not hesitate to teach a lesson to their perpetrators. They openly express their physical desire and often adopt many subversive techniques to have control over the male sex. Thirdly, in Dalit men's autobiographical narratives, Dalit men speak for Dalit women for which Dalit men become very selective while speaking about Dalit women. Such a selective approach of Dalit men towards the representation of Dalit women results in silencing them. Therefore, a huge absence of Dalit women in Dalit men's autobiography is observed. On the other hand, Dalit women's autobiographical narratives work as a free literary space for Dalit women where they speak their mind and their voice is

not controlled by the Dalit men. Another important aspect of Dalit women's life which is left unexplored in Dalit men's autobiographical narrative is how Dalit women enjoy their life going beyond their pain and sufferings. Dalit men have always projected Dalit women as the suffering selves whose laboring bodies slog in the fields throughout the day. But Dalit men fail to explore the other side of Dalit women's personality wherein they enjoy their lives. In contrast, Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, along with bringing the painful aspects of their lives, venture into those moments of their lives where they enjoy leaving behind the baggage of their suffering. It is interesting to see how Dalit women use the work field as a space of freedom where they sing songs, crack jokes, tell stories, share their problems and express their opinions. This is something which the male dominated domestic sphere does not allow them to do. Though the workplace is not free from danger for Dalit women as they become the easy targets for the lustful eyes of upper caste men, it can be considered as a the place of rescue for Dalit women because it keeps them away from their tyrant husbands and gives the freedom to speak their mind. The workplace provides Dalit women the opportunity of developing a close bond among themselves which is not seen among the Dalit men. At this juncture where the chapter claims to have a number of important observation regarding Dalit women's lives which have been ignored, misrepresented and silenced in the Dalit men's autobiographies, it is pertinent here to do a close analysis of Dalit women's narratives so as to locate how they have been able to touch upon different aspects of Dalit women's lives, in difference to Dalit men's autobiographical narratives.

4.6 Double Jeopardy: To be Dalit and Woman

The primary observation which this study comes out with is the claim that, unlike Dalit men's autobiographical narratives, Dalit women's autobiographical narratives successfully expose the multiple marginalizations of Dalit women both outside and inside the community. It is worthwhile to bring in a few instances from Bama's *Sangati* wherein she talks about the multifold marginality of Dalit women and different forms of patriarchy outside and within the community.

Among many incidents of violence against Dalit women which Bama talks of, Mariamma's case has a special place as it exhibits the exploitation of Dalit women both by the upper caste men and the men of her own community. Mariamma, a young Dalit girl while returning home in a hot noon after collecting firewood feels thirsty. Seeing a running irrigation pump nearby, she takes off the firewood bundle from her head and goes to quench her thirst by drinking some water from the pump. She has no knowledge that the pump belonged to an upper caste landlord called Kumarsami Ayya who is present there in the pump shed at that point of time. Seeing the girl alone Kumarsami seizes her hands and tries to take her inside the shed by force but the girl somehow manages to escape and runs to the village leaving everything there. She tells about the incident to her friends, but her friends suggest her to keep quiet because people would blame her only, even though she has not committed any mistake. By this time, Kumarsami, fearing that his modesty would be at stake if the girl exposes his malicious behavior, runs to the village and complains against the girl before the head of the community. He cooks up a false story that he saw Mariamma and another boy of the community Manikkam indulging in a seductive talk and behaving suggestively. The fact is that, just after the incident, Kumarsami sees Manikkam walking down on the same way with his bundle of firewood on his head. Kumarsami uses it as an opportunity to create the story.

Kumarsami's complaint is taken into serious consideration as the head of the community calls for a community meeting immediately without enquiring the veracity of the complaint. All the men and women of the community along with the senior head Seeniappan and the junior head Chellakkannu gather around while Mariamma and Manikkam are brought before them for interrogation. When the women who know the truth start talking to each other about the fallacious indictment against Mariamma and Manikkam, the men start scolding the women and try to send them off to their homes by saying "Do you women have any sense at all? What are you muttering about here, when we men are talking seriously? Go home all of you" (21). This is just a small reflection of how Dalit men suppress the voices of Dalit women and keep them away from the public discourses. Some

among the men even suggested deciding the punishment for the convicts without hearing anything from them because that would question the truthfulness of the upper caste land owner Kumarsami. But because some people protest against such a partial decision, the convicts are given a chance to speak. They try their best to prove their innocence but it is futile, as for the Dalit men it is impossible to believe that Kumarsami may lie. The girl conveys the fact that it is Kumarsami who tries to molest her but the men do not believe her. When the women support the girl and try to speak for her as they know that the girl is innocent, the men hurl abuses towards them and try to silence them by threatening them: "Will you she-donkeys get out of here or do we have to stamp on you? The more we drive the wretches away, they come back and make trouble" (23). Later some of the men come to beat the women up and drive them away from the place. Finally Mariamma is fined for 200 rupees and Manikkam 100. Nobody says anything to Manikkam while Mariamma is beaten up by her father to prostrate before the committee asking for forgiveness. For no fault of hers, a Dalit girl is humiliated both by the upper caste man and by the men of her own community. Here we can see a constant attempt from the Dalit men to silence the Dalit women whenever they try to speak for themselves. Mariamma's case is one among the many examples which expose the intricate operations of the vindictive social forces such as caste and patriarchy for which Dalit women are exploited both by the upper caste men and the men of their own community. Depiction of such incidents in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives also expose the inbuilt patriarchy within the Dalit community which is generally swept under the carpet by the Dalit male writers.

Mariamma's misery does not stop there as they get her married off to Manikkam against her wish. Marriama is strongly unwilling to marry Manikkam because he is a drunkard and when she is approached with the proposal, she says, "That fellow hasn't married all this while only because no one was willing to give him a bride. I'd rather hang myself with a couple of lengths of rope than marry him" (41). After her marriage Mariamma's suffering becomes unbearable as he is being beaten by her Drunkard husband Manikkam on a regular basis. Being a

witness to such manifold marginalization of Dalit women both inside and outside of the community, Bama writes,

> In the fields they have to escape from upper-caste men's molestations. At church they must lick the priest's shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven and Hell. Even when they go to their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husbands' torment. (35)

Unfortunately Dalit men writers have not been able to capture these intricate operations of caste and gender in case of Dalit women which subjugate them in different spheres of their lives. The failure is primarily because of the difference in gendered experiences for which Dalit men are unable to acquire a nuanced knowledge of the intricacies of Dalit women's lives. Secondly, there is a deliberate silence among the Dalit men about Dalit women's issues as a matter of disguise to keep their patriarchal selves unexposed. Thirdly, there is feeling among the Dalit men that Dalit feminism can be a divisive force among Dalits which will hinder the growth of Dalit movements.

4.7 Enemy Within: Marriage, Patriarchy and Domestic Violence

According to Ambedkar, marriage should not be "forced" on a girl and after marriage "the wife must be her husband's friend and a housewife having equal rights. She must not become the slave of her husband" (quoted in Pawar and Moon159). But in real life situations, marriage, for most of the Dalit women, is experienced as an inescapable trap, a source of violence and an extremely patriarchal structure where their own husbands are found to be the main oppressors. According to Shailaja Paik, the data says that "dalit women are daily beaten up, especially by their husbands" (40). Dalit women's autobiographical narratives in many ways conform to the statistics provided by Paik as they reflect upon the incidents where marriage becomes a painful experience for Dalit women because of their tyrant husbands. In her autobiographical narrative "Teen Dagdachi Chul", Vimal Dadasaheb More, for instance describes how ruthlessly her elder cousin Ambuakka's drunkard husband Kallappa harasses her every day.

Kallapa used to spend every penny of his earning on drinking and thus Ambuakka had to work hard to run the family. Ambuka had given birth to two girl children and that is the main cause of aversion of Kallappa towards Ambuakka. Ambuakka used to go for selling pots and firewood in the village. One evening no body bought firewood from her in the nearby villages, so she went into the far away villages to sell firewood. To her misfortune, she could not find a single buyer and it was late by that time. She missed the bus to her home for which it became late when she reached home. After reaching home, she explained the cause of her late return, but nothing did satisfy Kallappa as he doubted Ambuakka of having an affair with somebody. Kallappa started raining blows and kicks on Ambuakka – the more she pleaded for forgiveness falling on her husband's feet, the more violent he became. He picked up a stick from the firewood and started beating her mercilessly. When someone tried to rescue her, he started shouting at him, "You there, keep out of this. It is none of your business. Go back to your tents, all of you. Today I am going to kill her" (493). For a few moments Kallappa stopped beating his wife and sat silently and the crowd started to disperse thinking that the matter had come to an end. But suddenly Kallappa got up and

> went to the chul (hearth). There was an iron spatula used to turn the bhakri lying there. Ambuakka was not looking. He thrust the spatula in the chul and heated it up. Ambuakka was still sitting with her palm resting on the floor. He thrust the iron spatula onto her hand with such brutal force that it pierced right through. (495)

More rights, her heart "stopped beating with fright" (495) seeing Ambuakka howling with pain rolling on the ground as a stream of blood drenched the ground. In such a condition when Ambuakka was suffering with multiple wounds and her body was swollen up, her husband threatened her to torture her even more if she did not go to shell pots and firewood.

The graphic description of the Dalit woman's beating by her husband resembles the treatment of African American slave women by their white masters described in the slave narratives. Frederick Douglass in his autobiographical

narrative *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845) describes how his aunt was frequently beaten by her white master:

> I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. (19)

By bringing this comparison, it is being suggested that the Dalit women have been historically treated very much like the slaves by their own men. Bama's mother sounds quite logical when she comments on the condition of married Dalit women that "It's as if you become a slave from the very day you are married. That's why all the men scold their wives and keep them well under control" (43). While explaining the status of a woman in a patriarchal society Simone de Beauvoir (1949) writes, "among the workers of the land the unmarried woman is a pariah; she remains a servant of her father, of her brothers, or of her brother-in-law; … marriage enslaves her to a man…" (450). Therefore Bama's mother's observation about the status of married women as 'a slave' is quite apt. She has realized this through her own lived experiences as a Dalit woman. Bama not only exposes the multifold marginality of Dalit women but also tries to see marriage in a different lens going beyond the dominant Brahminical narrative that portrays marriage as a sacred institution and husband as the ultimate god of a wife. She deconstructs such a narrative by drawing instances from real life which show that in many occasions marriage can be proved as a living-hell for women and husbands real demons.

Urmila Pawar in her autobiographical narrative depicts similar incidents of violence against Dalit women by their own husbands. In the beginning of her autobiographical narrative *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* while talking about the Dalit women who go to the market from the village crossing hills and rivers daily in the morning to sell various things in the market,

Pawar explains how everyday at least one among the women is found to be badly beaten by her husband. During her school days, Pawar many times gets to travel with the women of her own community to the town, through which she ventures into their lives. Besides, many other shades of Dalit women's lives which Pawar perceives through their talks and modest behavior while travelling with them, Pawar finds Dalit women's physical exploitation by their own husbands as an unavoidable reality of their lives. Pawar writes, "There would be at least one woman among them badly bashed up by her husband. She would walk painfully, somehow managing to drag her aching body along the way" (5). They don't have the leisure to rest their aching bodies as their daily needs chase them to carry heavy bundle of firewood and heavy baskets of goods on the hilly ways to the market. Many among them carry their few months old babies suckling to their breasts. In the evening, they drag their tiring bodies home and find their drunkards husband waiting to snatch all their earning of the day. When they protest against it, they receive blows and kicks from their husbands.

While talking about exploitation of Dalit women by their drunkard husbands, Pawar also mentions a few Dalit women of her close acquaintance whose bodies are reduced to mere objects of suffering by their own husbands. Pawar recalls the painful married life of her cousin Susheela (paternal uncle's daughter who had lost her father in her childhood), wherein she exposes the oppressive Hindu marriage system and the patriarchal family structures. Susheela's husband is a drunkard who beats his wife regularly and Susheela's in-laws make her life worse by joining the act. For any slightest mistake, they beat her up and drive her out of the house along with her little kids. As Pawar describes

> They would drive her out of the house with her young children even on stormy dark nights. The poor woman would take her children and cross the hills and valleys at night, her face broken, body swollen, bleeding and aching all over, and reach her mother's house at Phansawale. When she came like that, and if Baba (Pawar's father) saw her, he would bark, 'Who's that? Susha? All right give her something to eat and send her back the way she's come. She must stay with her in-laws!'. (28)

Even at her mother's house she cannot breathe in peace as the Hindu marriage system preaches the idea that after marriage a girl should live and die in her husband's house. In addition, as the norm for a patriarchal society, where man always has the authority in the family, woman's suffering has hardly ever been a serious concern. After seeing Susheela in such a pathetic condition, the instruction given by Pawar's father to send Susheela back to her in-law's house displays the patriarchal convention that is inconsiderate of women's plight and thrives to maintain the established male superiority.

Dalit women's lives are so much engrossed with such painful experiences of the conjugal life that it gets reflected in the Dalit folklores which they perform as their means of entertainment in the festivals. Pawar brings in one of such songs which are sung by the women of their own community in the Ganapati festival. In the first part of the song, a newly married woman named Girija sends message through a passerby to her brothers to take her home. In the second part, she laments her painful life at her in-laws house before her brother who has come to take her sister home in the pretext of an occasion:

Girija sits down to pound some grains.
She sits and pounds and stands and stops.
Girija holds back her tears, O how she does!
O how she endures and asks whoever she sees,
Where do you come from, tell me O friend.
Where are you from, to whose family do you belong?
Please take a message from me to my brother.
He should come and take me home for the Gauri festival.

Girija's brother has come to fetch her home.
Girija washes his feet with tears, O how they flow,
Her brother asks her, "Why do you cry sister, why do you cry?"
"I've eight brothers-in-law and nine sisters-in-law;
How do I endure their torture? For how long?"
"Don't worry sister, here I have come
To take you sister home, sister, to take you home. (27)

While singing this song, Dalit women sometimes cry remembering their brothers and sisters. But unfortunately, in most of the cases, even a girl's father's side does not really come in rescue of the girl. Susan Moller Okin rightly states that the "gender-structured marriage *involves women in a cycle of socially caused and distinctly asymmetric vulnerability"* (138). Nivedita Menon has a similar view point as she argues that a girl from her childhood is forced to prepare herself "for marriage and marriage alone" as if "marriage is going to be the beginning" of her life, but finally she experiences marriage as "the end" (45) of her life.

By exposing patriarchy within the community, Dalit women writers challenge many concepts such as home, marriage and conjugal life which have been romanticized as sacred institutions in the Hindu Brahminical literature. While uncovering the domestic violence inside the marriage, they try to indicate how home can be one of the unavoidable spaces of violence for Dalit women. Viramma once compares such an oppressive marriage system as a slave trade designed for the enslavement of women. In the case of Urmila Pawar also, it is her husband, the person whom she loves so dearly and gets married with, is the one who comes in the way of her growth as an independent woman. Pawar's intervention in the public sphere as a Dalit woman activist and writer is not taken in a favorable note by Mr. Pawar. Initially, Pawar is not able to figure out Mr. Pawar's cause of discontent, but gradually she comes to realize that her education, her growing reputation as a writer and everything that gives her an "independent identity" (206) have become the cause of her husband's severe disappointment. Mr. Pawar takes it as his personal defeat as Pawar becomes independent and breaks the established norms of a 'wife' of the Hindu patriarchal order. Mr. Pawar expects Pawar to perform her duty as an obedient wife for whom "her husband's wish is law for her" (206). Mr. Pawar thinks that he is gradually losing control over his wife and thus often gives examples of other women who remain confined in the home and take care of the household. But Pawar's association with activism, persistence in pursuing higher education and her writing altogether work as a liberating force to break the boundaries of the domestic sphere and claim her identity in the public sphere. Even though her husband tries to confine her in the

domestic sphere by showing his dissatisfaction, it does not really affect Pawar's growth as an 'independent woman'. Therefor Pawar writes, "…he did not know that my horizons had expanded hugely-that I had seen the outside world, and he did not have the power to keep me confined to the narrow space of home anymore" (2007). In marriage, home has become the most powerful device to maintain the patriarchal framework by confining women within the domestic sphere and keeping them away from the public sphere where they could participate in decision making and knowledge production. It is also interesting to note the way Pawar, through the concept "*randki suj* – widow swelling" (128), symbolically depicts the intensity of violence perpetrated by a husband on her wife. In Pawar's locality, any widow who looks a little healthy is described that 'she has got a *randki suj*'. Once, while passing by group of chattering Dalit women, Pawar gets to hear the phrase but she is unable to understand the meaning. Being curious, when she asks about its meaning at home, her elder sister explains, "You know, for some women, when their husbands die, it is a release from oppression. Then they look a little better, fresh, so people say they have got the randki suj" (128). The oppressive nature of conjugality is exposed here. By questioning the concepts such as home, marriage and conjugality, Dalit women try to break the shackles of patriarchy which has been constructed and maintained through such institutions.

4.8 Marriage and Sexual Violence of Dalit Women

Sexual violence against women inside marriage is one of the sensitive issues in the present day feminist scenario. It is sensitive because, for a long time sexual exploitation of women by their own husbands was not recognized as a form of violence. Especially, in a country like India where marriage is considered to be a sacred institution, many women who have gone through such experiences, choose not to talk about it so that the relation remains intact. In addition, the Indian state is reluctant in recognizing the marital rape as a crime. According to the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2013, marital rape is not a crime unless the wife is under 16 years of age. The "One Hundred and Sixty Seventh Report on The

Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2012", which was prepared by the Indian Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs says that,

> … if a woman is aggrieved by the acts of her husband, there are other means of approaching the court. In India, for ages, the family system has evolved and it is moving forward. Family is able to resolve the problems and there is also a provision under the law for cruelty against women. It was, therefore, felt that if the marital rape is brought under the law, the entire family system will be under great stress and the Committee may perhaps be doing more injustice. (47)

Recently, while the matter of criminalizing marital rape was raised in Rajya Sabha, India's Minister of state for Home Affairs, Haribhai Parathibhai Chaudhary argued that "the concept of marital rape, as understood internationally, is not suitable in the Indian context, due to illiteracy, poverty, social customs and values, religious beliefs and the fact that Indian society treats marriage as a sacrament" (Nigam, *Countercurrents.org*). It will not be wrong to say that, marriage and social customs in Indian context, in a way, work as legalizing factors for sexual violence against women. Srimati Basu rightly says, "Marriage … works hegemonically through seeming pleasure and consent to solidify material subordinate…" (201). According to Carole Pateman, "Only the marriage contract can turn use of sexual property ... into the use of a person. But it is the husband who has use of a person, not the wife" (172). In other words, marriage as a social contract, reproduces the woman's body as a sexual capital own by the husband and thus can performs his sexual acts according to his wish.

In the Indian context, the custom of child marriage which is practiced even today in many parts of India, also contributes to the sexual violence of women, primarily because at such an early age a female body is not completely prepared for the sexual encounter. Secondly neither of the partners, at this age, do have good knowledge about the sexual responses of the bodies, since open discussion about sex by the parents with their children is considered as a taboo in much of Indian society. For many girls, the first night with their husbands remains as one of the most painful experiences of life. In India, the whole process of Hindu arranged marriage, in which a young girl is suddenly taken away from her parents

as if she is sold to a stranger, unsettles the girl emotionally and psychologically. On top of that she is locked in a room with a man whom she hardly knows. In such a condition the girl is neither prepared physically nor psychologically for the act. The young man on the other hand with all his curiosity and inexperience is unable to understand his partner. Therefore the act often turns out to be unreciprocal and violent which "dooms the woman to lasting frigidity" (de Beauvoir 462). Mariam Ouattara, Purna Sen and Marilyn Thomson in their article "Forced Marriage, Forced Sex: The Perils of Childhood for Girls" talk about a 38 year old woman named Gita from Bengal who describes her traumatic sexual experiences of her early marriage days as she was married of when she was under 15 years of age. Gita explains,

> It was very bad, very difficult. I had a lot of pain... I used to be scared when he came to get me and carry me to his bed. I used to cry and go to lie somewhere else, but he'd come and get me... When I came to visit my family, I didn't want to go back... I only told you because you asked. I have never told anyone before. (32)

Dalit women also have similar experiences, which they share in the autobiographical narratives. Viramma in her oral autobiographical narrative *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable* shares her first sexual experience with her husband, which in her words, "stayed as a horrible memory" (44) throughout her life. It creates a picturesque of a terrifying rape scene meted on a teen age girl. On the eleventh day of attainment of her puberty, with the completion of the traditional rituals, Virrama is sent to her husband's house. Viramma is just a kid then who loves to play with her friends, totally unaware of the responsibility of marriage and conjugal life. First few days in her in-law's house, she does not allow her husband come close to her as she is afraid of him and starts crying whenever he tries to come close. But one night she fails in resisting her husband's sexual advance against her will, which results in an extremely painful experience. In her words,

> The man came in at last. I shut my eyes straightway. I was curled up like a shrimp, my head in my hands. He brought the lamp nearer. I was as still as a corpse. He muttered something and lay down next to me. He took off his *soman* (dhoti) very quickly and with

> the same speed he undressed me. I was humiliated to be naked. He stuck me like a leech and took a firm grip of my breast. I was suffocating under his weight. I was trembling. I was terribly wet as if I'd pissed. At last he let go off one of my breasts, took his tail which was as hard as a sugar cane and pushed it at the top of my thighs, which he kept apart with his own. I felt he was tearing me. He roared like a lion, giving great thrusts and for once I suffered in silence. (43-44).

In this case, Viramma's husband's male ego gets hurt repeatedly as Viramma keeps him away from her physical proximity. And her husband's sexual advance against her will is an act of reassertion of the male supremacy and proclamation of the ownership over the female body. In other words, the act symbolizes the reestablishment of the gender power structure which has been momentarily disturbed by Viramma's rejection of her husband's wish. Viramma's nonresistance to the sexual violence is a consequence of her internalization of her mother's advice during her marriage: "Obey your parents-in-law, from now on they are your gods. Obey your husband, he's your master" (35). Such a myth created by Hindu marriage tradition that defines the husband as the master or god of the wife is one of the key factors that have contributed to the oppression of women. Like Viramma, Urmila Pawar in her autobiographical narrative *The Weave of my Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoir* also brings in instances of sexual violence in the domestic sphere by her own husband. Even though hers is a love marriage, the first experience of her sex life remains as one of the unwanted incidents of her life as the act is done "against her wish" (154) in an unfavorable condition.

In contrast to Viramma and Pawar's experience of their first sexual encounter of being painful and forced upon by their husbands, Narenda Jadhav's graphic description, in his autobiographical narrative *Untouchable: My Family's Triumphant Escape from India's Caste System*, of love making between his father Damu and mother Sonu in their first sexual encounter after marriage creates an impression of a well dramatized romantic scene between a newly married couple generally seen in Bollywood movies. It was such a tender experience that Sonu derives a great pleasure and satisfaction while remembering it as she says "I felt a

smile tugging at me as I recalled the night when he made me his woman" (47). The argument here is not to deny the fact that such an understanding and romantic equation can very much exist between Dalit couples, but what seems problematic here is Jadhav's act of entering into his mother's voice as he uses 'I', the first person narrative voice, and over romanticizes the most intimate moments between his father and mother. It is very unlikely that either of his parents had ever discussed their act of love making with him with such graphic details. However the recreation of the love making is quite cinematic which is situated in a fine evening, as Sonu, a "freshly bathed and cleanly dressed" (49) newly married girl waits for her husband to come while Laxmi kaku (aunty) words ringing in her years: "Your husband is your god. You are tied to him" (48). Finally her husband enters into the room putting an end to her long wait. Sonu offers a cup of tea to her husband and stands "quietly at a distance, shy and unsure of what to say or to do" (49). After a great drama over the cup of tea they come together as Sonu's husband takes her in his arms and Sonu feels an absolute sense of security and peace. The time passes smoothly as they feel inseparable from each other and Sonu gradually summits to her husband as his hands gently caress all over her body. In Sonu's words (Jadhav puts these words in Sonu's mouth),

> I felt his entire weight shift atop my body … but I was surprised to find that I could take his weight effortlessly. I was sobbing by now, but he did not seem to notice anything, only sighing and crying out my name. He was saying over and over again, 'Oh Sonu, you are so beautiful! How I have waited for this moment from the time we were married! … We lay quietly, basking in the warmth of our bodies. I was surprised to find that I was in no hurry to detach from my man. I lay quiet and unmoving for a long time. I knew that I had arrived (49-50).

A reader may enjoy the drama involved in the description, but it carries the error of misrepresenting and romanticizing Dalit woman's sexuality, marriage and conjugality. By putting his own words into his mother's mouth, Jadhav tries to transgress the gendered experiential boundaries and reproduces patriarchal constructions of female sexuality and femininity.

4.9 Cultural Patriarchy: Gender Polishing and Structural Oppression of Dalit Women

The roots of patriarchy lay deep in the cultural practices of a society which define the gender roles and prioritize the male sex over the female and thus the female sex is pushed into a subordinate position. The process of subordination of a female begins from the very childhood when she is restricted from doing anything that boys do. She is guided by the elders to be shy, soft-spoken, cautious, gentle, tender, and "taught that to please, she must make herself object; she should therefore renounce her autonomy. She is treated like a live doll and is refused liberty." She is taught the household works such as "cooking, sewing, housekeeping, along with care of her person, charm and modesty..." (de Beauvoir 308-309). Betty Friedan in her masterpiece *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) talks of how in USA during 1940s the women's magazines and books flooded with articles educating women in achieving feminine charms and propagate that the ultimate dream of women is to be "perfect wives and mothers" (14). Such articles also prescribed tips for women how to catch a good husband and keep him pleased always. Thus, a woman from the beginning of her life is made to realize that she is essentially weak and dependent on the male sex, and therefore, treated as an 'other'.

Bama in her autobiographical narrative *Sangati* describes how such patriarchal conventions get reflected in different practices of everyday life in her community which ultimately lead to the subjugation of Dalit women. Subjugation of a woman begins as soon as she is born since a baby girl is less desired than a baby boy. Bama provides an acute observation of how the female infants get neglected by their own mothers:

> When they are infants in arms, they never let the boy babies cry. If a boy baby cries, he is instantly picked up and given milk. It is not so with the girls. Even with breast-feeding, it is the same story; a boy is breast-fed longer. With girls, they wean them quickly, making them forget the breast. (7)

As children the girls are not allowed to play boys' games, neither the boys allow the girls to play along with them. The only game the girls play with boys is 'mothers and fathers' or 'husband and wife' where the girls play the roles as wives and boys as husbands. In such games, the boys behave like dominant husbands wherein they beat and abuse the girls on different pretexts. Bama explains, "we always had to serve the mud 'rice' to the boys first. They used to pull us by the hair and hit us, saying, 'What sort of food is this, di, without salt or anything!" (31). At the adolescent period, girls are instructed to behave in certain ways which constrain their freedom. Bama writes, "We are not allowed to talk loudly or laugh noisily; even when we sleep we can't stretch out on our backs nor lie down on our bellies". We always have to walk with our heads bowed down …" (29). Though such structural subjugation of Dalit women observed by Bama is not specific to Dalit women only, as it happens to women in common, it is important here to bring this analysis because Dalit men's autobiographical narratives are hardly ever found to be addressing these issues which creates an impression as if Dalit women are free from all these forms of discrimination.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter, through a comparative analysis between Dalit men's autobiographical narratives and Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, attempts to exposes the shortcomings of Dalit men's autobiographical narratives in dealing with Dalit women's issues as they largely stereotype, misrepresent, exclude Dalit women and avoid exposing the patriarchy within the community. In contrast, Dalit women's autobiographical narratives talk openly about the patriarchy within the community and depict the multiple marginalizations of Dalit women within and outside the community. A few more claims which this chapter does, such as, how Dalit women talk back to resist the oppressor, and how they find out different ways of celebrating life amid the pain and suffering as a way to tackle their pain and suffering, will be discussed in the next chapter.

End Notes

1. Kanyadaan means giving a virgin daughter in marriage. In Hindu religion, a virgin daughter is given as a gift by her father to the bridegroom's family through marriage. Therefore a daughter is treated as an object meant to be given away in marriage.
2. It is a Hindu definition of chaste woman.
3. A Hindu definition of a woman who is absolutely dedicated to her husband.
4. Here Sati refers to the practice of burning a widow in the funeral pyre of her husband which was practiced among the Brahmins in the pre-colonial India and continued to be practiced quite some time into the colonial period also. This practice was meant to maintain the sexual chastity of women.
5. Swami is a Sanskrit word which etymologically means master but it is used as a highly respectable way of addressing one's husband.
6. It means, husband is the ultimate incarnation of god for a Hindu woman.
7. Abusive reference to a widow.

Chapter 5

Speaking and Speaking Differently: Language as Resistance, Liberation and Celebration in Dalit Women's Life

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a detailed account of the multiple marginalities of Dalit women on the basis of caste / gender causalities conditioned primarily in Indian social system. But a few more important claims made in the previous chapter will be analyzed in detail in this chapter. According to Sue Fisher and Kathy Davis, since a number of feminists have addressed the issues of women's subjugation, there is always a risk of "victimizing women by representing them as the passive objects of monolithic systems of oppression" which may blur the possibility of "uncovering the subtle and ambivalent ways women may be negotiating at the margins of power, sometimes constrained by but also resisting and even undermining asymmetrical power relations" (6). Dalit women may face the same danger of being reduced into merely a subjugated community as their multifold marginality is often found to be the subject of discussion. In addition, as it is analyzed in the third chapter, Dalit women are largely stereotyped as helpless exploited beings in Dalit men's writings. To avoid such a risk of typification of Dalit women as helpless exploited beings and to explore other important aspects of their lives, this chapter undertakes a close reading of Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, to locate how they talk back and resist against the oppressor and find their own ways of enjoying their lives. This chapter, firstly, explores how Dalit women use specific linguistic expressions as a symbolic way of claiming their distinct identity which in consequence results in an act of resistance against the dominant linguistic culture of Brahminical inheritance. Secondly, it observes how Dalit women use harsh and sexually explicit language to shame and scare the oppressor, and therefore, language for Dalit women

becomes one of the most effective weapons to keep the oppressor away. Gopal Guru rightly states that, Dalit women "talk differently" (Guru 2548), because their talking differently functions as a potential act of resistance against both casteism and patriarchy along with signifying a mark of distinct identity of their own. Thirdly, the chapter locates different passive strategies used by the Dalit women to resist the oppressor in their everyday life, because, in many conditions, an open resistance is found to be counterproductive for them. Finally, the chapter investigates how Dalit women find different ways to enjoy life amid the pain and suffering. In this context, folklore and oral tradition are found to be the most important aspects of their lives through which they enjoy by performing together and sharing with each other. It is also interesting to see how the work field, which is generally seen to be a place of pain and hard labor, is often used by Dalit women as a place of freedom and enjoyment.

5.2 Language as Resistance and Identity

Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall in their article "Language and Identity" rightly state that "language is central to the production of identity" (370) because speakers "produce and reproduce particular identities through their language use" (369). Similarly, in case of Dalit women, their distinct linguistic expressions become one of the most important aspects in the formation of their social identity. Dalit women do not speak a language completely different from their dominant upper-caste counterparts; rather they speak the same language but differently. Urmila Pawar, for example, takes note of the way her mother talks. While gossiping among themselves, to express her surprise her mother would generally say "You whores!" (129), and if she carries on a conversation with a man, the phrase she generally uses to express a sense of surprise is "You slave!" (129). Viramma also points out the radical difference in Dalit women's language as she says "how particular our language is and how blunt" (194). Sexually explicit abuses seem to be an indispensable part of their lives as at the pretext of slightest anger or disappointment they start abusing instantly. In Viramma's words, "we instinctively say, 'Eh, the whores! Which bitch stole that jar which was in the

house! I'm going to fuck your husbands! I'm going to bite your nipples!" (194). She further explains, "… we have to have a 'whore' or a 'screwer of my husband' or a 'fucker of his sister'. It's a question of tone: those words can be kind, but they will be insults if you say them in anger" (195). It is also interesting to see how Viramma indicates the difference in the usage of language between upper caste women and Dalit women through an example of how differently they name their children and use different phrases to refer to their loved ones and the ones they dislike.

> We always give them nick names: 'Coconut Palm' if he's tall; 'Shorty', if he's small; 'Crow' or 'Swarthy' if he is dark black; 'Duck' if he's got bandy legs. And if we want to say sweet things to a child, we'll say: 'my little fool', 'my little curse', 'my little juice drinker', while you'll (here 'you' refers to the upper caste women) say, 'my little pearl', 'my parrot,' 'my spring of jasmine (195).

Such a difference in the usage of language not only helps in establishing a distinct linguistic and cultural identity of Dalit women but also challenges the established semantic structures that embed the signs of upper caste ownership.

What Dalit women do here is similar to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains about the term 'catachresis' in her interview "Identity and Alterity: An Interview". She defines 'catachresis' as the ability of the colonized to take something from the colonizer and 'reinscribe' it in their own terms. In other words, for Spivak 'catachresis' "aims at reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding" (quoted in Hawthorne and Klinken 162). In fact the term 'catachresis' is derived from the Greek term *katakhresthai* which technically means "to misuse words, as in a mixed metaphor, either in error, or for a rhetorical effect" which can "either be deliberate or mistaken" (Hawthorne and Klinken 160). For Derrida 'catachresis' means

> … the violent, forced, abusive inscription of a sign, the imposition of a sign upon a meaning which did not yet have its own proper sign in language. So much so that there is no substitution here, no transport of proper signs, but rather the irruptive extension of a sign proper to an idea, a meaning, deprived of their signifier. A 'secondary origin'. (255)

'Catachresis' in simple terms can be understood as an act of disassociating a sign from its established meaning and reassociating it with a meaning which was deprived of a sign, therefore creating a new semantic structure that represents the linguistic behavior of a neglected speech community. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986) state that,

> A minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristics of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization… (This can be compared in another context to what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language. (16-17)

The linguistic behavior of Dalit women can be defined in similar terms as they distort the established upper-caste linguistic norms through their distinct linguistic expressions. Using the words and phrases such as 'whore', 'fuck', 'bitch', 'fuck your husband' etc., in their normal interaction, which are generally considered as abuses among the upper-castes, Dalit women disentangle the vulgarity associated with such linguistic expressions. When Viramma clarifies that it is just a matter of tone, those words can be kind but the same words can be insulting if they are used in anger, she in fact indicates how Dalit women violate the Brahminical semantic norms that characterize certain linguistic expressions as vulgar and certain linguistic expressions as civilized. Dalit women's use of phrases such as 'coconut Palm', 'my little fool', 'my little curse', and 'my little juice drinker' to address their young loved ones instead of using phrases such as 'my little pearl', 'my parrot,' and 'my spring of jasmine' which are used by their upper-caste counter parts, indicates Dalit women's involvement in the process of catachresis through which they overthrow the established signifier-signified relation of the Brahminical linguistic order and set a new signifier-signified relation which represents the speech operations of Dalit women.

This is not just an act of resistance against the Brahminical linguistic tradition, rather Dalit women's distinct linguistic behavior is one of the most important aspects of their lives through which they consciously claim their distinct social identity. Like Viramma, Urmila Pawar in her autobiographical

narrative proudly notes the difference between the way Dalit women and the upper caste Marathi women address their family members. According to Pawar, Dalit women's way of addressing their people is more informal whereas the upper caste Marathi women's way of addressing their people is much more formal. In Pawar's perception the informality among Dalit women reflects the intimacy they share with their people whereas upper caste women's formality indicates the superficiality in their relations. In her community, women call their mother as *Aaye* instead of *Aie* (a standard form of addressing their mother's used among the Marathi upper castes, particularly Brahmins). Dalit women address their husbands as the singular 'you' instead of the Brahmin women's 'honorific' way of calling their husbands as '*Apan*'. Dalit women have an informal way of calling their sisters-in-law whereas the Brahmin women address them in a very formal way. Pawar takes note of the changes in her elder sister's ways of talking during her high school days because of the influence of her Brahmin friends. She dislikes her sister's change in addressing her mother as *Aie* instead of *Aaye*, her formal way of addressing sisters-in-law and the way she addresses her husband as *Apan*. Pawar has multiple causes of being dismissive about her sister's adoption of Brahminical linguistic culture. Firstly, Pawar's sister's longing for the Brahminical culture signifies that she somewhere subscribes to the established Brahminical grand narrative that Brahmins are superior to Dalits. Thus her act of accepting Brahminical culture allows Brahminism to persist as dominant culture and she becomes one of the passive agents through which Brahminism is maintained. Secondly, when she tries to fit the Brahminical culture in the Dalit cultural framework, it appears very unnatural because of the fact that Brahminism has never been a part of the Dalit culture. In fact, she commits a structural mistake in putting two contrasting forces together which create distance in her conjugal relationship. Therefore Pawar says, "I think Tai's use of honorifics created a distance between herself and her husband, which was never there in a husband-wife relationship in our community" (124). Thirdly, the tradition of addressing the husband with highest respect revolves around the Brahminical construction of the concept 'Pati Parmeswar' (a Sanskrit phrase which means, husband is the highest

manifestation of god for a wife), which is extremely patriarchal and functions as a trap to enslave women in the form of wives. Thus, Pawar is completely against such an oppressive tradition and wants to prevent her sister from her self-sacrificing act. In fact, Pawar not only rejects the Brahminical culture, but also proudly asserts her Dalit cultural identity. While explaining that there has never been such a superficiality of treating husband as god in Dalit community, Pawar suggests that Dalit cultural expressions may sound different and crude but it is deep and intimate. Therefore, the Dalit woman's acts of speaking and 'speaking differently' not only signify the proclamation of her distinct 'Dalit woman' identity, but also symbolize her intervention in the sphere of knowledge production.

5.3 Sexual Explicitness in Dalit Women's Language: A Weapon of Resistance against Physical Violence

Dalit women's linguistic expressions, which often appear to an outsider as raw, coarse and sexually explicit, have other operations apart from forming a distinct identity of their own. The function of such a language as an instrument of resistance against the oppressors is one of the most important factors to bring into the discourse. On many occasions Dalit women are found to be saving themselves from their violent husbands by cursing them with their raw and sexually explicit language, and behaving in a very rough manner. Sexual explicitness both in terms of verbal and physical demonstration, on a few occasions, has been used by marginalized women groups as a means of resistance against the oppressor. Laura S Grillo in her article "Female Genital Power in Ritual and Politics: Violation and Deployment in Southern Côte d'Ivoire" talks about how Ivorian women protested against the violence arising out of the clash between combatant groups and the misuse of state power during the Ivorian civil war. In this protest "Women appeared smeared in white kaolin clay or stripped naked, wielding branches" (*Culanth.org*) and some of them danced naked in the streets making suggestive gestures. This form of protest as Grillo defines was a political manifestation of a

"powerful ritual rhetoric" derived from the rituals practiced by the African women where they use female genital as a symbol of power. Grillo writes,

> African women still perform paradigmatic ceremonies that draw on the power of their sex: Naked and smeared in kaolin, elders dance, chant, and use waters with which they have washed their genitals, sometimes mixed with bodily effluvia, for libations. With well-worn pestles they pound the ground to curse those who breach ethical mandates. Aware of the ritual potency of their nudity and the conjuration of their sex, women use it to intercede in calamitous political situations. (*Culanth.org*)

Here the ritual celebration of female genital is an act of subversion, because the female genital which often becomes the reason of violence on women and for which they are assumed to be the weaker sex in the patriarchal societies, is transformed into a symbol of power.

A protest of similar kind was seen in 2004, in India when a group of twelve North East Indian women stripped themselves in the public and stood naked in front of the Assam Rifles headquarter, shouting the slogan 'Indian Army, rape us! Kill us!' (*Outlookindia.com*). The protest was against the murder and possible rape of a woman named Thangjam Manorama from Imphal, Manipur, by the Indian army who was suspected of being associated with a local militant group called People's Liberation Army. Here the woman's body which is a subject of violence and subjugation for the oppressive other is transformed into a means of power through the public display of nakedness. These instances are brought in here to contextualize how Dalit women use the same strategy to scare the oppressor to keep him at bay. In *Sangati*, Bama brings in a few instances wherein Dalit women, through their raw and coarse language, fight back against the violence perpetrated on them. The oppressor retreats when Dalit women defame them by cursing them publicly with sexually explicit terms. Bama talks of a Dalit couple, Raakkamma and Paakkiaraj, who often quarrel and often Rakkamma gets badly beaten by her husband. On one occasion when Paakkiaraj goes to beat Raakkamma, she starts hurling abuses towards him: "You only know how to go for a woman's parts. Go fight with a man who is your equal and you'll see. You'll get your balls burnt for your pains! ... Thuu!' And she spat at him" (61). The more

he threatens to beat her and asks her to be silent, the more she abuses. Paakkiaraj drags her down holding her hair and kicks Raakkamma on her lower belly. Raakkamma fights back with same intensity by showering abuses on her husband:

> How dare you kick me, you low life? Your hand will get leprosy! How dare you pull my hair? Disgusting man, only fit to drink a woman's farts! Instead of drinking toddy everyday, why don't you drink your son's urine? Why don't you drink my monthly blood? And she lifted up her sari in front of the entire crowd gathered there. (61)

Bama is disgusted at the sight of such an unpleasant scene as she thinks that it is quite obscene on part of Raakkamma to behave with her husband in this way in public. But as Paakkiaraj walks away from Raakkamma without responding to his wife's behavior, Bama realizes that it is because of Raakkamma's blunt language and hostile behavior Paakkiaraj walks away off from the place out of shame. Raakkamma's body which has been an object of oppression for her husband is used by Rakkamma as a weapon to resist her husband as she offends him by uncovering it in the public. She also refers to her private parts repeatedly in her abuses to insult her husband which indicates that Dalit women's blunt and sexually explicit language plays an important role in redefining Dalit woman's body as a symbol of power and resistance.

Viramma in her oral autobiographical narrative *Viramma* reports a similar kind of incident. While a man called Kannappan of Viramma's community chases his wife Kannima with a knife in his hand, she catches hold of his testicles publicly, under the pretention of catching his dhoti. Kannapan shouts in pain helplessly as he finds himself unable to do anything against it. Kannima does it quite intentionally to humiliate Kannappan in public so that he feels ashamed and leaves her alone. Viramma rightly says, "What shame! A husband who gets beaten by his wife will never be able to go out the next day with his head high …" (196). She realizes that such a strong retaliation is needed for a person who tries to harm you with a knife. Every time a quarrel breaks out between Kannappan and Kannima, Kannima often curses Kannappan as "you fag", "you juice drinker" (196) in retribution to Kannappan's act of verbal or physical violence. Viramma

finds such acts of verbal and behavioral retaliation by Dalit women as a 'clever' and 'very effective' way of 'taking revenge' (196). In other words, for Dalit women this works as one of the effective subversive techniques through which they not only save themselves from the exploitation of the oppressor but also, at times, take revenge on the oppressor for their mental satisfaction.

Such a technique does not work against the oppressors within the community only, but also has similar impact against the oppressor outside of the community. Pawar describes an interesting anecdote as to how she makes the boys silent in the school who tease her. During her high school days Pawar was a little plump but active in sports and many other extracurricular activities such as participating in drama, song competitions, debates and mimicry. According to her, when she performed mimicry on the stage, "the audience would be in splits" (102). She even mimicked her teacher without any fear. That was probably the reason for which her school mates started teasing her as 'Aga', a contemporary well know comedian from Hindi film industry who was also a little plump like Pawar. Very often the school students would tease Pawar by shouting at her "A … g … a" which irritated Pawar immensely. Once when she was entering into the school campus, a group of boys started teasing, shouting the same chorus at her. Pawar shouted back towards the boys in a loud voice, "I don't give a damn for you, May someone shit in your mouth for you!" (103). The aftermath of the shout was quite fascinating as Pawar writes,

> There was a stunned silence! The window in the teacher's room flew open, and the teachers craned their necks to see who had the guts to retort thus! The boys teasing me disappeared in the classrooms like mice startled their wits. From that day on, nobody dared to call me Aga. (103)

Even though she was a young girl, her counter response with a blunt language helped her to make the disturbing voices quiet and she could save herself from the daily humiliation, because after this incident, nobody ever dared to tease her.

5.4 Dalit Women and the Passive Techniques of Everyday Resistance

Dalit women use many passive techniques of resistance in their everyday practices to protect themselves, to show strong disagreement and to take revenge against the oppressor as well. These everyday practices are very much similar to what James Scott talks in his masterpiece *Weapon of the Weak: the Everyday forms of Resistance*, about the techniques such as "foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage …" (xvi), mainly used by the peasants and land laborers of Southeast Asia against the land owners. For example, Scott talks about how the low caste indentured laborers in India use similar techniques to show dissatisfaction against their masters.

> They could intentionally or unconsciously feign illness, ignorance, or incompetence, driving their masters to distraction. Even though the master could retaliate by refusing to give his servant the extra fringe benefits, he was still obliged to maintain him at a subsistence level if he did not want to lose his investment completely. *This method of passive resistance, provided it was not expressed as open defiance, was nearly unbeatable* ... (33).

Practicing these common forms of resistance is profitable from many angles. Firstly, in such practices, the peasants and laborers do not have to come out openly against their employers but they can achieve their goal. The open forms of resistance affect the lives of the working class because they depend on the elite class for their livelihood. Through these every day common practices of resistance the working class is able to resist without harming their livelihood. Secondly, the open forms of resistance need a properly organized action which requires time, unity and leadership, but these everyday forms of resistance do not need any of these assets and can be performed instantly at the individual levels. Thirdly, these everday forms of resistance can be carried out for a long period of time in comparison to the open forms of resistance because it does not affect the daily living of the labourers.

In Dalit women's autobiographical narratives such as Bama's *Sangati*, Baby Kamble's *The Prison We broke* and Viramma's *Viramma*, Dalit women are found to be using similar passive forms of resistance against the oppressors within and outside the community. For instance, Viramma describes to her interviewer how she steals crops in small scales from the field of the Reddiar (upper caste landlord), while working in his field as his serf. She does so because she realizes that, whatever wage she gets from Reddiar in the form of a small share of the crop at the end of the season is not sufficient for the amount of labor she puts in. In her words,

> … I won't be satisfied with what the Reddiar gives me for all that work. When I get to the field, I fill a little jar with big fat peanuts which are white as milk when they are cooked. I hide the jar under a peanut plant. At the end of the day, I quietly pick up what I've hidden, put the leaves I've picked for the oxen on top of the jar and get going. (247)

When she is asked, what she does if she is caught by the Reddiar, she says, the Readdiar acts as if he has not noticed anything, because he knows that we are the ones to put lives into risk to protect his land and crops. The practice of everyday forms of passive resistance by Dalit women is also used in the domestic sphere. Viramma talks about how she used to express her disagreement and anger against her husband as he was rude to her in the beginning of their conjugal life. She says, "… I sulked, I scowled, I never laughed, I took my revenge in my own way" (44). It is very interesting here to take note of the way through which she takes revenge on her husband against his act of forceful sexual intercourse in the first encounter against her wish. She talks about one of the intimate moments between her and her husband after they start understanding each other gradually, and her husband starts to love spending time with her in bed. She says, "At those moments he was ready to do anything. Once to punish him for having been so brutal at the start of our marriage, I made him lick the soles of my feet and my toes!" (48). She claims this to be one of the private moments which she enjoyed the most. Here Viramma's act of taking revenge on her husband does not have any negative effect on happy conjugal life but at the same time she takes revenge successfully against the oppressor and derives a great mental satisfaction out of it. It signifies

the effectiveness of these passive techniques of resistance in everyday practice and the intelligence of Dalit women in implementing it successfully. Such intelligent acts of Dalit women also reject the patriarchal narrative that represents Dalit women as hapless unintelligent folks.

There are other passive techniques of resistance adopted by Dalit women in their everyday lives. Instances of Dalit women being possessed by the spirits of local goddesses and evil spirits are found in almost all Dalit women's autobiographies where Dalit women are treated like goddesses. During the time when they are possessed, their words become orders to the family members including the husband and other community members also. Their wishes are fulfilled with an immediate effect. In this way, the Dalit women, who are always neglected by their own men get the desired attention and are treated with great importance. Baby Kamble talks about how the husband of a possessed Dalit woman behaves with his wife as he is afraid of being cursed by the goddess:

> The man of the house would then literally fall at his wife's feet. He begged her to have mercy on him, 'Oh holy mother, I fall at your feet and beg you, don't be angry with me – I accept all my mistakes. (27)

Such activities can also be seen as a passive way of taking revenge against the tyrant husbands which gives Dalit women mental satisfaction. Bama in *Sangati*, talks about how some Dalit women after coming back from the field, act as if they are possessed by evil spirts, which in a way proves to be a break from the daily backbreaking work, because in most of the cases they are advised to take rest the next day or for the next few days and they are treated with a lot of attention and care from the family members. The above discussed strategies of resistance used by Dalit women to retaliate against the oppressors and to protect themselves signify that Dalit women are strong, expressive, clever and skilled enough to face all odds of life. Such strong images of Dalit women projected through the Dalit women's autobiographical narratives challenge and deconstruct the narrative propagated through the Dalit men's autobiographical narrative which stereotypes Dalit women as hapless, voiceless, desire less and silent beings.

5.5 Speaking the Unspoken: Dalit Women's Desires

In Dalit men's autobiographical narratives, there is hardly any Dalit woman character who talks about her desire and sexuality. Therefore, in *Sangati*, Bama expresses her discontent as she writes, "Nobody seems to reflect on women's bodily hungers and needs. Women are told never to reveal these things" (122). In contrast, women in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives are quite open about their desire and sexuality. For instance, Viramma in *Viramma* very openly talks about her marriage and sex life. Though her first sexual experience was painful, she gradually begins to enjoy it when a good understanding develops between her and her husband. A small section of her description is quoted below, where she enjoys describing her sexual adventure with her husband:

> While I told him stories, he'd pull me to him and I'd be stretched out next to him, legs against legs. I did not feel embarrassed at all. I felt fine. My husband caressed my body with his rough hands. His movements are quite nervous, but not at all brutal. We caressed each other for a long time, a very long time… I found out with him that the ears and the hollow behind the knees are places that give pleasure… I looked admiringly at his little hairy balls and his sting which was thick and hard as sugar cane with its violet head. I was always moved at those times, and I felt feelings that I had never known before. (48-49)

The artistry, humor and openness involved in describing the act indicate that Dalit women are assertive of their desire and sexuality. They do not find it vulgar or obscene to express their sexual desire; rather they see it as one of the important aspects of life which is worth celebrating. Urmila Pawar also talks about how she was attracted towards a few good looking boys in her class when she was in her high school. She talks about one of her classmates called Shantanu whose good looks captivate her so much so that her eyes get fixed on him. Such honesty and directness among Dalit women in stating their desire and sexuality debunks the patriarchal notion which sees woman's body as a site of sexuality, however considers women as bereft of sexual desire.

5.6 Going beyond Pain and Suffering: Exploring Dalit Women's Ways of Celebrating Life

The most striking feature of Dalit women's lives which has been well explored in Dalit women's autobiographical narratives but largely left untouched in Dalit men's autobiographical narratives is Dalit women's capability of finding different ways and means to enjoy their lives in adverse conditions. Except the festivals and marriage ceremonies in the Dalit communities which are commonly enjoyed, what makes Dalit women special is the way they use the work field as a space of relief, freedom and enjoyment. Such an aesthetic reading of Dalit women's lives is similar to what Jacques Ranciere talks about in his masterpiece *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth- Century France* (1981). He sheds light on a group of laborers in 19th century France who worked in the night to produce creative writings, not to reflect on their hardship, low wage or poverty, rather to explore the possibilities of perceiving life through a creative lens. In this context, the night, which is generally seen as a time for the laborers to rest and release themselves from the long day's hard work, is used to celebrate life. Similarly, in case of Dalit women, the work field, which is generally considered to be a place of hard labor and pain, gives them the opportunity to exercise their creativity and enjoy life. Dalit women, while going to work in the morning or while returning home in the evening after finishing the work, get a great relief and mental satisfaction in sharing things, both good and bad, pain and pleasure. When they share the daily happenings of their lives with each other, their voice becomes clear and they speak their mind with a lot of freedom. The fatigue of the daylong backbreaking labor does not reflect in their voices; rather they sound fresh, energetic and sharp. While walking along the hilly ways, accompanied by a group of Dalit women in the evening who were returning home from the market after selling different things, Pawar observes their chattering with great interest as she finds it exciting:

> The women chatted with each other ceaselessly on their way. It was great fun listening to their gossip! They would talk freely, without any restrain, in a language, vivid and robust,

> full of various cadence, tones and rhythms that evoked many colors and smells of things from different places. (3)

At the end of the day the artistry and strength in their language and expression is not lost. The strength and the free spirit to express themselves come from the freedom they get in the work place or in the open field which they do not get in the domestic sphere as it is dominated by their male counterparts. Gopal guru in his article "Labouring Intellectuals: The Conceptual World of Dalit Women" explains how, for Dalit women, "the collective nature of labour—for example, paddy plantation, or harvesting, or cotton-picking, or grinding the hand-mill in the home—that makes knowledge-generation a participatory activity" (7). In other words, the laboring activities which are done collectively generate "the intellectual imagination, involving a search for an emancipatory alternative" (6). Therefore the strength, freedom, sharpness and subtlety noticed by Pawar in the Dalit women's conversation is the reflection of the creative intellect produced through their collective work.

What attracts Pawar about Dalit women even more is their narrative brilliance in weaving stories out of very small occurrences of their daily life. It is not only the story teller but the ones who listen to also show an intimate involvement even though there is nothing really new in the story. This is how Dalit women construct their stories from the ordinary occurrences of their lives:

> You know, I got up bang at the first cock crow. Kicked my blanket away with my feet … went to the stove … picked up the clay pitcher in the corner and came out … when I came out, it was still moonlight … yet I went to the river … filled up the pot with water … by that time the cock crowed again … I said now I need a live coal … but who did give it to me? Then saw the children *chulti*, their aunt, get up as her nephews were returning to Ratnagiri … so I took a small dung cake and went to her … she gave me a small live coal which I placed on the dung cake … I came back blowing on it. (4)

Though there is nothing strikingly 'literary' (in conventional terms) in this oral narrative, what makes it important is the joy they derive from describing such 'mundane' and 'normal' occurences. More importantly, their being illiterate does

not prevent them from perceiving the literary aesthetic pleasure as they are skilled with their own ways of storytelling.

Like Pawar, Bama brings in exciting instances from Dalit women's lives to show how Dalit women enjoy even while doing hard work in the work place. She talks of a girl of her own community called Maikkanni who works in a matchstick factory. Maikkanni once describes to Bama why she likes to go to the factory even though she does not like the work she does in the factory. Firstly, going to the factory allows her to travel by the factory bus and she loves travelling by bus. Secondly, in the factory, they play new movie songs and it's a sheer enjoyment for her to listen to those songs. Maikkani, with great excitement, describes, "What do you think of our factory? Every day they play new songs. We listen and work fast". While describing about the bus, the factory and their work speed, Maikkanni looks spirited and happy which signifies that Dalit women do not simply go to loiter and enjoy in the work place; rather they do their work with all honesty.

Bama further explains how Dalit women sing songs, crack jokes, tease each other and laugh while working in the field and keep themselves entertained along with the work. In Bama's words, "They sang all the time at work, too, so that the woods rang out to the sound of their laughter as they made up songs and words to tease each other" (76). They are found to be very creative in framing songs instantly to tease each other. For example, Bama talks about a group of working women in the field, start teasing one of the young girls in the group named Ranjitham who is recently betrothed to a young man even darker than her. One of them makes a song and they start singing it:

> Handsome man, dark as a crow
> More handsome than a blackened pot
> I have given you my promise
> You can read Ingilissu (77)

The word 'Ingilissu' (Dalit women's way of pronuncing the word English) refers to the literate bridegroom who may help Ranjitham in learning English. They

bring in different subjects in different songs, sing it together and laugh. Viramma has similar instances to offer wherein she talks about how Dalit women sing different songs in the field when the landlord is away: "When the Reddiar gets on his motor bike and goes off to eat, well then the field is ours! It belongs to whoever sings the strongest: lamentations, planting out songs, *sunnambu* songs" (224). From the above instances, it can be concluded that in comparison to the domestic sphere the work field proven to be a relatively free space for Dalit women. In other words, Dalit women enjoy more freedom and recognize their own creative faculties in the outer space, whereas they remain confined and restrained in the domestic sphere. In her essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure", Virginia Woolf claims to have similar observations. She explains how she and her friends feel increasingly free and delighted as soon as they step out of their houses into the London streets. Their inner selves transform into free beings possessed with the newly gained freedom through which they realize themselves. She writes,

> We are no longer quite ourselves. As we step out of the house on a fine evening between four and six, we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of the vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one's own room. For there we sit surrounded by objects which perpetually express the oddity of our own temperament and enforce the memories of our own experience. (17)

The open space has many things to offer as they connect themselves with people, things and objects through which they identify many facets of their own persona. But after wandering like free birds in different places of the streets for few hours, as they walk towards their homes, they are irked with an uncanny feeling as if they are going to be pushed behind the unescapable bars of a prison. Therefore Woolf writes,

> Still as we approach our own door step again, it is comforting to feel the old possession, the old prejudices, fold us round; and the self, which has been blown about at so my street corners, which has battered like a moth at the flame of so many inaccessible lanterns, sheltered and enclosed. (25)

As it is observed by Woolf, for women, the world beyond the domestic sphere or the public sphere functions as a space of freedom, knowledge and accessibility which helps in examining life from different quarters and opens up different horizons of life, whereas, the domestic sphere is seen to be a space of ignorance, prejudices and confinement which limits the possibilities of life. Dalit women have similar experience, as for them, the domestic sphere is seen as a space of perennial oppression which reduces them into trifling objects. On the other hand, when they come out in the field, they transform into free-flowing creative selves and their work no more seems an exhausting task as they enjoy it along with their songs, jokes and laughter. It will be a false claim to say that Dalit women are completely free in the work place, because there is always a danger for them of being exploited by the upper caste men. But it can certainly be argued that the work field is a relatively free place where they enjoy their lives, share their problems and stand for each other against any kind of oppression which result in developing a strong bond among them. At the same time the work field provides them the economic independence from their husbands and keeps them away from the domestic oppression. In Simone de Beauvoir's terms, one can say that the work field provides the opportunity for Dalit women to set themselves free from the "realm of immanence" and achieve "the light of transcendence" (726). By "realm of immanence" de Beauvoir refers to the set of patriarchal norms and restrictions which are historically thrust upon women by the male-dominated society, which in consequence results in the structural subjugation of women. But the modern woman is gradually unshackling herself from those conventions and should continue doing so in pursuit of her freedom and independent identity, which de Beauvoir denotes as "the light of transcendence." Going by De Beauvoir's proposition it can be asserted that, the work field plays a significant role in Dalit women's lives as it offers them the opportunity of keeping themselves free from the oppressive domestic sphere and explore their true selves. And the language through which Dalit Women express themselves freely by singing songs, cracking jokes and narrating stories becomes instrumental in building a free and strong persona of the Dalit woman.

5.7 Conclusion

The most important aspect of the Dalit woman's persona which this chapter locates is the will power to live life which makes her to stand strong and fight against all odds. Dalit women do not have too many complaints about life though their lives are really difficult; rather they try to grab every possibility of making their lives interesting and enjoyable. What is even more interesting about Dalit women is their oral tradition of storytelling and singing songs which becomes a repository of folklores and an indispensable part of their cultural history. At a time, when written texts dominate the sphere of literature and written language is generally considered as the authentic form, Dalit women's maximum use of spoken language reestablishes the importance of the spoken form of language both in the sphere of literature and life. Dalit women's raw language which is used for many meaningful purposes and the conscious acceptance of such a language as their distinct social identity disrupts the idea of a standard language that gives rise to the social stratification based on language.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Scope for Future Research

The thesis primarily looks into the literary misrepresentations of Dalit lives and misreading of Dalit literature conditioned both in caste and caste / gender premises, thus suggesting that Dalit texts demand a different kind of reading which cannot be possible through the application of the established Brahminical literary parameters, because such literary parameters are not designed to capture the lived realities of Dalit lives. In other words, it argues for a specific set of literary aesthetic parameters, i.e., 'Dalit literary aesthetics' for the study of Dalit literature. The conceptualization of Dalit literary aesthetics on the basis of lived-experience brings in a fresh perspective to study literary aesthetics and offers mainstream critics the opportunity to inform themselves about the aesthetic views of the people whose lives have hardly ever been taken into account for an aesthetic analysis. It may interest the mainstream critics to engage with the debate of 'lived-experience' to understand whether they can inculcate similar kind of a view point which would help them understand the lives which they have neglected so far. It also emphasizes the insider / outsider dichotomy which is needed specifically in the context of marginal literatures in order to secure the marginal space from being occupied by the dominant other. Therefore, the emphasis on Dalit 'lived experience' in Dalit literature as an essential criterion to represent Dalit lives should not be considered as a completely restrictive mechanism but may be used as a necessary constriction to avoid the misrepresentations of Dalit realities by the upper caste other and check the intrusion of the upper caste other into the Dalit literary space. So far as the avenues for the outsiders to communicate with the Dalit literary world is concerned, non-Dalit critics such as Sharmila Rege, Toral Jatin Gajarawala, Debjani Ganguly, Maya Pandit, Susie Tharu, etc., are doing so by contributing critical works to Dalit literary sphere. But these critical works are the analysis of Dalit lived realities that have been written by Dalits themselves, and thus, these

critics do not necessarily claim to be representing Dalit lives. Such critical works signify that the insider and outsider spaces are defined but there are avenues for interaction.

The Dalit feminist stand point or Dalit womanism, which the thesis argues for, not only provides a space for Dalit women to speak for themselves but also contributes to Indian feminism at large as it can be helpful for the mainstream feminists to understand that caste, gender and patriarchy are interrelated. Control over women's sexuality which is one of the main features of Brahminical patriarchy is primarily intended to maintain the caste boundaries. In many Brahminical texts, women are compared with 'Sudras' and in Hindu society women are treated like untouchables when they menstruate, which signifies that there is an intrinsic relationship between caste and gender. Through a close reading of Dalit women's autobiographical narratives, while exploring the patriarchal structures within the Dalit community, many incidents of gender discrimination are traced which are not specific to Dalit women but common to women in general. The gender discriminations such as prioritization of boys over girls, restriction for girls to behave in certain ways, supremacy of a husband over his wife, etc., are commonly experienced by women irrespective of whether the woman belongs to an upper caste or a lower caste. This commonality among women certainly opens a way for interactions between Dalit womanism and feminism at large. At the same time there are subtle differences in the gendered experiences between upper caste women and Dalit women which should be addressed through a Dalit Womanist / Dalit feminist approach. Sharmila Rege suggests the upper caste feminists to 'reinvent themselves as dalit feminists', because reinventing themselves as Dalit feminists will not only help them understand Dalit women's problems well, but also help them to get a clearer perspective of comprehending gender issues at large.

By bringing in a comparative analysis between Dalit men's autobiographical narratives and women's autobiographical narratives, this thesis exposes the misrepresentations of Dalit women by Dalit male writers, which

should educate Dalit men to become more sensitive about Dalit women's issues. The exposition of the inbuilt patriarchy within the Dalit community which is done through a close analysis of Dalit women's autobiographical narratives should be a matter of introspection for Dalit men and it should encourage them to address the issue openly. Dalit critics such as Kancha Ilaiah states that, "Patriarchy as a system does exist among Dalitbahujan, yet in this sense it is considerably more democratic" (34). Such a biased statement which portrays Dalit community of being 'democratic' can be counterproductive especially for Dalit women as it conceals a serious problem like patriarchy. Dalit male writers often do not realize that patriarchal notions, in some way or the other, are ingrained within themselves since they have been a part of the patriarchal society. The instance of slapping his wife which Kesharshivam depicts in a positive light in his autobiographical narrative supports the above made claim. Dalit men are the ones who enjoy the structured patriarchal power within the community and thus feel protective about it. Along with raising their voice against the exploitation of Dalit women by the upper caste men, Dalit men should be self-critical in resistering different forms of gender discrimination which Dalit women go through in their own community.

The thesis contributes towards a reading of Dalit women's lives by exploring Dalit women's skills of using different strategies to resist the oppressors and their unique ways of celebrating their lives which debunks the stereotyped notions about Dalit women that portray them as helpless and unintelligent beings. It is fascinating to observe Dalit women's conscious attempt to assert their 'Dalit woman' identity through their distinctive linguistic expressions. The very act is also indicative of how the voices from the margin speak for themselves and thus create their own agencies to negotiate discursive power relations which they had hardly ever been a part of. What is even more interesting about Dalit women is their ability of manipulating the master's (here master refers to the upper castes) language and claiming ownership to it. Dalit women's lives can be inspiring for any woman as they show enormous will power to live their lives in the face of severe hardships faced inside the home and outside. Therefore Bama writes, "… our women have an abundant will to survive however hard they might struggle for

their last breath" (*Events* 68). Dalit women can be seen as the repositories of folklores as they are accomplished with the artistry of singing wedding songs, coming of age songs, mourning songs and narrating various stories of their own culture. Jokes, banters and creating stories from their everyday happening become an indispensable part of their lives as they derive great pleasure by sharing with each other in the work fields. Dalit women's openness and subtlety in expressing their bodily desires, which has been a forbidden subject for women in patriarchal societies, break many gender boundaries. Explorations of multiple dimensions of a Dalit woman's persona undertaken in this thesis offers a departure in the way a Dalit woman's life may be read while opening possibilities for fresh Dalit womanist dialogues which could be a matter of interest for the scholars who are interested in this field.

This thesis explores the discriminatory practice of caste by the upper castes against Dalits to exhibit how such an evil practice marginalizes the people of a particular section of Hindu society and reproduces them as Dalits. But, due to certain constraints, it has not been able to capture the occasional practices of caste hierarchy within Dalit sub-castes which have been talked in a few Dalit autobiographical narratives, such as, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit Life* and Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*. Therefore, the problem of caste hierarchy within the Dalit community will be addressed in detail in the future research which will bring more depth and veracity into Dalit literature studies. In addition, emergence of the Dalit novels in recent times, such as, P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* (First published in Tamil as *Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum* in 1989 and translated into English in 2006), Cho. Dharman's *Koogai: The Owl* (First published in Tamil as *Koogai* in 2005, and translated into English in 2015), G. Kalyan Rao's *The Untouchable Spring* (First published in Telugu as *Antarani Vasantam* in 2000, translated into English in 2010), Kancha Ilaiah's *Untouchable God* (2013), Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), etc., opens a future prospect to observe the aesthetic transitions from Dalit autobiographical narratives to Dalit novels.

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