CHAPTER—2
SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Origin: --

The literary history of the African-American autobiography is loosely related to the rise and development of the genre of slave narratives, a unique genre in American literature. The personal narrative in African-American literature is essentially a collectively descriptive of the race memory of the society and the focus is on sameness, social differences, race and gender. The psychologist Jung calls it 'collective consciousness'. Brazil was discovered in 1500 and became a royal Portuguese Colony, which was a source of sugar, spices, cocoa and wood. At first the native Indians were employed as workers. They were not adaptable to heavy work demanded of them. To replenish the work force, Portuguese raided Africa and brought in thousands of Negro slaves. In 1800 Richard Allen founded 'Free African Society' in the same year U.S. banned the importation of slaves. Afro-America covers the entire American Hemisphere including North, Central and South America, the Caribbean and north countries like Newfoundland and Greenland. There are nearly 103 million Black people of African descent in America of which only 27% are in the U.S.A. while 47% are in Brazil. There lives will be understood when we understand their time.

Autobiography is an expression of an individual's sense of society and history, their socio-historic consciousness and expression of oneness with the world. Legal immigrants of America had many obstacles of language, lack of contacts, cultural shock and separation from family. They become stronger and creative as they work through the obstacles. They had the attitude of honesty, faith, discipline, conviction, desire, hope, personal growth, patience, persistence, flexibility and gratitude. They have been given a dream beyond all their childhood expectations and hopes are unbelievably high.
Any writer or literature is a great cultural storehouse. The text 'mean' only within a set of pre-existing socially approved ideas, symbols, images, ways of thinking and values. Through the literature the meaning is culturally created or transferred. The cultural, traditional codes have been handed down with different cultural perspective including class, gender, ethnicity and belief. Any text is an historical document and meaning is cultural and contextual. After writing the text, when it becomes open to the reader, it no more remains personal or individual property. So meaning taken out from the text according to social, historical, cultural perspective is only a 'shared meaning'. The response to it is not merely an individual thing, but as a part of society, culture and history. If we change the context, the meaning changes and becomes contextual. For analyzing a book we should see the personal, social, political and cultural influences. There are different conventions of reading and writing with historical understanding.

2.2) Folk-Autobiography

It remains one of the most poignant and least recognizable genres of Black women's writing. Its primary form of literature is oral with the rural background having domestic or midwifery profession. They used to tell simple life stories. The Oral tradition influenced the contemporary written literature, its content and style. Narrative Cycles are group of stories that tend to focus around particular characters and include common events like gambling, abduction, trickster, seduction, deviances, disobediences, migration, death, encounter with mysteriousness, colonization, war, love, children and women's stories. The communal consciousness of millions of slaves, their oral tradition on songs and stories inspired individual African-American writers who gave form and substance to present writing and publication to become associated with legitimacy in the new nation. Writing and reading had a special significance.
These women acknowledge the importance of education for empowerment with formal learning; economic instability and poverty are central challenges in African-American community. All recognized the doctrine of Martin Luther King Jr.’s Black liberation ideology of love within empowerment ethics. Moral situation of Black people is understood through community but moral dilemma is defined by struggle. Black male leaders made themselves free from the brokenness and alienation, which already existed, in black community. They wanted to prove their artistic ability so with Freedom’s Journal (1827) they advocated the terrible sin of slavery. David Walker’s ‘Appeal’ (1829) delivered a furious condemnation of American slavery and racism. The content called for a series of violent black uprisings, which was very shocking for White readers. For them writing to combat charges of racial inferiority, social justice and to show the disparity between American ideals and racial inequality was unacceptable.

2.3.) Literary Background: --

The first African-American daily newspaper, ‘The New Orleans’, the first newspaper in South Asia published in 1856. For poetry, occasional pieces, Editorials, letters to the editors, testimonials, appeals and addresses all of which considered ‘literature’ in 19th century. Newspapers provided a remarkable record of the early literary efforts of African-American and beginning of a tradition. As the American Revolution reinforced Enlightenment then ideas about the importance of written communication, reading, writing and printing were increasingly seen as technologies of power. Colonists turned to written texts in the form of pamphlet and broadsides as a medium of public expression. The country had formed itself through one document the Declaration of Independence. The Constitution caused written publication principles laid out in the Declaration of Independence; Black women’s Slave autobiographies are the product of the quest for multiple freedoms for all and for all sorts of oppression that is slavery and sexual harassment.
On the eve of the Civil War the first African-American literary magazine was published. Advancement in educational opportunities made them feel the need of literature that gives all the details of history and aspiration. African-American Biographies of 19th century black leaders such as Fredrick Douglas and Martin Denany and histories such as Daniel Payne’s The History of African-American Episcopal Church (1891) George Washington William’s History of the Negro Race in America from 1619-1880, (1893) as well as the collection of A New Negro For A New Century (1900) with the contributed essays of Booker. T. Washington & Fanni Barriar Williams tried to present a ‘New Negro’. It was a matter of great pride and inspiration for African-American society.

At the beginning of 19th century free blacks living in urban areas of the North used writing to highlight the disparity between the condition of people of African decent in the United States. And through the Slave narratives, African-American entered in the world of prose, poetry and drama. In 1859 the first African American fiction appeared, The Two Offers’, a short story by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a short story of a middle-class women whose race is not specified, Harriet Wilson’s Our Nig: Sketches from the life of a free Black, an autobiographical novel about the life of a working-class black women in the North. Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861), the first autobiography by a formerly enslaved African-American woman vividly describes her experiences of black women’s sexual exploitation. Publications by ‘A Colored Lady’ ‘or A Young Lady Of Color’ at least not only to the wide variety of writing submitted by African-American but also to the ability of black women helped to avoid socially imposed norms through such things. Socially imposed constraints of race and gender had prohibited black especially women from engaging in public and political discussion. To be audible and visible, most of them had adopted anonymity or pen name, which provided a kind of protection that allowed black writers to speak their minds more freely and frankly.
Black historian Rayford Logan identified two decades between 1890 and 1910, the same period was labeled as ‘Women’s Era’. African-American women’s writings flourished in recent decades with a great struggle. These women have tenaciously ferreted out a site, which express their own unique and compelling voice in spite of their seduction and suppression. The history of black women is linked with the issues of sexism, racism and sexuality. The history of African-American referred to racial, economical, legal and sexual exploitation by the white males. Christian Barbara schematized the history of African-American women writer’s consciousness in terms of chronology. Before about 1950 Black women wrote for audiences that largely excluded themselves in response to the dominating white society’s racial discrimination, 1960 was a decade of finding unity in shared blackness, 1970 a period of exposure of sexism in Black community and 1980, a time of emergence of a diverse culture of black women engaged in finding self-hood and forming connections among women that promised to transcend race and class in a worldwide community patterned on the ties of mother and daughter. In the 80’s the terrain for the growing understanding of the personhood of Black women, figured in the fiction of the Diaspora was worldwide. (Emecha: Vol 3-4.)

2.4) Harlem Renaissance: --

Like most cultural movements, the Harlem Renaissance came into being largely because of historical and social conditions that enabled it to flourish. It was initially called “The New Negro Movement”. The early years of 20th century witnessed the Great Migration in 1880 when elevated rail lines linked Manhattan, an island in New York city with the more developed Lower Manhattan when scores of black fled the racism and violence of the South in search of justice and the promise of jobs in the North. Whites employed blacks in various intimate capacities like washing, ironing, cooking, scrubbing, sewing, mending, digging or planting but social congregation was prohibited.
In between the period of First and Second World War the millions of African-American had left the South. There was concentration of Black in cities like Detroit, Washington D.C., Philadelphia and Chicago. Due to job opportunities people progressed economically which resulted into cultural development whenever it was possible. All over New York, Harlem Renaissance has a great musical, literary and artistic effect on the minds of black people. During that period cultural and Civil rights leaders encouraged Black artists to achieve excellence in all the fields, which will be helpful in breaking down the racial barriers. Black women started arguing about their Voting rights and other social and political struggle. New York became the center of American publishing.

It was the period of Restoration/Reconstruction for Black people's forgotten promises and hopes. After the Civil War of 1865, African-American hoped finally a new Era of freedom of opportunity. The educational opportunities boosted the self-consciousness in the black middle-class community. Their writings no more remained just for the sake of entertainment but it became the weapon of social analysis and direct confrontation with the prejudices. They wanted to prove themselves important creative people of mainstream. Their unique heritage of Africa and national attachment of America should give them their own identity in the society and in the culture also. It gave confidence and spirit to them that they could make their mark in American History.

New black writers got the entry in the mainstream. The writer used literature as a weapon to fight for the abolition of slavery in the U.S. They pointed at the particular need of free black community that is full, free citizenship and equal participation in the life of republic. The society could not survive and flourish without a common understanding of human nature and conduct. On July 1896, the National Association of Colored Women's Club was formed. The objectives of the club were to promote education of women, children; to secure and enforce civil and political rights for African-Americans and inter-racial understanding among all people. Due to the
strong racial protest National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909.

In the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance many Black writers were interested mostly in poetry. Since poetry is the highly effective form of human feelings and emotions, White people were doubtful about the creative capacities of the Blacks in handling of this form. So their poetry was not received properly. Hence Black writers focused themselves to fiction. Jessie Faucet’s *There is Confusion* (1924), Claude McKay *Home To Harlem* (1928) Wallace Thurman’s *The Blacker The Berry* (1929) and *Infants of the Spring* (1932), Langston Hughes’ *Not Without Laughter* (1930) and George Schuyler’s *Black No More* (1931). Zola Neale Huston, an active writer in Harlem Renaissance, wrote many short stories. Her *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) Her writings inspired Black women writers who wrote about race, gender and class.

After the Great Depression period in 1930, they shifted their interest from typical plantation description to the urban life in their literature. Their social protest as drawn from Marxism and other ideologies as naturalism and realism struggled to create significant picture of black urban life in poetry, prose and drama. The 19th century saw a handful of middle class African-American women writing fiction, poetry, autobiography and biography with their strength and creativity, they overcome tremendous barriers to pave way to their inner call to express their ideas publicly. It was their honest voice to tell the truth, which was denied them in every other public forum. Ellen Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Tony Morrison, Alice Walker and many other strong independent women wrote for themselves. It was a period in which the printed words held great influence over public opinion. European Enlightenment laid lot of importance on writing. Hopkins was the first writer to introduce racial and social themes into the framework of traditional 19th century romance novels. These women’s autobiographies are a means of appealing to White society for acceptance as human beings. According to Joanne Baxton, “For Black
women the quest for the personal fulfillment is the central theme. It is the account of struggles and triumphs of the lives they actually led.

2.5 SECTION-I

MARIAN ANDERSON (1897-1993)
MY LORD WHAT A MORNING (1956)

On this background Marian Anderson, the black singer, achieved a great success. She was a combination of dignity, serenity, perseverance and talent. When the country has tolerance toward these people, she had accepted the responsibility of role model for the future with grace and passed on a great legacy of accomplishments to be not only met but also surpassed by the African-American singer who followed her.

2.5.1) Childhood of the singer:

Marian Anderson was born in Philadelphia in 1897. Her father John Anderson was an ice and coal salesman. Her mother Mary had been a teacher in her native Virginia but due to social constraint she was not qualified to teach in Philadelphia. Black churches of that time provided a refuge against economic deprivation and racism. She was the first among three daughters of John and Mary Anderson. Born into a poor South Philadelphian family, Marian from earliest childhood attended the Union Baptist Church of Philadelphia. She began singing in the church that demonstrated exceptional musical talent at the very early age of six. Her singing skills developed as she grew. She became a soloist who could sing not only parts in her natural contralto range but also soprano parts.

Marian’s father died of head injury leaving the family in more desperate financial circumstances when she was just twelve years old. After her father’s death she could
not afford her high school education so she had to quit school after 8th grade. She could not complete high school until she was twenty-four. She started working and earns money with her singing. Anderson faced overt racism for the first time when she tried to apply for admission to a local music school. She recalls the clerk’s racial comment “We don’t take colored”(P.38)

2.5.2) Formative years of the Singer: -

The Union Baptist Church recognized and very much appreciated her voice in the choir. At that time the Church knew her family not as an ordinary Christians or just an active members of society but as a strong ‘believers’ and ‘supporters’ of Christianity. The Church at Fitzwater and Martin and the Community provided her financial support and encouragement for Marian’s musical and academic education. She was able to take voice lessons in Philadelphia, first with soprano Mary Saunders Patterson around 1915 then with contralto Agnes Reifsnyder from 1916-18 and finally with Giuseppe Boghetti in 1920.

2.5.3) Struggle to achieve the rights: --

From 1914 she started performing in public concerts and by 1917 she was giving solo performances. Her tenor/coach Roland Hayes provided guidance in her developing career. She however found a teacher who gave her voice and music lessons for free, later with donations from local church. Sponsored by her family, her church, friends and teachers, she received a superb musical education and pursued a concert career.

She toured regionally, gaining knowledge and confidence with each performance. She developed a network of Black churches and colleges in the South and the Midwest where she gave concerts. But every concert, performance, the journey towards the destination, location was rather miserable because rail travels with all its various racist strictures were constant source of humiliation, embarrassment and
sometimes fear for her. Even after achieving success she was not exempted from racial discrimination. She was often refused accommodations at restaurants, hotels and concert halls. The following years she gave around 70 recitals in the U.S., the most intensive and longest tour in the concert career of any singer. Although she had latent talent, she was not accepted by the White society and often suffered resentment by it.

2.5.4) Singing Career: --

In 1924 she gave her first recital at New York, Town Hall. She had been told that the ticket have been sold well. But when she went on the stage, there was smattering of an audience. Critics were not complimentary, the concert revealed her discomfort with foreign language. She felt lost and defeated. She felt like ending her vocal career. In this entire tormented situation her mother was a source of balance. She was wholly dedicated to her mother and took her everywhere, whenever she went. Boghetti convinced her to continue her studies and musical training. A scholarship enabled her to go to Europe. She went to London in 1925 to study and improve her music knowledge. She visited Germany and Finland where composer Jean Sibelius dedicated the song 'Solitude' to her. During ten months periods she gave 123 concerts in 15 different countries, performing a repertoire that included 200 songs and arials in German, Italian, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish and other languages. She sang before the Archbishop of Salzburg and many of Europe’s leading musicians.

The Archbishop was very happy with her performance; even Arturo Toscanini said, "Yours is a voice one hears once in hundred years." She received more recognition in Europe than in her own country because of racism; it paved the way for career of future African-American singers. After that very critical success she went to U.S. in 1935 for a recital at Town Hall. Hurlok managed the show and she was declared the country’s third highest concert box office drawn. Long before the fall of Soviet Union, from Leningrad to Moscow, Marian Anderson’s concerts were packed. She
was warned, not to sing religious songs or Spirituals in U.S.S.R. because they would “fall on deaf ears” (P.31) she forcefully answered,

“They are the songs of my people. I shall sing them whenever and wherever I please.” (P.32)

The concerts had various arrangements to satisfy local customs with respect to separation of the races. In some places she had to give two separate concerts, one for Blacks and one for Whites. Her every performance became a symbol of African-American’s ongoing struggle for racial equality. In 1935 she won the enthusiastic audience in America.

The most highly publicized instance for Marian took place in 1939 when her manager Hurlock tried to arrange a concert for her in Constitution Hall, the largest and most appropriate indoor location in Washington D.C. The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), owner of the hall had the policy for ‘White Artist Only’. They came to know that the performer is an African-American singer; this insult to American Democracy was more than they could stand. So they refused to allow her to sing there. This act of discrimination was condemned at the national level resulted into big wave of protest. Deems Taylor send a wire of protest—‘The action subverts the clear meaning of the U.S. constitution, in particular the Bill of Rights, and places of your organization in the camp of those who seek to destroy democracy, justice and liberty.’ (Newman, 1965, 105-106) The protest was answered with active encouragement from the First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The Times took cognisance and the headline appear-MRS. ROOSEVELT TAKES STAND. RESIGNS FROM D.A.R. She told her own feelings about this concert

“I was sadden and ashamed. I was sorry for the people who had precipitated the affair. I felt that their behavior stemmed from a lack of understanding. They were not persecuting me personally or as a representative of my people so much as they were doing something neither sensible nor good. Could I have erased the bitterness, I would have done so
gladly. I do not mean to say that I was not entitled to appear in Constitution Hall, as might any other performer. But the unpleasantness disturbed me and if it had been up to me alone. I would have sought a way to wipe it out.”(P.125)

The United States Department of the Interior with a able support of Mrs. Roosevelt organized a concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on 9th April 1939. The lady who had conquered the capital of Europe with her magnificent voice was to sing at the Lincoln Hall for all people of every ethnic group. That particular day was the Easter Sunday. The concert drew a crowd of 75,000 people including radio listeners. The entire episode was the unique case of racial discrimination of African-American community. The Times music critic wrote of this concert “Let be said at the outset: Marian Anderson has returned to her native land one of the great singers of our time. The Negro contralto who has been abroad for four years established herself in her concert at the Town Hall last night as the possessor of an excelling voice and art.”. Nearly twenty years later, when she described the Easter concert in her autobiography, the contraltos own words

"-----I sang. I don’t know how. There must have been the help of professionalism I had accumulated over the years.”(P.191)

She was shy, unassuming, gentle person. Her presence was mystical, charismatic and her singing had a deep spiritual quality.

In 1943 Marian married Orpheus Fisher, her classmate who tirelessly and faithfully waited for her long 20 years. She was 24 when she came back to her high school education at that time America was engaged in First World War. She met Orpheus. He was an African-American almost as tall as she and of light complexion, people thought that he is White and there was a rumour that they were an ‘international couple’. So after marriage also there were different sorts of difficulties. They were searching for house but could not get one since they were Black. After a long hunt, they bought a farm in Connecticut. Marian said, “They had to buy twice as much acreage as they needed so that we wouldn’t contaminate neighborhood.” She had an
iron will which considering the obstacles to a classical singing career for a black woman of her era, which she very much needed.

In 1954 Metropolitan Opera general manager Rudolf Binge signed Marian for the role of Ulrica in the Met’s production of Un Ballo in Maschera by Verdi. Her debut on 7th January 1955 marked that an African-American singer had sung on the Met stage. At that time she was 57 years old and her voice was started showing her age.

2.5.5) Awards and honours: --

The singer received numerous awards and honours during her life. She was given the National Association of Coloured People’s (NAACP) Spingarm Award by the hands of Roosevelt in 1938 for outstanding achievement by a black American. In 1940 she received Philadelphia Award in the honor of a citizen whose service brings special credit to the city. She performed before the heads of the States including the king and queen of England and at the Presidential inauguration of Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy. In 1958 she was appointed alternate delegate of the U.S. to the United Nations. From 1957-58 she served as a goodwill ambassador with the United States state Department. In 1963 she received the Presidential Medal of freedom by President Lyndon Johnson.

In June 1977 when she came to Cambridge, Massachusetts; Harvard University honoured itself when it conferred it’s most distinguished honorary degree on Marian Anderson. She received honorary doctorates from over two-dozen universities. She was honoured with the United Nation Peace Prize and the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award, a New York City’s Handel Medallion congressional resolution of Congratulations delivered by First Lady Rosalyn Carter and she was felicitated with Grammy Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1991 just two years prior to her death in 1993.
In 2005 the U.S. Postal Service honoured her, as it's 28th stamp in the Black Heritage Stamp Series recognizing her life and accomplishment at D.A.R. Constitution Hall where once she was not permitted to perform because of her 'Black' color. Deputy Postmaster General John M. Molan dedicated the stamp saying “the stamp is a powerful reminder of her unprecedented contribution to music and to her great sacrifice for justice.”

2.5.6) Inspiration to the family and Community: --

Marian Anderson a women whose remarkable achievements have transcended the excellence of her musical career to bring significant and lasting change to society. She retired in 1965 with a final concert, conducted by her nephew, James De Priest in Philadelphia. She sang there “My Country ‘tis of thee, Sweet Land of Liberty”. After her retirement she remained active as a public speaker, recipient of numerous awards and honorary degrees, promoters of education for African-Americans in the performing arts. She settled with her husband, Orpheus Fisher on a farm in Connecticut until she moved to De Priest's Portland Oregano home in July 1992. She suffered a stroke the following Spring and died of congestive heart failure on 18th April 1993. People from every corner of the world, over 2000 admirers attended a memorial service held in her honour at Carnegie Hall in New York.

New York Times on 8th June 1993 paid a Tribute to Marian Anderson, Allan Kozinn wrote, “The memorial was a quiet uncomplicatedly dignified affair, very much keeping with Anderson's public persona. The printed program carried the title “Remembering the Art of Marian Anderson” and indeed the focus was on her singing, not on her struggles and triumphs------It was in the group of Spirituals that Ms. Anderson's expressive range was best illuminated. Included were her haunting accounts of “Crucifixation”, Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child” and “Were You There?” as well as representation of the brighter, more ebullient side of her artistry, captured in her recording of “Let Us Break Bread Together” and “He’s
Got the Whole World in His Hands” is obvious. De Priests said about his aunt’s personality in the interview-

“She was tremendously strong person and she had to go through a great deal, being a woman, and being a black woman at that time trying to build a career. But her dignity was such a powerful force, and her faith was so strong that while she obviously was outraged, it would never be her style to be a seething Cauldron and in private to rant and rave. She was positive. She knew what she wanted to do. She knew that no one should be in her way preventing her from doing it because of her race. And I think, she probably felt that she was going to be clearing a path not just for herself, but also for others to follow.

Her autobiography My Lord What a Morning published in 1956 is an interesting story in her own modest words. It is an account of her Journey from her humble but proud beginning in South Philadelphia to international vocal renown as music shaped her career. Her autobiography is a classic portrait of a musical legend. She gives her views on discrimination, surpasses all odd situations and warm remembrances of her parents, mostly mother, her sisters, brother, teachers, friends, managers, accompanists and fans. The book is divided into twenty-eight chapters entitled significantly and arranged chronologically. Almost twenty-two chapters are nothing but an account of Marian’s worldwide journey to learn and to perform. She talks very less about her feelings, as she is more concerned about her ‘career and people’
2.6 SECTION II

ANNE MOODY (1940-)
COMING OF AGE IN MISSISSIPPI (1968)

2.6.1) Historical Background: -

The African-American creative writers came into limelight at the beginning of the pre-revolutionary war period. Since 1970 these writers led by Toni Morrison and others have earned widespread critical acclaim, their literature has been recognized internationally as well as nationally since it’s inception in the late 18th century. In the second half of the 18th century, African-Americans launched their literature in North America when they claimed for the basic human rights in the Declaration of Independence. They wanted to prove that blacks are not inherently inferior to whites in matter of spirit and body except their skin colour.

On 21st July 1896 the National Association of Colored Women’s club (NACWC) was formed. The objectives of the club were to promote the education of women and children, job security, enforcement of civil and political right for African-Americans and interracial understanding among all people. Anne Moody is a well-known contemporary black native Mississippi author grew up in the period after World-War II that altered international power-relationship in the United States. Thousands of white working men went off to fight in the War and people of color got the job opportunities as never before. This kind of work in offices, factories and other employment opportunities were open for the first time due to the massive shortage of white workers. Industrial jobs had been the domain of white men.

This drastic change created the economic equality and social justice as manifestation of Civil Right Movement, the Black Power Movement and the Women’s Liberation Movement. Men of Colour who fought in world war II were
send to fight in other countries with different culture than U.S. they experienced U.S. segregation in the military. The war of independence was fought into 1950’s and 1960’s in Africa, Asia and Latin America in defense of “freedom and democracy” by men of colour to free themselves from European civilization.

The third world independence, policies of decolonization and the status of African-Americans in the United States as colonized people raised many questions. At that time ‘Mississippi Free Press’ an underground newspaper started in 1960. It was highly political, non-traditional, anti-establishment newspaper published weekly or twice a month. It was distributed for free by volunteers with little support by donation of money or labour. Civil Right Movement was born out of the passion of equality.

The 20th century women turned their focus to education, Civil Rights and anti-lynching campaigns. As African-Americans were fighting for Civil Rights, racial injustice and equality, the feminist movement came into full swing. Women were pushing for equal rights, more independence, equal pay and the right to be heard. Women activist Friedman helped the women’s movement with her 1963 bestseller, The Feminine Mystique that sparked a national debate on the role of women as housewives.

It was a historic moment when 20 National Organizations of women leaders disrupted hearings of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments in 1970 to demand the Equal Rights Amendments be heard by the full Congress. With the Civil Right Act of 1964. Equal employment opportunity for women became officially United States government policy and for the first time Women of Colour expressed their political, social and sexual struggles for liberation through writings. In 1964 the Civil Right Act prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex, religion or national origin. This gave rise to the Equal Employment Opportunity commission. In the first five years of the committee, it received 50,000 sex discrimination complaints.
In Black people’s mind the memories of Africa are transmitted from generation to generation. Still they could not develop their own African culture in America but as per the demands of the situation, Black culture is no more African but African-American. White masters give their family names to them. Black rejected the names given to them by White people. The term ‘nigger’ shows scorn and insult. ‘Negro’ lost the significance Harlem Renaissance given to them. This was replaced by the word ‘Black’ which signifies ‘collective identity.’ These people gained confidence, courage and strength by every oppressive and dehumanizing experience. They explored the social, political, religious and cultural position of the Black people. Their literature developed into a vehicle through which African-Americans could voice not only their rejection of slavery and racism but their desire for freedom and recognition as full citizen in U.S. It is a means to gain access to humanity and free them from the dehumanizing institution of slavery.

2.6.2) Social Background;

It is a reflection of social conflicts, regional cultures and ethnic identities. As history never comes to an end, recently due to remarkable development in cultural, political and literary field which resulted into the formation of the Black Women’s Literary Renaissance in 1970s. Anne Moody’s Coming of Age in Mississippi (1968) is an honest and inspirational reflection of the struggles she went through during the civil right movement. She gives a detailed account of many important issues like politics of race, the Youth movement, emergence of feminist consciousness, how their childhood experiences framed their activism, why they chose that particular path, gender issues raised, their struggles in the community, struggle for equality, the role of religion in their lives.

Setting of the book is her hometown of Centerville, Mississippi that was characterized by a total segregation complex. Mississippi during that time from the end of World War II through the 60’s was known as a closed society where the
traditions of white supremacy were celebrated and the white society declared their loyalty to segregation and white supremacy. Mississippi was not alone in their loyalty to traditional white society, rather they were among the most violent, and as it was an economically poor state had least to lose in refusing to create racial harmony for the sake of business and capital growth.

2.6.3) Childhood: --

Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968) begins when she is four years old and depicts her life up to twenty-four which she wrote at the age of twenty-eight. She tells her story through the mouth of Essie Mae, of her childhood name. She was born in Wilkinson Country, Mississippi on 15th September 1940. Her parents Fred and Elnire Moody worked on the farm of a White man Mr. Carter all the time except Sundays. There only she perceived the disparity between the rich and poor. All the Negro workers on the plantation were staying in one wooden room. In the evening darkness she says

"...the lights in Mr. Carter’s house looked even brighter, like a big lighted castle. It seemed like the only house on the whole plantation." (P.5)

Anne and her little sister Adline stayed whole day with her eight years Uncle George Lee. He used to beat both the sisters. He was so mean and wild that once he set the house on fire and blamed it on Anne. Her father beat her for the first time but due to fear she did not say anything. He got tired of all these things so left the house and gave up the responsibilities of the family for alcohol, gambling and sex. As a single parent, it was very difficult for her mother to support the family. She was unable to get a job so she moved into city. There she met a White soldier, Mr. Raymond, from whom she had seven children without marriage. Anne, to support her mother and raise her family, she worked and cleaned the houses of whites in
order to get food and clothes for the family. She was earning six to twelve dollars a week.

2.6.4) Formative years:

As a child she attended segregated schools where she got A's and B's grades throughout her years of schools. She overcame obstacles such as discrimination and hunger as she struggles to survive in her childhood. In the high school she was a good student, outstanding athlete, and a member of the basketball team. She was not getting along well with Mr. Raymond. She went to stay with her uncle in Woodville, there also she has to work hard in the houses and businesses of Whites to support the family and earn fees for her education.

In summer vacations she worked tirelessly in New Orleans and Baton Rouge where she got a job in a café. She lived there with her uncle and other family members. She was just fifteen years old and the workers had to be eighteen. Her co-worker in the café told this thing to the boss and got fired and had to leave the job. She saw that Negroes are being killed, beaten and made run out of town. She was very much concerned and sensitive about these issues at the age of fifteen. She says-

"I was fifteen years old when I began to hate people I hated the white men who murdered Emmett Till and I hated all other whites who were responsible for the countless murders. But I also hated Negroes. I hated them for not standing up and doing something about the murders."(P.136).

The incidents like Emmett Till's murder, Tapline family burning, Jerry's beating, Samuel O'Quinn's murder, working for Mrs. Burke, she felt like cutting every White man she saw. She says
“I hated myself and every Negroes in the Centerville for not putting a stop to the killing or at least putting up a fight in an attempt to stop them. (P.203-4)

After her high school she went to Natchez where she got admission, a basketball scholarship at Natchez Junior College. She entered Tougaloo College that was an integrated college for blacks and whites in Jackson, Mississippi. Anne Moody acquired confidence due to education and thought of fighting for her rights.

2.6.5) Social Movement: --

She was friendly, compassionate, somewhat peculiar smart, intelligent black girl. Anne alone from her family was involved in the movement. She found the supportive environment for her work at Tougaloo. During her two years at Tougaloo, she got involved with National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Officials in the Mississippi were against blacks registering to vote because it would increase the chances of having blacks in the offices. Because of their skin color, they were not allowed to enter in the Movie Theater, bus, train or restaurant. Even if they entered, they were not served at white counters. The cause of her joining all these Civil Right members' and groups was the lynching of Emmett Till. Her hatred towards whites became a force within a civil right struggle.

She joined the group of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) started in Delta to help blacks in South to vote. She joined Woolworth sit-ins and the marches on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King made his famous “I have a dream” speech before a crowd of 250,000 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. for the right to vote just to abolish racism. The CORE and NAACP members were also not served at white counter. Once suddenly white people came to the restaurant and started throwing ketchup, mustard at them.
from the counter. The police came and took the Civil Right members out of the restaurant.

2.6.6) Achievements and Honours

She received her B.Sc. degree in 1964. Throughout her life she has own many awards and honors for literary accomplishments. *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968) received the Brotherhood Award from the National Council of Christian and Jews. The Best Book Of The Year Award from the National Library Association both in 1969. She received the silver medal from Mademoiselle magazine for her short story, "New Hopes for the Seventies" Her other work ‘Mr. Death: Four Stories’ and her short story ‘Bobs’ are recorded.

2.6.7) Moody as Civil Right Activist:

During her career she worked hard as a civil activist and worked for the Congress of Racial Equality. The activists had some sound plans to help the Negroes solve their immediate problems—that is, a way to get a little food into their bellies, a roof over their heads, and a few coins in their pockets. (P.374) Anne spoke and participated in many activities. The Voting Rights Act, which prohibited Blacks from voting, has passed in 1965. In the same year Black activist Malcolm X was assassinated.

On November 22, 1963 the country had lost a strong civil rights supporter, President John Kennedy, to gunfire at a Dallas Parade. In the same decade Martin Luther King (Jr.) after his famous speech “I have a dream” shot in April 1968 on the balcony of a Memphis hotel. It was a great shock for her. She sank in the chair staring at everyone and not seeing anything,

“So much killing” I thought, “so, so much killing. And when will it end? When?” (P.387)
They were all afraid to even consider what his death meant to Negroes. They were afraid to go out even to their neighborhood, out in the cruel and evil world of Whites.

“I had the feeling that when I walked out on the street everything would be pitch black.” A world this evil,” I thought,” should be black, blind, and deaf, and without any feeling at all, then there won’t be any color to be seen, no hatred, no pain to be felt.”(P.389)

The Negroes had almost lost the hope of “real Freedom” As an activist, she found very difficult to persuade Negroes to register them in the voting list in this frightful atmosphere. She found her name in Klan blacklist. It was a great shock for her. She says,

“Before Emmett Till’s murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell and devil. But now there was a new fear known to me -the fear of being killed just because I was black. This was the worst of my fears.”(P.125)

In the distressed state of mind she had decided to leave Civil Right Movement. She was confused about the discrimination and racism against Blacks and Whites. She had all mixed feelings about Northern Whites and doubts about the direction of Black Liberation. She had realized that racial equality might get better; the races will never be truly equal. She ends the book with this decision but with an inspiring song “We Shall Overcome.” According to the Encyclopedia “Black Women in America” Anne left Mississippi in 1964 to become a civil right project co-coordinator at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York married Austin Stratus and had a child named Sascha. In 1969, her marriage ended in divorce. In 1972 she became the artist-in-residence in Berlin, Germany. She lived in New York where she continued to write and serve her Community as a counselor for New York City’s poverty program. She never thought of herself as a writer, but rather as a civil right activist.
The title 'Coming of Age' that is reaching adulthood is a natural process of the living. With her clear and very personal writing she wanted to feel and understand people what it was like to be a poor black woman who has been discriminated, harassed time to time just to have basic human rights. It is an account of the hardships of life and how difficult was life in the 40's when there was lot of racism. It is a story of a brave, ambitious and dedicated young African-American women’s journey and experiences during 1960's Civil Right Movement. She makes us feel and visualize the time-period.

The book is divided into four sections-I) Childhood II) High School III) College IV) Movement. The story is being told in the first person point of view through the main character, Eassie Mae, who is really Anne Moody. The whole book gives us a realistic picture of what life was like for a black female growing up in Mississippi. It is an honest and inspirational reflection of the struggles she went through during the Civil Right Movement. An Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965) collaboration with Malcolm Journalist authors Alex Haley provided a standard that Anne Moody’s Coming of Age in Mississippi (1968) sought to emulate. (William Andrews, Inc.2005)

The book gives us a detailed account of many famous events of that particular time. She makes the reader feel that particular atmosphere and the story is described in very picturesque form. Through out the book we feel that she stood up for the causes she believed. Her autobiography depicts the uphill battle that was faced by all black people. These writers have identified themselves with the social and political movements. Their main intention was to bring cohesiveness between individual and society. For them, aspiration is more important for the community in the fight for fundamental freedom, human right and racial hatred. The memories of their own country are transmitted from generation to generation. Though they have great respect for the traditional values, they could not develop their own culture. These writers have adopted an enlighten outlook which is a sign of wisdom and
insight acquired by them. They have moulded themselves as per the demands of the situation. Black culture is no more only African but African-American.

2.7 SECTION -III
THREE BLACK WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, (ED) WILLIAM ANDREWS (1986)
‘SISTERS OF THE SPIRIT’

2.7.1) Religious Background:-

Religion plays very crucial role in the lives of back community, especially in the lives of women. Christianity has played a major role in the shaping and molding of their history and culture also. Their lives are centered on the religious principles and ideas. Religion had very strong influence on the Nineteen-century public life. Religious expression and ideas are basic to our common experience. So the literary canon is incomplete without the study of religious autobiographies.

During late 18th and early 19th century, African race was easily available and looked as a cheap source of the plantation system and for slave trade. In those days from West Indies sugar was sent to New England, which was useful for making rum. Sugar was sent to Africa in exchange of slaves. They were taken to West Indies to work on cane field. So Africans were dislocated and displaced from their Homeland. They were brutally exploited due to being black and miserably poor. They were denied every right of human beings. Hence education was the remote possibility for them. Anglican churches refused to educate the slaves because it was against the law. The Methodists formed their own sect known as Methodist Episcopal Church in U. S. A. The main function of Methodist Church was mission and to preach Holy books. It also introduced Christian education to slaves as the mission.
The Great Awakening had already taken place under the guidance of the renowned theologian Jonathan Edward. This Awakening influenced especially young people. In the South slaves were prohibited from congregating in large numbers and church meetings. They had a separate church known as the African Methodist Church. The motto of the church was “God Our Father, Christ Our redeemer, man our brother.” The black church was completely ‘man’s domain.’ Women being black, female and poor were brutally assaulted, insulted and exploited socially and racially. The women were exposed to a domestic double standard. They were admonished by church and society to consider the home their proper and perfect territory.

2.7.2) Social Background: --

The 19th century gospel message promoted connectedness with God and with one another. After knowing God, complete transformation started taking place in the minds of the people. Camp meetings were arranged. So the revival that had begun with the conversion of youth led to social action. In the later part of 19th century, almost around 1880 General Conference was a watershed time for women who were called to preach. There was a strong movement for full clergy rights for women. The Bishops opposed very strongly for the same. So women were forbidden to preach with church authority. In 1938 the Northern and Southern Methodist church reunited. The North church was in favor of ordination. Around 1954 the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was changed into Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

Women received clergy privileges. By 1956 also clergywomen did not allow to participate fully at all levels of United Methodist Church. The women were not allowed to preach but with their strong faith and belief in God they found their ways. The women fought and spoke on various issues such as race, sex, class and education. Religion provided them comfort and peace of mind. It gave them solace and confidence. They continued to fight for equal rights for women. They argued
that Holy Spirit does not discriminate on the basis of one’s sex. The role of women in the church begins with Jesus Christ. In last 2000 years there are many stories of courage, sacrifice and of deep faith. These stories were intended not to bring glory to him but to point to the power of God’s grace revealed in Jesus Christ. Their faith in God seemed to be the focus of their fight for equal rights as well as ultimate source in the liberation of African–American.

The end of 18th century and beginning of 19th century was marked with the publications of religious magazines and journals. The purpose of these publications was to educate preachers and clergy. John Wesley, the founder of denomination formed the pattern of these writings. He started the first monthly periodical ‘The Arminian Magazine’ a series of personal accounts written by English Methodists. His other periodicals ‘The Spiritual Magazine’ and the ‘Gospel Magazine’ also acquired the place in literary canon. The journal was about theological writings that is works of divine, biographical account of ‘holy’ persons, experiences of pious persons and the original poetry about the universal love of God. In November 1778 issue the first autobiographical account of a preacher ‘A Short Account of Mr. Jaco’ was published.

Throughout the 19th century black women preachers were engaged in the act of autobiographical writing. These writings were an attempt to make place for themselves in ‘men’s domain’, which was socially and religiously restricted for them. Through their writings they explored the cruelties and inhumanities of slavery, their sorrows and triumphs and their struggles. These women shared their moral wisdom to empower their community and helped them to survive in the face of oppression.

2.7.3) Spiritual autobiographies: -

Spiritual autobiographies played an important role in Methodist class meetings and worship. Majority of women turned toward the authority of Holy Spirit. Some of
them experienced the Divine call to ministry. It is a record of their journey to fulfill their religious quest and accounts of their hardships. Their experiences and their lives help us to understand the role of religion played in the lives of Afro-American women during 19th century. They also provide us the picture of literary and political spheres of American life. Their spirituality helps us to understand the history and experiences of Afro-American women. They were extremely spiritual and radically Christian.

These autobiographies are important to study as they offer ante- and -post bellum account on gender differentiation in black church leadership. These stories are full of hopes so they are inspiring to generations to come. This study of African-American women Preachers has been divided into three sections, one on each woman preacher, that is Jerena Lee, Zilpa Elaw and Julia Foote. It shows the social structure and initial struggles of their lives and how they overcame the initial hurdles of discrimination and marginalization.

2.8) Nature of the text ‘Sisters Of The Spirit’:

William Andrews, a professor of English at Wisconsin University has brought together the Spiritual autobiographies of three black women of nineteenth – century in a single book entitled as ‘SISTERS OF THE SPIRIT.’ These three women are, Jerena Lee (1783 –1850), Zilpa Elaw (1790 –1845) and Mrs. Julia A. J. Foote (1823 –1900). These are the women preacher who preached the gospel from 1836 –1879 when slavery was ending in the U. S.

These three women had published their autobiographies named as ‘The Life Experiences and Religious experiences of Jerena Lee, A Colored Lady, Giving An Account of Her Call to preach the Gospel published in 1836. Zilpa Elaw had written Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experiences, Ministerial Travels and Labors of Mrs. Zilpa Elaw and published it in 1846. The third woman preacher has named her
autobiography A Brand Plucked From the fire: An Autobiographical Sketch By Mrs. Julia A. J. Foote that was published in 1879.

William Andrews has collected these spiritual autobiographies and published it in 1986 with his historical introduction of almost twenty-five pages. The introduction of the book offers a solid foundation for the original texts and makes it unique. Apart from historical background he has devoted almost twenty-three pages to Jerena Lee that is from pg. Nos. 25-48. We can see Zilpa Elaw from 49th page to 160th that is from 49-160 for Julia Foote he has devoted all about seventy-three pages, that is from 161-234.

This book is a remarkable account of their difficult childhood, religious conversions in revival camp meetings and adult lives dedicated to saving souls across black and white America. It is the valuable document of racial, gender and feminist radicalism in American religious life. It is the spiritual autobiography of these three Afro-American women preachers associated with the African Methodists Episcopal Church.

2.8.1) JERENA LEE (1736-1850)

2.8.1.1) Childhood: --

Jerena Lee was born on February 1783 in Cape May, New Jersey. She is the daughter of the ‘free’ Afro-American parents. They were very poor but very religious. When she was just seven years old, her parents had to send her as a live-in maid to Sharp family. She could not see her parents till the age of fourteen. She attended the sermon of Richard Allen, co-founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and pastor of its first church. She felt the call. She went for blessings to Reverend Allen and Mother Bethel. They did not sanction Lee’s call as it was against law of Methodist Church “did not call for women preachers.” A few years later Lee more intensely felt herself called to preach. She was trembling and filled with fear went to Reverend Allen. That time Allen, now Bishop Allen as
African Methodist Church independent denomination sanctioned and she was converted to Christianity. She was permitted to hold prayer meetings in her home and then to ordain a preacher.

2.8.1.2) Spiritual Awakening: --

After the conversion she had the feelings of unworthiness. She was rewarded by the sanctified process came a calling to preach a Gospel. She narrates the experience

“As if lightening had darted through me, I sprang to my feet and cried ‘The Lord had sanctified my soul for Christ’s sake’ (p.12).

With this Divine call she started preaching. She got married in 1811 to Joseph Lee who was a pastor of a small town, Snow Hill. She joined the Church there but not comfortable with the people and atmosphere. Her husband being pastor was always busy. She wanted to move to some other place and he was not ready to do that. He died after six years leaving her all alone to look after the children the one of two and half years old and the younger one were just of six months. After the death of her husband she was freer to travel. She was completely broken with grief and on the other hand cannot say happy but she recalls “I now began to think seriously of breaking up housekeeping and forsaking all to preach the everlasting Gospel.”

2.8.1.3) Successful Preacher: --

In a year she claimed to have traveled more than 2000 miles and preached more than 175 sermons. She asserted very strongly her right to preach as a God-given gift. She says, 

It should be remembered that nothing is impossible with God-- Did not Mary first preach the risen Savior? ---Then did not Mary, a woman, preach the gospel?” (P36)
In those years she not only preached in Philadelphia but also all around Mid-Atlantic and Northeast States. Ohio was the farthest west she traveled in her life. Sometimes she preached and traveled with Zilpha Elaw together. In one of the sermons she stressed the right of women to be ministers. She says,

“If a man may preach because the Savior died for him, why not the women? Seeing he died for her also – Is he not a whole Savior, instead of a half one? As those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach would seem to make it appear.” (P36)

She became the first woman authorized to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. So her autobiography is nothing but her call to preach the Gospel. She gives only the account of her spiritual journey and did not describe her family or personal life in detail. She published her autobiography a year before her death in 1849.

2.8.2) ZILPHA ELAW (1790 –1845)

2.8.2.1) Childhood: --

Zilpha Elaw was born in Philadelphia to free black parents. Her family being very religious attended daily prayers every evening service. Her mother died while delivering to her twenty-second child. All of Zilpha’s siblings, with the exception of three, died in infancy. (P53) She was just twelve years old. Her father sent her to Quaker’s family to work as a live-in servant. She found that family very reserved about religion. In her autobiography as she tells about her stay with Quaker’s family she referred herself “speckled bird” (P.53) She reported that she saw a vision so she joined Methodist Episcopal Church. She decided to become preacher and evangelist. At the age of eighteen she left the Quaker’s family and in 1810 she married to Joseph Elaw who was not Christian. He was employed in the textile
industry. He moved to Burlington from there to New Jersey with her. She gave birth to a daughter.

2.8.2.2) Spiritual Awakening: --

She attended her first a week-long revival camp in 1817. Among all people she fell into trance. She declared that God had sanctified her soul. She gave her first public speech and set herself as an evangelist. In her second meeting she received the words of encouragement from the women audience. Her husband, due to lack of faith in God and fear of public humiliations tried to persuade her not to preach. He tried to give up her ministry and teaching of God. She says,

After we had been married about a year, he resolved to use every means to induce me to renounce my religion and abolish my attendance at the meetinghouse. It was then that my trouble began, and grew so severe that I knew not what to do, but that God who is a present help in every time of need was with me still and enabled me to endure every trial with meekness. I kept my mouth as with a bridle, and sinned not with my tongue. (P.63)

Still she remained a very loyal and faithful wife to him. She declared very strongly and firmly that she was just carrying out the will of God. He was ill for some day and died in 1823. For her household chores and being a single parent extra duty of taking care of her daughter she hired a servant. In those days there was no school for black children. In her school days she had never experienced such kind of segregated atmosphere. Therefore she opened a school for black children at Burlington.
2.8.2.3) Career as a Preacher: --

But very soon she found that teaching and preaching at a time was getting heavier for her. So she closed that school for the call of God. She set her itinerary in Philadelphia. She kept her daughter with her relatives and traveled to States throughout the northeast and mid-Atlantic region of the United States. In 1928 she decided to spread her message of her own race. So she traveled to the slaveholding States. She went to Maryland, Virginia. She visited some places of Baltimore and Annapolis, Alexandria and Washington D.C. In her journey she faced all sorts of experiences like arresting, kidnapping or even selling of her self into slavery. She even sailed to England to preach a word of God in 1840. She preached over 1000 sermons in and around central England. While doing this she was criticized severely and admonished strongly but the public and religious authorities also. They thought that she is encroaching ‘men’s area’ and believed that a woman should not preach the word of God and a woman of color were rarely noticed.

When she returned to Burlington where she preached alongside the famous black evangelist Jerena Lee whom I have described earlier in Western Pennsylvania. After recounting her great journey she decided to write about it. Unfortunately she died in 1845 and then her autobiography was published in 1846. ‘Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experiences, Ministerial Travels and labors of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw.’

Throughout the pages she talked very less about her family life and her daughter. Her conviction was preaching and she believed very strongly that she has been called to God and she should carry God’s will. On the title page of her autobiography she referred to the Paul’s words to the Corinthians-----“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency of God.”
2.8.3) JULIA A. J. FOOTE (1823–1900)

2.8.3.1) Childhood: --

Julia Foote was born in Schenectady, New York in 1823. Her parents were the former slaves. She was born into an African Methodist Church family. Her parents were devoted Christian so she adopted their faith at an early age. She published her autobiography 'A Brand Plucked From the Fire' in 1879. It is about the family background, her education, childhood conversion, marriage, young people against the disobedience and immoral behaviors, admonitions to parents, children on obeying their parents, social evils like racial discrimination and instructions for Sunday School teachers. It is just like written sermons.

As a child of enslaved mother she had seen that the master of her mother whipped her because she refused to respond to his sexual urge. This incident had a negative impact of the institution of slavery on her mind. At the age of five, while playing with the other children she found a bottle of alcohol. She drank all the content and fell over there. The other children in fear could not understand how to handle such situation. They called out for help of a passer-by and made her sober. While writing that incidence nearly after fifty years, she used that experience as the foundation for a temperance message and concluded with the warning,

"No drunkard shall inherit the Kingdom of heaven." (P.168)

There were no schools for colored children in those days. Only her father in the family had a very little knowledge. She did not know how to read and write. She asked her father to teach her what he knew. So he taught her the alphabets. Until the age of eight she did not even know how to pray.
Her mother told her if she wanted to go to Heaven, it is important to say Prayers. Once a white lady came to them to sew. She taught her Lord’s Prayers. “After learning the Lord’s Prayers Foote was overjoyed, she felt that it was at this moment that she was converted.” (P169)

At the age of ten her parents sent her to Prime family as a live-in maid. She got an opportunity to take education in country school outside the city. While working for the family, she was studying Bible religiously and faithfully. Her parents moved to Albany where they joined African Methodist Church. There they could attend the church regularly. She came back to stay with her parents. At home being elder in the family she had to look after the four siblings. She became rebellious and as per her age she liked to go to party and theater. When her mother came to know about that she punished her.

In one of the parties she fell to the floor while dancing. They all laughed and told her to dance again. She started dancing and again for the second time also she fell to the floor. She said that it was wrong for her to dance. They all laughed and called her “Little Methodist fool” She heard the voice ‘Repent!’ ‘Repent!’ She sank into the nearby chair. They all dispersed. She said,

“Thus was I again plucked as a brand for burning? Had I persisted in dancing, I believe God would have smitten me dead on the spot” (p179)

Her mother encouraged her to attend another party. She says,

“Mother you know not what you do when you urge your daughter go to the parties to make her more cheerful. You may even be causing the
eternal destruction of that daughter. God help you mothers to do right.”

(p.179)

At the age of fifteen she joined the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. At the age of eighteen she married a sailor, George Foote. She went to Boston with him. Her husband strongly objected her preaching but she insisted that God had called her to preach and she is obliged to answer to a higher power. It put strain on her matrimonial relations. Her pastor Reverend Jeheiel C. Bemen advised her not to even think of her preaching. He even censored her for engaging in ministry in her home.

Still she continued her preaching in homes, revival camps and other places where her gifts of the Spirit were welcomed. She preached in New York, New England, and Mid-Atlantic states later in Canada, Ohio and settled in Cleveland where she published her autobiography, ‘A Brand Plucked From the Fire’. In 1894 she became the first woman deacon. In 1900, shortly before her death she became the second woman to be ordained a female elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

2.8.3.3) Career as a Preacher:

She vehemently argued over a woman’s right to preach and unfailingly pursued her right to work in ministry. She establishes a didactic, a call – and –response dialogue between herself as preacher and her reader as congregants. In 1879 she published her autobiography ‘A Brand Plucked From the Fire, An Autobiographical Sketch by Mrs. Julia Foote’. It consists of thirty chapters written in evangelical language. She maintained her relationship to her readers as preacher and the congregants. In the preface she says,

“My object has been to testify more extensively to the sufficiency of the blood of Jesus Christ to save from all sin. Many have not the means of purchasing
large and expensive works on this important Bible theme ---- My earnest
desire is that many ---- especially of my race--- may be led to
believe and enter into rest. Sweet Soul rest” (P163)

All these three women preached the Gospel from 1836 1879. They are the religious
figures of their time. They are the foremothers of African- American women’s
religious and literary tradition. Their family background, education and marriage
are connected to their salvation experiences. They described all the minute details of
their religious life that is the presence of god in their life. They are chosen by God
but alienated from the society due to their race. Their autobiographies are nothing
but the written sermons to assert their right to preach the Gospel in a western
society from which they were excluded.

They were extremely spiritual, humble and obedient to God. They fought to preach
and exchange God’s word with the people of 19th century. They sometimes even
neglected their family, went against the wish of their husbands in order to go out to
teach and preach God’s word. For them, their religion, Christianity was a means to
educate and instruct people not of their community only but also the Whites and
British also. These women traveled all over America and even England. The
experiences and their lives give us an idea and help us to understand the role of
religion in their community. It gives us the right approach and insight of 19th
century African- American women’s lives.
2.9. SECTION-IV
SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DALIT LITERATURE

2.9.1) Social Status of Women in India: --

Until very recent times, an orthodox Hindu woman’s life was restricted by many rules and regulations. Basically women were considered the property and for power equation. Even in modern autobiographies we get this kind of reflections so without focusing on this concept, as a whole the study will be incomplete. An ancient Indian woman got much freedom. The women were well-educated and respected members of the society. The history of women’s lives starts from the Vedic period. If we trace the position of women in the pre-independence and post-independence India, we come to the fact that in the pre-independent India, it was the freedom struggle brought the men and women together in spite of patriarchal society. They came together with the same motive. In the post-independent India, the access to education made drastic change in the attitude of society.

In Vedic period, the woman performed main role in the household and was free to do whatever she liked. She could do freely and frankly what she had to do. She had her own identity and personality. She could read and write, she could sing, dance and play Veena occasionally. A wife shared all her husband’s rights and was his companion and assistant in his each and every activity. Early marriage and purdah were not the practice and girls had the rights to choose their own husbands at the proper time and proper age. The spinster daughter could get a share of her father’s property. It was usual for the wife to take a dowry from her husband. The standard of morality was high. The widows were allowed to wear ornaments and keep the head unshaven. The Vedic woman shared the social and religious duties of her
husband. This emancipation and freedom for women continued even after the Vedic period. It was indeed the ‘Golden’ period for an ancient Indian woman.

Manu, who formed the basis of Hindu laws, changed the whole social position of woman and reduced her social status to mere chattel, i.e. movable possession. She was confined to the house and her main duties were to look after the house and children. In fact he used to say ‘where women are honored, there the gods are pleased’, but she is not fit for independence. According to him she has no right to divorce her husband, she has no property or inheritance right. She can marry only within her own caste so the choice of partner is limited, moreover her horoscope must match that of the intending bridegroom. The family of the girl has to offer an enormous dowry. After her husband’s death she should commit ‘Sati’. She should never remarry. The widow is considered to be a curse and must not be seen in public. She cannot wear jewelry or colorful clothes. Child and infant marriage is encouraged. Over all the status of woman was the worst.

The woman was highly discriminated and degraded due to the laws of Manu and his Manu-smriti. There was a strong hold of religion and the opposition of high caste people. Women were completely subjugated and suppressed at the hands of laws. The Verna, an ancient caste system had affected the social and political fabric of contemporary Indian society. The three basic characteristics of caste institution were exclusion (rules governing marriage and physical/social contact based on the notion of purity and pollution), hierarchy (order and rank according to status) and inter-dependence (division of labor). Hegemony and dominance of the upper caste is maintained and perpetuated at the cost of exclusion and oppression of the lower caste groups.

Although the women population is 50% of the total population, women the most repressed, dominated and down-trodden section of the society. Man and woman are the two important component of the society, but woman has always remained injured, insulted and neglected in the society. She is suffered due to sex
determination, economic independence, traditional customs, ignorance, superstitions, inferiority complex and prejudices. In Indian male-dominated society she has always been given subordinate status where her duties and rights have decided by her male –counterpart.

The patriarchal system in India from the centuries has developed the attitude and behavioral pattern in male that had made conventions of treating women as property. It is said that Indian women should be worshipped as goddess but actually they are ill –treated, humiliated and insulted by the hands of religious laws and social norms. In the post –independence period the various national movements for freedom struggle, political upsurge, desire of education, economic strain and many other social changes made woman mature and aware of her strength. It created a phase of protest against the standard values of the conventional society that caused the oppression of woman. To some extent she got the freedom that made her aware of her ‘self’ and made her understand individuality so that she can rebel against the social injustice in every walk of life.

2.9.2) Who are Dalits?

In order to understand the word ‘Dalit’ we must understand the Verna – caste system. Dalit means who are suppressed or squeezed in the grinder of casteism. Dalits literally means oppressed, whom Gandhiji, and ‘ati-shudras’ by Mahatma Phule traditionally and legally called ‘untouchables’ or constitutionally ‘schedule caste’ and euphemistically’harijan’. ‘Dalit’ this word symbolizes not the caste but an identity of the people of their lowest social position.

In 1930 British used this word in Hindi and Marathi translation of ‘Depressed Classes’. If we see Dr. Ambedkar’s Marathi speeches, he has used this particular word. In the same year a newspaper ‘Dalit Bandhu’ (Friends of Dalits) published in Pune. The newspaper was the vehicle to deal with the problems of Scheduled caste, Scheduled Tribe, Neo Buddhist, landless poor peasants, women Untouchables and
all those exploited traditionally. It is the word for self-assertion and gives sense of pride to protest for their own position to achieve a sense of cultural identities.

Dalits were subjected to innumerable agonies so as to prevent them from rising above the conditions fixed for them by Hindu law. It is a legal system of pains and penalties. Dr. Ambedkar (1891-1956) the emancipator of the ‘untouchable’ and crusader for social justice, in the first half of the 20th century emerged on the Indian socio-political scene. In his ‘Ostracized Bharat’ (Bahishkrut Bharat), he has defined ‘Dalithood’-it is a kind of life condition that characterizes the exploitation, oppression and marginalization of Dalit people by the social, economical, cultural and political domination of the upper castes Brahmincal ideology.’ So Dalits are those who are excluded socially, subordinated politically exploited economically and oppressed physically by dominant society and deliberately kept out of the boundaries of human society laid down by upper caste. They are literally ‘ground’ or ‘broken’

The term ‘Dalit’ is a broad term to define. It implies those who have been broken or oppressed in the social hierarchy in a deliberate way. Dalit’ by rejecting the sub-human status imposed on them by the Hindu social order. As the time passed, this term has acquired a new level of pride. It is a dignified term nowadays. In 2001 Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane, a professor of Marathi at Marathwada University and Founder Editor of Asmitadarsh (Mirror Of Identity) wrote in a letter to Ellinor Zelliot -To me, dalit is not the caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economical traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, holy books, teaching separatism, fate and heaven because they have made him slave. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. (Zelliot, 2001) The term dalit provides a sense of pride and self-assertion. It is used proudly. It has become the symbol of their identity.

The word ‘Dalit’ was defined and explained by many great upper caste and dalit writers, thinkers, social scientists very aptly in a different ways and included the
economical and psychological exploitation of Dalits. Dr. Bhalchandra Phadke thinks that we cannot define the word ‘Dalit’ in the general sense without understanding the social system of with casteism in India because there is an important concept or idea behind this word. Through the various definitions defined by Dr. M.N. Wankhede, Dr. Sada Karhade, Dr. Prabhakar Mande, Prof. Kulkarni G.M., Waman Ingale, Dr.Yashwant Manohar, Prof Narahar Kurundkar, Mr. Baburao Bagul, Dr. Yogendra Meshram Mr. Namdeo Dhasal Mr. Raja Dhale and many others have focused mainly on their miserable plight due to their economical, Social and Cultural exploitation and subjugation. Indian Constitution has passed an act in 1950, the Article 17, “Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden.” Still ‘Dalithood’ is observed everywhere in more or less magnitude.

2.9.3) Social Status of Dalit Woman--

Untouchability is not unique in India. Europe in a few centuries ago practiced it. Even Japanese untouchable burukumin are in large number. But it took worst form in India only. In Hindu caste system each caste has assigned duties, responsibilities and privileges. Shudras are on the lowest wrung of the social hierarchy performed the manual task and physical labor. Over the centuries religious and moral laws govern the society. Only the upper caste people have the right to study and recite Vedas.

According to Manusmriti ‘if the shudras intentionally listens for committing to memory the Vedas, then his ears should be filled with molten lead or lac, if he utters the Vedas, then his tongue should be cut off, if he has mastered Veda, his body should be cut into pieces. Many Hindu social reformists tried to change the social structure. 10th century Hindu leader of religion, Ramanujan from South India condemned untouchability and adopted many untouchables as his disciples. In 11th century Veeru Bramhendra Swami from Andhra Predesh, Mysore State Minister Sri Basaveswara, A.P. minister Brahma Naidu in 14th century, In 18th century
Mahatma Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890), Justice Ranade (1842-1901) in Maharashtra. Narayanguru (1856-1928) in Kerala. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) who was born into the third caste that is Vaishy supported the caste system, but wanted to eradicate untouchability to save Hinduism.

Justice M.G. Ranade was orthodox in his personal life also. When Shahu Maharaja wanted to appoint other caste people on some important post in his administrative staff, he had typical traditional views that upper caste people are better suited for administration as well as for other posts. (Latthe, Vol.1, p.325) Raja Ram Mohan Roy was against the education for the down-trodden. He worked for upper caste people. Lokhitwadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh belonged to the very orthodox family. He used to worship idols for hours at his home. Although he advocated the Western education, he refused his son to enter the house without undergoing the rituals for purification because according to Hindu religion, crossing the sea was supposed to be a sin and he had a fear also that orthodox people may ostracized him. (Mudholkar, 1973,18) Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve made education available only for Brahmin widows. He did not admit non-Brahmin woman in his school. (Shinde 1958,103-5) Humanist reformers like Periyar (1879-1973) and Gora (1902-1975) fought against the indignities of the caste-system and introduced inter-dining by trying to break one of the Hindu’s biggest taboos. Hence castism and male-dominance is responsible for the denial and oppression of women. Loosing their freedom and imposing slavery this was mainly due to the restrictions enforced on them by the inhuman religious norms and social structure.

Dalit woman is dalit among Dalits. She experienced triple exploitation; caste i.e. being dalit, gender i.e. being woman and patriarchy. Her social plight made miserable due to social fabric where she faced grinding poverty (extreme exploitation at the workplace) caste as specific atrocities (ban on Water access and gang rape by upper caste men) and domestic violence.
Dalit woman is the first victim of caste conflict. Degrading status in the society and inhuman treatment by upper class people Dalit men also suffered a lot. Along with Dalit men Dalit women were also doing all the filthy tasks of upper class society. In male-dominated society she was always treated as their subordinate. She was the victim of social injustice. As a woman she suffered due to starvation and lack of money. Her poverty-stricken life made her to work hard on the fields and farms. There she made a victim of economical injustice and oppression. The landlord or owner of the farm used to exploit her sexually and economically. She always became the victim of triple exploitation. In fact she had more freedom than the Upper caste women as she performed the role of caretaker of the family. Yet she suffers from more harassment, oppression and exploitation than the upper caste women. Dalit women could not dress in the manner of other Hindu women nor could they wear jewellery and were also exploited sexually by upper caste men and as domestic labor by women of upper caste. It was the social unwritten custom that the bride should satisfy sexual urge of the master or landlord then only she was allowed go to the husband. Her hard work still was inadequate to fulfill the basic needs of the family. They were denied a few basic amenities and with limited access to convenience and benefits which are their basic rights.

Although women of all caste groups experienced this ‘dalitness’, it was women of the lowest caste and outcaste groups who experienced the brunt of patriarchal repression both in the hands of the upper caste and in the hands of men. Millions of dalit women live in an atmosphere of constant violence in their homes in the hands of their drunken husbands yet they worked hard to keep the family away from hunger. All were very hardworking, worked like a beast on fields and farms. She has been explored in the specification in India. Dalit women constitute a lower segment in Indian society and suffer from dual disadvantages; a) of being Dalit, i.e. from socio-economic and cultural marginalization and b) being woman i.e. from gender-based inequalities and subordination. They have to struggle harder to secure basic necessities of life, viz. food, fuel and water. (Jogdand, 1995.)
Dalit woman is a separate category and they have typical problems as compared to other women in our society. Violation of Dalit women is due to eccentric inhuman rules made by the upper caste people, the life of indignities and uncertainty. For centuries they have been kept powerless accepted submissively patriarchal economic, political, social and cultural degradation. Mrs. Kumud Pawade thinks

"To be a Dalit woman is a great calamity in Indian society."(145 –6)

In the patriarchal society women are always treated as a marginalized creature, never considered as autonomous self but just as incidental. Access to education and paid employment were rejected by mainstream. Socially marginalized women had to work hard not only for their survival but also for the family, especially children, old or elderly people who are completely dependant on them.

Dr. Ambedkar gave completely new outlook to women by giving them confidence, making them self-independent. With his own example, he showed that education is the way towards success. We have no dignified place in the society so we have been denied the basic human rights as respected human beings. So without struggle, revolt against the established society we will not get the fundamental rights that allow us to live the life of respected members of the society.

2.9.4) Dr. Ambedkar's Influence on Dalits –

The life of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was full of struggle of the journey from inhuman untouchability to the architect of the constitution of India. This metamorphosis brought the change in his life of outcaste to one of the highest positions in the country. This change awakened the Dalit society, which was in ‘hibernation’ for thousands of years. He led the society by his own example. He showed the society that it is possible to overcome the obstacles with Lord Buddha’s enlightenment and legacy of Mahatma Phule and Shahu Maharaja. Dr. Ambedkar was a man of choice in every respect. Instead of leading a luxurious life after
obtaining university degrees, he chose to face a storm by going against the caste – ridden Indian society. He decided to ameliorate the ills of his fellow – brothers. His choice of the subjects was also noteworthy. He had selected such subjects for study, which could give him a detailed knowledge of sociology of human society, and at the same time he had chosen such thinkers and philosophers whose philosophy could give answers to the problems, which had made him restless and depressed. He was wounded by the bitter and humiliating experiences of untouchability in India; therefore he was always in communion with the great thinkers and philosophers of the world. Prof. John Dewey’s philosophy of common man gave him consolation and inspiration also. (Khabade, 1989,44)

He received his highest degree of D.Sc. from London University in 1923 for his thesis ‘The Problem Of Rupee :It’s Origin and it’s Solution’ His other books e.g. ‘Annihilation of Caste’, ‘Who Were Shudras?’ ‘Thoughts On Pakistan,’ ‘Thoughts on Linguistic Status,’ ‘Buddha And His Dhamma,’ ‘What Congress And Gandhiji Did for Untouchables?’ His writings and thoughts made dalits to think over the dehumanizing, miserable plight in the society. This is the source in true sense of ‘Dalit Literature’

He had rare qualities of excellent intelligence; spotless character and dedication towards society due to which he was respected not only in his community but also all over the world .He researched in different fields as social, political and economical which added lot of knowledge to human society. In 1915,he had written his thesis for his M. A. degree on ‘Prachin Bharatatil Vyapar’ in 1916,he received his Ph. D. degree for the thesis ‘National Dividend of India –A Historical and Analytical Study’. He published the same thesis entitled as ‘The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India’ in the same year he had written ‘Bharatatil Jati, Yantrana, Tyanchi Utpatti Aani Vaadh’. In 1917 after leaving Baroda he wrote ‘Bharatatil Lahan Shetiamini Aani Tyavaril Upay.'
In 1919 he was invited as a delegate of the depressed classes in the ‘Evidence before the Southborough Committee on Franchise’ had argued eloquently for the uniform franchise for securing access for the depressed classes to the public sphere – to public wells, roads, schools, temples and cremation grounds and for special provision for their adequate representation of their interests and opinions. In June 19,1921 he received his M. Sc. degree of London University for his thesis ‘Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance of British India’

He thought that we must strive to uplift our social status as a dignified human beings so on 20th July 1924 he founded ‘Bahiskrut Hitkarini Sabha (Group for the Well being of the Excluded) it’s aims and objectives were 1) Spreading of education through education institution, hostels and other educational means.2) The social and cultural development is possible through libraries, social institutions and board of studies.3) Economical development through agricultural and industrial business.4) Strive to fulfill the demands and expectations of untouchables. The motto of this organization is ‘Educate Organize And Agitate’

He challenged the national politic by arguing for human rights and honour. He saw the caste system as a serious obstacle in the path of democracy. He suffered critically in national politics. He was Dalit, the largest untouchable caste in Maharashtra. According to Zelliot Ellinor

“His actions were moulded not only by his personal background and achievements and the Maharashtrian thinking of his day but also by his status as untouchables.”(1998, 100)

In the post-independence period, he was a member of Constitutional Committee. His idea Of separate Electorate and justice was nothing but the struggle for the liberation of Dalits .It was the question of identity and existence of Dalits and the focus on the oppressive character of the Hindu community based on the principles of the caste –system. He practiced the principle of liberty, equality through separate

Dr. Ambedkar was a dominating figure and active organizer of the Dalits during the anti-colonial struggle against the British in India. He advocated vehemently the concept of classless society. In real sense the society that based on caste, society that kills the respect and dignity of individuals, where castism dominates, put the Dalits in an uneasy position within the discourse of humanity, is not the real society. He attacked on castism in each and every speech and writing. In one of his speeches he has said metaphorically that Hindu society is just like a big tower and caste is just like a floor, but remember that there is no stair or ladder so there is no way to go from one floor to another, once the person takes birth in that floor, on the same floor he has to die even if a capable /deserving person of the lower caste or a not – deserving person of upper is not allowed to change the floor. (3.4.1927)

In his undelivered speeches entitled Annihilation of Caste (1936) he said, “Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is harmful both to spiritual and national growth.”

2.9.5) Role of Newspaper: --

Good thoughts are always more powerful and intensive by any weapons. Weapon attacks on body while thoughts by attacking can shape or mould thousands of minds at a time. A single thought can make revolution by bringing drastic change in the minds of people. Any movement is facilitated due to the practicality of thoughts. In order to transmit the thoughts into actions, a strong media is required. In our
country the periodicals and the newspapers have been proved to be the strong influence on the minds of the people.

Since 19th century the periodicals and newspapers are very effective means of changing the mindset of people. In 1832 Balshastri Jambhekar published the first newspaper ‘Darpan’ in Marathi. In 1908 after eight decades Mr. Shivram Janba Kamble started the first Dalit periodical ‘Somwanshia Mitra’. Mr. Kisan Fagoji Bansode had started ‘Hind Nagrik’ that gave self-respect and confidence to the community.

Dr. Ambedkar realized the importance and utility of Press, that is newspapers. He wanted to annihilate untouchability and organize and awaken untouchables so he started newspaper ‘Mooknayak’ (Leader of the Dumb) on 31st Jan 1920, the first leading newspaper of those who were kept out of the main stream deliberately since centuries. In the Editorial Dr. Ambedkar had written that the atrocities made on the society and the solutions to their problems; their future progress and various ways to that progress could be found through these periodicals. ‘Bahishkru Bharat’ the fortnightly journal on 3rd April 1927, a weekly named ‘Janata’ (19th Oct. 1931) of which title was changed, as ‘Prabuddh Bharat’ in 1956. He wanted the entire world to take cognizance of him and his neglected community. With his revolutionary and brilliant writings he had destroyed the tower of Man-made castism.

These periodicals and newspapers were powerful means for conducting the movements. He faced the financial crisis for carrying out this activity. Initially Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja donated 25,000 for this social cause. In that critical period ‘Mooknayak’ took up the responsibility of guiding the society and awakening against the social injustice. In order to negotiate the problems this periodical has contributed a lot. Satyagraha of Mahad, Entry into Kalaram Temple, Burning of Manusmriti, he expressed his opinions and revolutionary thoughts on these historic movements very emphatically. He uprooted the tentacles of inhuman traditions and
 customs of the society. These thoughts helped to regain the humanity and dignity of enslaved, oppressed and neglected people.

2.9.6) Importance of Education; --

There was Gurukul system of education in India. In the Buddhist Era the education system took different form and nature. According to Lord Buddha ‘Knowledge’ means ‘Light’ so he advocated education for all human beings. He founded universities – Nalanda and Takshsheela where the students from all over the world and of different caste and creed were admitted. Women were welcomed wholeheartedly.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule nurtured it again. He was convinced that ignorance and illiteracy are the root cause for the destruction of human beings. He opened the first untouchable girl’s school in 1848 in Budhwar peth, Pune and in 1853 the school for boys. Not only in Maharashtra but also all over India such school was not available. Idea of such school was not even thought. This was the revolutionary step taken by Phule couple in the orthodox society. Rajshree Shahu Maharaja kept this legacy of Mahatma Phule alive in future. He started compulsory free education provided hostel facilities with 50% reservations and opportunity of higher education.

Imparting education among the depressed classes, the Christian Missionaries helped to uplift them, directly or indirectly. They highlighted the evils of untouchability and succeeded in converting a large numbers of untouchables to Christians. So the dirty, drunken got new dignity and became worthy members of society. They gave inspiration and practical help. Missionaries criticized the institution of untouchability, which “resulted in a reinterpretation of Hinduism at both the ideological and institutional levels – producing a changed attitude among Hindu elite towards caste and untouchability.” (Srinivas M.N, 1966, 49 – 50)
In 1865, under pressure of Christian opinion, Government had to lay down the principle that the Government schools would be open to all classes. Due to acute poverty of the depressed classes, the government in most provinces increased grant-in-aid for the education of a pupil from the depressed class, which was more than the grant towards the education of pupil from the rest of the society. (Philips G.E. 1998, 26)

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar carried out the same legacy further. His idea of education was self-respect, self-reliance and social transformation. In order to remove all the barriers of caste and religion and to achieve social democracy, education is the only noble path. He wanted educated man to be action oriented, and fighter of social injustice that was one of the greatest evils. He wanted Buddhist monk also to be a good teacher. He had full faith and trust on the teachers. He gave a revolutionary mantra — Educate, organize and agitate.

The dalit community at that time was completely drowned in illiteracy, ignorance and superstition. He knew that self-esteem and self-awareness will help them to come out of this devilish position. So education is the best and effective weapon to eradicate all the evils of the society. He himself had very tough time while getting education. He used to get monthly scholarship of twenty-five rupees by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad, a liberal ruler of Baroda and books and cloths supplied by Prof. Muller in his college days. Even after completing his Law, he had not enough money to pay for his ‘Sanad’. Education will make these people powerful and dignified so along with media he founded many education institutions.

He founded People’s Education Society and on 1st of March 1951 the first college, Milind College at Aurangabad. He opened various schools and colleges in Mumbai, Auragabad, and Mahad and all over Maharashtra. With education he wanted to fulfill not only the basic needs of Dalit community but also their moral, social and intellectual upliftment. He wanted to bring social change through education. He believed in social and dynamic transformation through higher education that leads
to sceptism, rationalistic attitude, rational and historical sensibility and scientific attitude.

For him education was extra-ordinarily important. Education is the only alternative for the transformations of human beings. Dalit will get perception of the various facets of life. It will broaden the horizons of their life that will help them to be successful in an industrial and technical field in the future. He gave maximum importance to women education because he believed that progress of society is closely related to the progress of women.

2.9.7) Buddhism: --

Dr. Ambedkar revolutionized the anti-caste movement as he had decided to reform the Hindu civil society socially and constitutionally divided on the basis of caste. In 1905, he completed his matriculation. His teacher Mr. Keluskar arranged for his felicitation ceremony. As a token of his love and affection, he presented a book on the life of Lord Buddha. Dr. Babasaheb had a fascination for Buddhism from that time only. In 1935 on 13th Oct. at Yevla near Nasik he gave a conversion call that “I was born a Hindu and I have no choice about that but I will not die a Hindu.” He did not take this decision in a minute/day/month or year. He thought over that decision for long twenty years and on 14th October 1956 he adopted Buddhism along with millions of former untouchables in a public ceremony at Nagpur. Especially Mahars in Maharashtra became Buddhists and became politically powerful. Hinduism based on four-fold caste system denied them their own rights as human beings so far. It was an extraordinary, historic event in Indian history.

He appealed all the upper caste people to renounce Shastras and Puranas on which basis Dalits were oppressed, insulted and dehumanized then only he will remain Hindu. But the orthodox people neglected his appeal. Dr. Ambedkar’s intention was to spread Buddhism all over India, which was a social revolution. It was a struggle
for their equality as Buddhism condemns both caste system and the practice of untouchability.

To Babasaheb, then religion is a foundation of human life and society. This is because religion is a matter of universal morality, and without moral foundation society cannot survive as a human society. He then conceptualizes religion as a system of injunctions and prohibitions designed to promote a harmonious human life. Harmonious human life itself meant one on which there is equality and brotherhood among members and one which is rationalistic in rejecting superstitions, mysticism, irrationality, blind belief, and of course, God, who symbolized all these rejected elements.

K. Raghvendra p.66-67) Dr. Ambedkar gave the interpretation in his book Buddha and His Dhamma.

For him Hinduism is not a religion of humanity. He said, “It is superman’s heaven and the common man’s damnation. It is a misnomer to call it religion. Its philosophy is opposed to the very thing for which religion stands.”(Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar –Writings and Speeches, Vol.3, p.78)

So he found Buddhism as proper philosophy for a community of severely exploited people seeking their better place in the future. It pioneers liberty, equality and fraternity. The message of Lord Buddha is – YOU BE YOUR OWN LIGHT (Atta Deep Bhav). It is a religious philosophy in terms of social morality. His rationalistic interpretation of Buddhism is a Navayana Buddhism path to self-respect and upliftment of the human beings. He sought answers to all the problems of his community in Buddhism – an equalitarian and rationalistic religious philosophy.

Lord Buddha has great compassion for downtrodden people. He laid emphasis on non-violence in his teaching. Dr. Ambedkar was greatly impressed by two doctrines, that is 1) Eight-fold path [Ashtang-marg] i.e. proper attitude, balanced thinking,
balanced speech, proper action, earning livelihood by proper means, proper exercise, proper memory and proper samadhi were his doctrine. And 2) Panchasheel asteya, control over the bodily (worldly or materialistic), desires, Truthfulness and not taking intoxicants are the five rules. People of all caste, from all strata of society entered the Sangha in large number, as caste was no barrier. Lord Buddha established women’s sanghas too.

He had glorified humanity and preached that all human beings are equal. Dr. Ambedkar found the right path of living human life with dignity, which glorified the greatness of humanity. It was the right step against the caste system, which denies the human beings the very status of human being. This foundation of equality was logical and rational. The teaching of Lord Buddha was more based on social and cultural rather than religious and spiritual foundation. His teachings are centered on the human being. He taught how the human being should behave with other human being. He showed the way of life—the true meaning of life and how to lead a meaningful Life. Dr. Ambedkar wanted liberty, equality and universal brotherhood to be germinated in the society and dreamt of an ideal nation.

Convergence of untouchables, Pad-dalit Shudras to Buddhist religion has brought a drastic change in the community. A remarkable change had occurred in their outlook, way of life which is based on morality, wisdom and compassion. They have given up old customs, rites and rituals, visits to Hindu pilgrimage sites Children were given contemptuous names e.g. Dagdu, Dhondu, Kachru, Pandu, Damu, Tingu which indicated their low position and caste. Nowadays Buddhist women name their children after great women and men from Buddhist history e.g. Buddhbhushan, Millind, Gautamiputra, Siddharth, Rahul, Vishal, Pratik, Pradnya, Sheela, Karuna, Amrapali, Sujata, Sanghmitra, Gautami, Yashodhara etc. The women who were once meek, shy; after the conversion, same women became self-reliant as Buddhism is a path to self-respect and upliftment as Ellinor Zelliot says. Buddhist women improved the quality of Dalit life.
In 1962 Dr. Ambedkar established Bharatiya Buddha Mahasabha so that each and everyone in the society will get deep knowledge and education of Religion. This well-disciplined institute is still working efficiently at rural and urban level by arranging various Shramner camps for the Buddhist men, women and Buddhist monks.

The impact of conversion is strongly reflected in Dalit poetry novel, autobiographies and dramas. A dalit poet Harish Bansode says -

“We have begun a new life
We have found our own temples
Regained our lost faith
All are equal here.”

2.9.8) Dr. Ambedkar and Women’s Movements: --

Dr. Ambedkar was the greatest champion of women’s rights in the pre independence period followed Jyotiba Phule who is the founder of women’s liberation movement in Maharashtra. Dr. Babasaheb fought for Dalits’ rights but for all Indian caste oppressed people; including workers, farmers and women from all castes and creed.

Women, in those days, of all castes experienced the typical Dalitness in the family and the society as well though women of the lowest class and caste who experienced the inhuman status due to patriarchy and religion. In this situation Dr. Ambedkar considered women’s emancipation as main purpose of this reformation. He was the greatest champions of women’s rights in the per –independence period. As a Minister of Government in Independent India, he introduced the Hindu Code Bill to liberate not only untouchable women but the upper caste women also, because upper caste women were treated as slaves as directed by Manu. Ambedkar in his paper ‘Caste in India, their Mechanism, Genesis and Development’ has mentioned that ‘caste’ as an enclosed class, existed before Manu. In his Mahad Satyagraha he
made bonfire of 'Manusmriti'. His comment on this event — "We intentionally made a bonfire because we view it as a symbol of injustice under which we have been crushed across centuries. It was a very cautious and drastic step, but was taken with a view to forcing the attention of caste Hindu. At intervals such drastic remedies are necessary. Because of his teachings we have been crushed ground down under acute poverty and so we made a dash, stated all, took our lives in our hands and performed the deeds. If we don’t knock at the door, none opens it.” He was the most progressive as regards to the issues of status of woman as a whole.

Hindu Code Bill granted woman the basic rights to justice, equality and security. It gave rights of inheritance and property ownership. It created a storm on political and religious levels. Even upper caste leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru; the first Prime Minister of Independent India could not support the ‘bill’ since other members opposed it very strongly. When he saw that as a Minister he is unable to support women’s rights, he resigned his position in protest. Many upper caste well educated women are ignorant about his great sacrifice just for this reason.

Dr. Ambedkar took extra efforts for women education. In one of the seminars he said that “If you want to educate your children, first educate women.” Kalicharan Nanda – Gawli from Gondia, started a school for the untouchables. In 1924 Jaibai Chaudhari started a girls’ school in the house against the wish and support of her husband. Fortunately she came in contact with a Christian nun. She worked so hard against all unfavorable conditions and she became the great educationist. Along with girls school she opened some girls’ hostels to fulfill their need of education. With access to education, they became aware of their own place in the society as decent human beings. The early movements of untouchables in Maharashtra led to increasing participation by women in conferences. In 1920 All India Women Conference was held at Nagpur where all women narrated their experiences of untouchability. Dr. Ambedkar was very keen about women’s participation so he organized several conferences.
By 1930 women became so bold that they started conducting their own meetings. In 1935 at Yevla near Nasik where he declared his revolutionary decision of acceptance of Buddhist religion, hundreds of women supported him enthusiastically. In 1936 they held conferences and meetings independently. They strongly demanded freedom and equal status as dignified human beings of the society. The women passed the resolution -

i) Free compulsory education for girls.

ii) Women’s representation in State legislative assemblies, local bodies etc.

iii) Training for self – protection of untouchable women such as Karate or wielding of sticks.

iv) Starting a women’s wing in the Samta Sainik Dal.

v) Prohibiting child – marriages

vi) To support the Independent Labor Party and Scheduled Caste Federation.

Many conferences were held in India at various places as in Kanpur (1944) Mumbai (1945) and in Kolkata (1946). It is very explicit that women were becoming socially and politically active. Many of them joined political agitation, sit - ins, courted arrest and underwent jail. All these activities were carried out in addition to family responsibilities generally assigned to women. Some women got severe beatings of the husbands or some got full support. They took help from their relatives’ family members or from neighbors. Some of them took their infants to the jail. Dalit society had already sanctioned divorce, widow marriages and even marriages. With political and social awakening and recognition of their position, many women wanted some improvements in marriage systems. They opposed child marriages. They discarded many Hindu rituals of marriages.

On 2nd May 1954 Dr. Ambedkar held the Vidarbha Literary Conference and addressed Bramhin Pundits, writers and representatives of literary circles. He said, “We are neglecting our lives, our duties and our culture. If we do a little retrospection, we will discover a horrible picture of how our life –values and culture are getting burnt up. Whatever the reasons may be, we will find that we are going
on a downward path of degradation. That is why, writers should immediately take notice and should make an effort to conserve the life – values and culture, give them luster and make them grow. I earnestly want to tell the writers to manifest in your literary forms, the noble value – systems and cultural values. Do not have a narrow limited horizon, Enlarge it. Do not keep your relations restricted within four walls. Let them expand. Do not restrict your pen only to your problems. Make your pen spread its glow to dispel the deep darkness from the villages. Do not forge that the world of exploited dalits, sufferers in our country is immense. Try to understand their sufferings, their problems and strive to bring about improvement in their lives through your literature. There lies the real humanity. (Guy Poitevin, 1996)

In 1970 the feminist movement was developed in India, but only mainstream, middle caste educated women were involved. Their experiences were universalized. Dalit women and their experiences were not taken into consideration. In 1980, dalit women actively participated in politics at local level as Sarpanch and members of Panchayats. They became aware of the urgency of asserting their identity and reclaiming their own space. In 1986 Dalit women in Mumbai organized the Dalit Sri Samvadini (Dalit Women’s Dialogue). In 1990 several independent and autonomous women’s organizations were established. The National Federation of Dalit Women, i.e. NFDW (1995), All India Dalit Women’s Forum (1996) was formed. Dalit Christian Women Organization was formed in 1997. NFDW took to defining dalit identity in terms of human rights and demanded that the Government of India acknowledge caste discrimination as a form of racism at the UN World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa in 2001.

Dr. Ambedkar not only headed Dalit Movement but also very actively sought for and supported Indian Freedom Movement. He brought the Dalits in national mainstream. He was taken as a leader of only Dalits and Downtrodden but in fact he was the National leader of all the communities. Therefore the Bharat-Ratna award posthumously in 1990 awarded him and Vishwabhusan awards in recognition of the noble service he rendered to the nation.
2.9.9) Nature of Dalit Literature:

Dr. Ambedkar’s speeches, writings and provoking thoughts made Dalit community aware of dehumanizing status in the society. With education they started thinking over their miserable plight as an insulted, injured and disrespected human being. This is the source of Dalit Literature in a true sense.

Literature and life are very closely related to each other. The origin of any literature is deeply rooted in the realities of life and hence it plays a very important in making of life stories. It helps in building up the good cultured society. The simple reason is that the creator of literature i.e. the writer or poet is very much a part and parcel of the society. So the unique situations transformations or the stagnation existing at that particular time, perhaps to the greater extent affects him. Owing to his comparatively greater sensitivity and power of perception, the glimpses of the static or dynamic aspects of life are reflected in his work of art. We can see his impulses of his thinking are expressed in his writing as per his capacity. Sometimes some problems are created in the society when they are aggravated and become intolerable then it culminates into social movement.

The movements that are born due to day-to-day problems of life are very closely related to the literature. As man is not an island, he cannot stay alone. He is a social animal, part and parcel of the society, it is his social commitment, social debt that he wants to pay back. This kind of sensitivity makes him write. We cannot separate literature from society as Dr. Yashwant Manohar thinks that to deny the relationship of literature and society means to deny the relationship between the children and parents. (1992, 27)

The literature from 19th century was the amalgamation and reflection of sorrow and happiness of middle class people where Dalit people were completely excluded. We never find dalit people or the reflection of their problems. The life, culture and
language were totally different than the higher-class people. Everything was beyond
their comprehension as dalit society was never the part of the mainstream society.

In 1950 the women’s liberation movement was germinated. It took nearly two
decades for Indian Women’s Movement to gather momentum in 1970s. Although it
was the modern western concept, it has different forms as Liberal, Radical,
Environmental, Marxist, and Socialistic etc. Their goals were women’s rights,
women’s liberation and autonomy. Women of different countries with different
cultures came together with the same motives by rejecting the lower status and to
prove the importance and indispensability of the woman. The Indian Feminist
movement aroused the sense of identity and individuality in their minds. It has
created new awakening and changed the attitude of women towards women. The
Indian women became economically independent but it could not change the
dominating attitude of men towards women. In the same year, dalit Movement as a
New Social Movement expressed through radical literature and action. But even this
upsurge did not give vent to the mute voices of Dalit woman in rural or urban India
They were not figured anywhere.

If we trace the background of Dalit literature, we find that in the pre-independence
period, on 15th February 1885 an eleven years old girl-student of Mrs. Savitribai
Phule, Mukta Salve had written an essay entitled ‘Dharma’ about the family; social
life of untouchables that is nothing but the pains, sufferings and agonies. She says
that we are classless people and due to utter poverty our life is nothing but pains
and sufferings. Manu’s philosophy rejects the very existence of ours as human
beings. She appealed to revolt and protest against the established society, which
rejects the basic human rights, and acquire equal status and human dignity in the
society. On 2nd August 1936, Ms. More J.S., inspired by the Buddhist philosophy and
Ambedkarian thoughts, she wrote a short story entitled ‘Dharmanterpremi’ in the
newsletter ‘Nirbhid.’ In the same month 23rd August in the same issue Ms. Anu
Indurkar had written a poem ‘Dharmantar Kaa Karave?’ But after sixties i.e. after
a period of century or more Dalit women have awakened and are giving literary
expression to their deep feelings. The writing of Dalit women made remarkable development in the field of Marathi literature.

2.9.10) Marathi women autobiography: --

An autobiography as genre is not a new form in Marathi literature. But only people from upper caste of name and fame from different fields have written their autobiographies and enriched literary field. There was no tradition as such for the writings of Dalit literature. These women Mrs. Shantabai Kamble, Mrs. Babytai Kamble and Shantabai Dani are the very first members of their family neglected socially and religiously who felt like writing. It is the powerful impact of Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts and teaching and facilities of education gave them confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem to communicate the stark realities of life i.e. what they have seen? What have they experienced? How have they suffered? It is so factual that they do not need any imaginative power to put liveliness in their writing. They have just written their own experiences as and how they come to them. It is a powerful force of their overwhelming thoughts and feelings that they did not care for the artificial, so called norms or standard form of writing. Their forms, pattern, and language even the way of expression was totally different than the established writer. This literature differs with its unique sensibility and experiences that has expanded the horizon of literature and hence it is remarkable in the literary history.

2.9.11) Dalit women writers: --

Dalit literature is one of the most significant trends since the sixties. In India dalit women's Autobiographies are confined to Marathi literature mainly. With Dr. Ambedkar's call to downtrodden to take up their fight with the caste-ridden society, with an access to education, the Dalit Literature flourished in Maharashtra. In the sixties, the flow of Dalit literary writings increased in the form of short stories,
novels, autobiographies and dramas. Almost every year the conferences were held. In the 1970s, individual volume of poetry began to publish by the Maharashtra Buddhist Literature Committee, Asmitadarsh Press or the Marxist Magova Press.

Dalit literature has changed the face of Marathi literature and inspired similar literary creativity in Gujarat, Karnataka and other states of India. In Maharashtra, there has been a steady stream of pioneering autobiographies from Mahar, Mang; Neo-Buddhist, Chambhars, De-notified tribes and other Dalits. Because of the legacy of Phule- Ambedkarian movement it was natural that it paves way to rebellious expression first manifested in Maharashtra.

In the sixties Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav, Sankarrao Kharat were already writing. In its formal form came out of another progressive movement called Little Magazine that was a kind of rebellious youth against the establishment. In the later half of the sixties, first lot of the Dalit degree holders had started coming out of the universities in significant numbers.

The newly educated Dalit youth found inspiration in the movement of Black in the distant land of North America, their black literature and Black Panthers became the role models for them. It was therefore natural that this protest gained its first expression in the form of new literature called Dalit literature, the protest, Dalit consciousness and its rebellious expression found its manifestation in the form of poetry. This is the highest form of human expression and the immediate way to model and articulate the Dalit consciousness. Initially Dalit sensibility expressed through poetry, full of agonies, anguish, anger, pain and protest; conversed through the vivid picture of dalit locale, dialect, customs and history of injustice. The notable example is ‘Golpeetha’ a collection of poems by Namdeo Dhasal’s Golpeetha. The name of the red-light area in Mumbai, which is a reflection of the tough life of Dalits, the world that is totally strange, unfamiliar to the established literary circle, and people. The Dalits are treated worse than animals. Arjun Dangle gives a
harrowing picture of their wretchedness in a poem entitled 'The Cantonment Has Begun to Shake' 

"We fought with crows,  
Never ever giving them the snot from our noses.  
As we dragged out the Upper lane's dead cattle,  
Skinned it neatly  
And shared that meat among ourselves,  
They used to love us then  
We warred with Jackals –dogs-vultures-kites  
Because we ate their share.

The poetess Heera Bansode lodges a complaint in the people's court hoping for justice against the oppression, injustice through her poem,

The complaint of mine  
Is against the orthodox culture  
Which has imprisoned in a sealed room,  
Which has given us the charity of life  
Completely Boycotted.  
Where the wind treat us as strangers,  
Where the monsoons give us only famines  
Where water play with us  
The most inhuman game of mirage.  
We are rejecting this  
Unclean and poisonous life  
And to escape from these cruel curses  
Will you give me  
A bright and auspicious moon?  
My countrymen, to your court  
I have brought a complaint.
Dalit literature is a new stream in the literary canon that exalts the image of humanity and evaluates the religion and social system which is based on man-made rules. It is expression not of revenge but striving for the humanity in a real sense. The most important function of literature is social commitment. This literature is nothing but a commitment of very basic and eternal human values. It accepts the principles of liberty; fraternity and equality with social justice, so it is the expression of the stark realities of life, a literature of newly awakened society.

Before these renowned writers that I have mentioned earlier, Dalit women had already started writing. The inner quest of identity, the cultural denunciation of the iniquitous Hindu dissensions and the social struggle to assert one’s human dignity took various forms according to the will, vision and capacity of each writer. The nature of these connotations varies and takes different shades depending upon the writer’s personality, changing socio-cultural contexts, motives and inspiration to write. These marginalized people tried to achieve their status and position of human beings In the fit of anger and protest, Dalits started writing so their literature is a literature of Protest and anger. Like volcano, this struggle sprung up through Dalit women’s Autobiographies. These agonies and sufferings for their identities are reflected through their writings. These are the agonies due to hunger, poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and Superstitions, social structure led by the upper caste people for their convenience. These agonies are of triple exploitations; caste, gender and patriarchy. Their writings are an attempt to assert and construct their identities. (Teltumbde, 27-29 May 2002)

Dalit literature is not merely aesthetic writing but it serves the purpose beyond that of social transition and revolt. These autobiographical writings are more of a social phenomenon, a form of social protest, and a socio-cultural action. It is a reflection of real brutality and ugliness of the society of which they are a part. It is the agonies
of hunger, poverty, illiteracy and superstition. This literature represents the agonies and searches for their identities. It is the literature of protest and social commitment; it is the saga of suffering and pains, helpless humiliation. The rage and roar of Dalit writings by their own experiences of the indignities and deprivation suffered by the traditionally downtrodden and the underprivileged classes of Hindu society. Their experiences in their writings are not complete but fragments of total reality. As 'one shade can not create rainbows, let hundred flowers bloom to bring the spring.' (Nirav Patel 1999.11)

Marathi Dalit Women Autobiographies enables us to accept the downtrodden, the Subaltern and the oppressed as perfect sensitive human beings and not just 'helpless victims'. Such life stories serve as inspiration for other members on the community. Shantabai Dani, Babytai Kamble and Mrs. Shantabai Kamble's texts proved that the access to education and Dr.Ambedkar's teaching have inspired the Dalit movement and ultimately the community. Dr.Bhalchandra Phadke says that those who have ostracized (Bahishkru) by Hindu religion and social customs, traditions, those people got new vision, power with the fight for emancipation of Dr. Ambedkar. Those people got the golden opportunity to express their valuable experiences. (P.29-30)

The Dalit women contributed a lot to Dalit literature. Venutai Bhatkar, Rangubai Shubhakar was famous poetess and singers of that time. Jaibai Chaudhari,Tulsibai Bansode, Muktabai Sarrgore, Kausalya Baisantri, Meenakshi Moon, Vimal Thorat, Sulekha Kumbhare, Meera Kishore, Kusum Meghwal, Rajani etc. were working as writers and poetesses.

The women writers Kumud Pawade, Jyoti Lanjewar, Urmila Pawar, Heera Bansode, Sugandha Shende, Surekha Bhagat, Asha Thorat, Aruna Lokhande, Susheela Moon, and Meena Gajbhiye are some of them from Maharashtra have provided useful insights on the problems of Dalit identity. Mrs. Kumud Pawade is by profession a lecturer in Sanskrit, a language that was considered the language of
God. The lower caste people were not allowed to learn or to hear. But Prof. Pawade teaches Sanskrit to higher caste students. Her several articles on culture, social education and women's problems have been published. Her autobiography 'Antasphot' (Inner Explosion) received worldwide publicity.

In the field of Drama also remarkable development has taken place. There are more than 40 Dalit theatre groups. Dalit Rangbhoomi spread from Pune to number of cities in the State and to Delhi. Many writers wrote their own plays, a few adopt plays from American Black theatre, and some revive the art of tamasha.

Numerous writers started expressing social evils through various poems, stories plays, autobiographies and other writings. The prose pieces gave facts and figures, the genre of drama, autobiographies and poetry awakened social consciousness by dramatizing the plight of the deprived classes and indicating the society for heaping indignities upon the oppressed. These women writers provided useful insights on the search of Dalit identity. Through their autobiographies these women speak not as an individual, but as members of the community. It gives society's attitude towards poverty, discrimination and power politics.

As a renowned writer Mr. Baburao Bagul had very aptly said that Dalit literature is not merely a literature written by Mahar or Buddhist people. Dalithood has universalized inspiration. Dalit literature has not only economical but social foundation. It is nothing but an expression of social awareness.

Yashwant Manoher feels that -

"It is song of the greatness of every human being of the society and it is nothing but the declaration of individual identity. They don't want sympathy but soldiers to fight against the social discrimination. They don't want mercy but the true, honest experience of sensitive hearts. (1992,130)"
It is a natural tendency to make the world beautiful. Here it is Herculean task to liberate the society from the bondage of slavery through the journey of agony to identity. If the elephant chained in his infancy, it will remain chained, in captivity if he does not understand his strength.

Without Dr. Ambedkar’s conscious efforts, the dalit community would not have realized the potentiality is the realization of their potential like an elephant. He was the saint in action because he not only preached but also practiced. He gave up his life by staying in the society for their liberation. He liberated these people through social movement. He was the proactive practical leader as he himself went to the people; he did not wait for them to come to him. He was an instrumental for this social transformation by giving them confidence to gain education. Baby Kamble admits that it is Babasaheb’s inspiration that she educated her children, opened shop for them so she can help her people to get them employment to achieve dignified life not for themselves but for the community at large. Their lives have been charged with Babasaheb’s teachings and wisdom. So it is necessary to study the writings of Daughters of Maharashtra. Dalit literature has acquired wider scope in recent times. It gives importance and priority to human values so that the whole world will transform for the betterment of all the people with respect to brotherhood and harmony.

2.10. SECTION – IV

SHANTABAI KAMBLE (1923)
MAZYA JALMACHI CHITTARKATHA (1985)
(THE PICTURESQUE STORY OF MY LIFE)

Which is the 1st Dalit Woman autobiographer? There are different views, opinions about this issue among the writers, and literatures. This autobiography is published on 20th June 1986 by the auspicious hands of Honourable Minister Sushi Kumar
Shinde at Mumbai Marathi Granthsangralaya. In his speech he had mentioned that this is the 1st autobiography written by Dalit woman. Before this publication it was published serially in 'Purva' magazine in March 1983 issue. So it is very clear that Mazya Jalmmachi Chitterkatha is the first Dalit woman autobiography.

2.10.1) Childhood: --

As we have seen Dalit women is the most oppressed, subjugated component among not only in the society but also even in the Dalit community. In such society Mrs. Shatabai Kamble is born on 1st of March 1923 at Karanjani, Dist. Sangli. Her maiden name was Najuka lovingly she was called Naja. Her autobiography starts with the incidence of her school admission. On one fine morning the teacher, Mr. Kamble came to see Sakharam, Najuka’s father. He was an illiterate laborer working on the fields of upper caste people. The teacher was trying to convince him to register his son, Shaker’s name in the school. The mother was reluctant to admit Shankar in the school because once the teacher punished him due to some mischief. She got so angry that she took his slate which was the only school material and said goodbye to the school. He started working as a Mason in the village. The teacher told the parents that the school is in the cobbler’s area so nobody will trouble them

"Have opened the school just for our community, so please send them to school" (P.9)

At last the teacher convinced Appa, Naja’s father to send his second son Dattu in the school. Appa being illiterate was unable to sign the admission form, so he put the thumb impression on the form. The teacher took two thumb impressions on two different forms. Illiterate but smart Appa asked why two thumb impressions for an admission of a single boy? Then teacher told him that he has filled Naja’s admission form also. The teachers were persuasive, proactive and instrumental.

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2.10.2) Formative Years: --

Her father did not like Naja going to school because in pre – independence period Education not only for girls in general and Dalit in particular was a remote possibility. Girls going to school were not allowed as people used to criticized school going girls. Only boys were going to school but not regularly, as there was no liking as such for school. (p.10) Mrs. Shantabai Kamble makes us aware of the stark reality of Dalit life. At last she stared going to school regularly along with other children of Mahar community. Jalinder, Sali, Hari, Rangi, Sudama, Dharma to whom Kamble teacher has only admitted. Till their 3rd standard they maintained the consistency and regularity then slowly other children lost their interest in going to school. Instead of going to school they used to play on the way or some children were kept deliberately by the parents at home to work on the fields or to look after the younger brothers and sisters or to take care of the pets like hens, cows or buffalos. For such reasons only her brother has left the school. He prefers grazing cattle to going to school (P.13)

She was studying in 3rd standard when Kamble teacher was transferred and the other teacher Mr. Patil came to look after her class. In the school Naja faced the instances of untouchability time to time. While checking her writing on the slate, the teacher used to tell them to keep their slates down at the distance so without touching their school material he could correct them. He made them to sit outside the class. This small innocent girl was wondering about the discrimination--

"The teacher is a human being, we are also human beings, then why his teacher does not allow us to touch him neither he himself touches us? (P.14)

The innocent and curious mind of a child is asking this questions to her father. This sort of discrimination is not acceptable by the small child also.
In this situation also her parents encouraged her to attend the school regularly and concentrate on learning. They were doing all mean, humble work of the upper class people of the village. They have to beg literally for their daily bread. It was highly difficult for them to send her to school. It was a strong impact of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s advice of education. So the parents for whom it was impossible to meet both the ends two times a day. Her parents know that she looks shabby in her torn clothes, as her clothes are nothing but rags. In response to the appeal to the parents to educate their children by Dr. Ambedkar, Naja’s parents decided to educate her. They used to sit down and dream about educating their daughter. Her mother once said,

“We should reduce the expenditure on eating, we will eat less but will furnish her educational needs and clothing.” (P.18)

This shows the awareness created among the people and positive response of Naja’s parents for educating Naja, in spite of all the difficulties as unfavorable social structure, low income; insufficient even to fulfill their basic needs like food.

When Shantabai (Najuka) passed 6th standard her mother told her the story of her own birth. Her mother had given birth to three girls in a row. Everyone was expecting for the fourth time she should give birth to a male child. But unfortunately for them that time also a girl child, Najuka was born. When this news spread, her father, shocked and disappointed, he shouted to his grandmother “Granny give that girl to me and spade. I will bury her immediately.” (P.39)

This type of social attitude is very shocking for the readers also.

In those days Mahars were suppose to beg literally for water and food in the village. It was the tradition due to the fact that they had no wells of their own nor even lands and even if they had some small piece, farming was not allowed to them. They had to serve the other upper communities. Moreover the upper caste people always
treated mahars like the animals. Social structure was such that when they go for asking for bread, i.e. Harakari, some laborious work was given to these people. It may take many days to finish that work then only they were given stale food. The stale food was not given in charity for nothing.

Mahud Budruk, Dist. Sangli is her birthplace. Since streams surrounded the village and water flows, the yield of groundnut crop was good. They had to go to clean the groundnuts. Even Naja used to go to for cleaning groundnuts. In return they used to get very small amount of as the compassion. That was only their dinner. Appa, her father had lost all his teeth could not eat the nuts so to satisfy his hunger; they had to grind it on the grindstone. That was all they ate for the dinner. (p.16) They could barely get enough food even after toiling for the whole day.

The house is nothing but a very weak muddy house. In Naja’s words “Our house used to leak in rainy seasons.”(P17) Her parents used to keep containers like brass plates and iron dishes to prevent the house getting filled with water. They used to stay awake the whole night in order to throw the water out when the containers were full with rainy water. The children used to sleep on a dry place but stayed awake and dozing often when the whole house started leaking. In that small house there were very limited things like the muddy fireplace, the storage basket of grains (kanagi). Whenever they were hungry her mother used to cook dried bread in a curry and gave them to eat. Her father was given the responsibility to look after the ‘Valu’, the Bull that was left for God by the Head of the village, that is Patil. In compassion he was allowed to collect or beg food from the village houses to look after his family. Her elder brother very rarely earned money by repairing the walls, they could buy grains, after grinding on the grinding stone, and the bhakaries were made. Sometime curry was prepared otherwise with onions they could eat after midnight and slept there only.

The social status of untouchable was very miserable. There are many instances of their degrading inhuman position. The daughter-in-law of Khabalya had died of
drowning in a well and an inspector had come in the village to investigate the case. Kisan Tatya (uncle) had told Appa to for his night duty (Jaglya) and then go to Chawadi to sleep. When the investigation was going on Gangaram had gone to sleep in the Chawadi. He quietly went to see the investigation. He was standing behind the tree and watching quietly. But the inspector spotted him and beat him ruthlessly whole night. Gangaram’s mother cried to see the wounds on his body and Gangaram was sitting shocked and dazed.

The other incidence one fine morning Ganpat Bajare, the upper caste person came to the common sitting place of Mahar under the tree and said,

“My buffalo was found dead this morning. It was healthy and ate the fodder I offered before going to sleep. I suspect a foul play by you Mahars and I will bring a doctor to check the cause of death. After postmortem if it is found that you have poisoned, I will not leave you people, I will take legal action.” Saka said to Ganpat “Why are you silent? Go and get the doctor. If it is found that the buffalo died of poisoning, we all Mahars are ready to go to jail.” (P18)

All the other Mahars supported the idea and brought the buffalo to ‘Dorphadi’, the place where the dead cattle were skinned, cut and distributed equally among them. The doctor came examined the dead buffalo by cutting open and checking the inside of stomach. According to the doctor’s report, it does not seem that the buffalo was poisoned. The doctor left and behind him Ganpat also left angrily. The Mahars were delighted to hear the remark of the doctor and their faces were lit up. This news spread like a wind and all the Mahars gathered and the meat was distributed equally among all the families. Any family member or person used to collect the share on behalf of the absent member. In this way the Dalit community showed the sense of teamwork and sharing attitude and concern for each other in the community living. All the families ate mutton to the full stomach. Dhondi told after dinner that night that they had actually poisoned the buffalo but the doctor could
not diagnose it. They all had a hearty laugh. As if this was a kind of revenge in their own way and it also provided them the cattle meat they relished and enjoyed which they could not afford to buy due to their insufficient earnings, due to lack of paid jobs.

In such unfavorable situation Naja and her parents did not loose the hope of going to school. Market day, only once in a week meant for shopping for all kinds of necessary things supposed to be very busy. Soon the Market day Naja could not complete her home-work given by Mahajan Teacher. Her mother had an eye over her studies so she told her to complete the sums by lighting the kerosene lamp. Then mother told her to have food. She slept soon after eating but could do only five sums out of ten. Next day in the school she was beaten along with other children for not doing full home-work. She was beaten by sharp cane five times on the right palm. While eating in the night with left hand, her mother asked the reason. She told lies that she fell down while playing hence her hand is paining. Her teacher had told her not to tell her mother because he feared that her mother might react angrily and like her brother she may remove Naja, a hard working girl from school.

She had only one dress that too was torn one. She had given a role in the cultural program during Ganapati Festival. Her father, Appa told her to use his dhoti (a white long cloth like sari used by men) She wore her father’s dhoti for eight days for going to school. In the school the other children used to tease her for wearing dhoti. Appa somehow managed to stitch her new clothes then she could perform in the cultural program. She played Lazim, acted in the drama and sang also. The people appreciated her dialogues. It was something new for the society that a girl student participating boldly in the program. Naja started gaining self-confidence and realizing her potential she possessed. She was as good as boys and it gave her sense of pride.

She is now in 7th standard, i.e. in those days it was Vernacular Final, the last but most important year of the school. She was the only girl-student in the class. Her
favorite Patil Teacher was transferred and new teacher, Kadam Teacher was appointed for her class. He saw that Naja is the only girl in the class. He called her and said

"Naja, this is the agricultural class of the final year of the school. You have to do the carpentry, smithy and rope making. You have to go to farms to observe the crops. Being a only girl in the class, you will not be able to work hard. So go to Pandharpur where there is a girl's school." (p.40)

Her father who was unable to feed her properly, how could he arrange for her school at a distance and strange place? Her father was helpless so she had to leave the school that made her father very sad and added to his agonies.

By the time due to malnutrition and negligence toward her health, Shantabai's mother became ill; she had severe stomach ache. Due to lack of money and superstitions her family members could not take her to the doctor but tried all the herbs, mixtures, powders and different incantation. They offered goat, cock, eggs and yellow rice as and when told by the people to many god and goddesses. Day by day her health was deteriorating and she was reduced to mere skeleton. Even in her illness she was worried about Naja and her education. She took her father's hand in her own hand and took a promise,

"To complete her education and get her marry with a teacher only." (p.45)

No any Mantras, incantations, herbs nor any offerings could cure her from stomach ache and she died of that disease only. Till her last breath she was worried about Naja and her school.

As she had already left the school, she started working on other upper caste people's field and farms. After summer vacation when the school reopened Patil
Teacher was again transferred to the same school. He inquired about Naja to the children in the class, as she was the only girl in the class. The children told Patil Teacher what had happened in his absence and why Naja left the school. Patil Teacher felt sorry for the same and he called Appa and then Naja to the school and told her father "She has learned so far so she does not know the work on farms and field, so sent her school." To Naja, who was reluctant to come to school, he said,

"I will give you separate bench to sit in the class. Study hard for this 7th standard. It is the last but very important year of the school. After this definitely you will get a job." (P.46)

After her mother's death, she has taken all the household responsibilities on her frail shoulders. She was very much worried about cooking and maintaining the house. Her brother solved the problem by telling that he will prepare bhakaries and when the school gets over, she will prepare curry. At last she was ready to rejoin the school.

For 7th standard, that is Vernacular Final, there was a Board examination. The examination center was at the District place. No means of transport was available. So they had to go by Bullock cart till Pandharpur and then by bus to Solapur. That examination was scheduled for four days. Somehow her father arranged for her four days food that she was going to take with her by taking the help from neighbors and relatives. She borrowed one extra sari from her neighbor to change in her four days stay. She enjoyed the bus journey because for the first time she was traveling by bus. At the Board exam, even the educational officer was surprised to see the only girl appearing form that center.

Since all the children for the first time had been to the town, they watched movie. Naja spent her money very carefully. She still had five rupees with her. She told the teacher "I have only one sari. While coming to Solapur, I borrowed the other one from my neighbour." So her teacher from the remaining money bought a sari for
three and half rupees and a blouse for eight annas, the first shopping she had. In her
holidays she did all the odd jobs. Even in her father’s absence she went for
‘Harakari’ also.

The seventh std. result was declared in the newspaper. Her Patil teacher very first
searched for her number in the newspaper and shouted happily “Naja has passed.”
The teacher was so exited that he called his wife out and told her also Naja’s result.
All were very happy. Everyone especially Naja missed her mother very much. Her
delighted father with tearful eyes said,

“My lovely daughter, I wish your mother was there, she would be so
happy to see your achievement, fulfilling her dream and to see her
daughter being the first one who have passed the Vernacular Final
examination in the entire Sangola. You are always lucky that two
brothers are born after you in this house.” (P.58)

In the mean time there were many marriage proposals came for Naja. Some of them
had lands with well – irrigated farms but all such proposals were turned down by
her father and brother in order to keep the promise given to her mother by Appa to
marry her to a school teacher only. A schoolteacher named Mr. Kamble who was
born and brought up in Sangli was in search of an educated girl for marriage. He
came up with a marriage proposal to Naja’s father. When he showed his willingness
to marry her, immediately her father and brother accepted it. She says,

“Nobody even bothered to ask or to take her consent.” (P.62)

Because in those days such marriage proposals were finalized by the elders of the
family.

When Mr. Kamble demanded for dowry, her father asked him,
"Are you not going to take her salary after marriage? She has passed Vernacular Final and very soon she will get a job in the school. In fact you should give 60 rupees along with sari and bangles." (p.62)

In this way her marriage was finalized. The wedding ceremony went on for four days. The delicious sweets like 'Puranpoli' and other items were distributed among the community. There is a very interesting detailed description of the whole ceremony.

After marriage the newly married couple went on pilgrimage to Pandherpur. There they happened to meet Mr. Kamble's maternal uncle and aunt. They invited the couple to their place. They were working as labors in the shop. In their house Shantabai saw their divorcee daughter, Dhondibai. After that visit the uncle and aunt met many times to Mr. Kamble. They inquired about his salary that was 12 rupees a month were quite enough to keep her daughter happy. Both were forcing him to marry their divorcee daughter. Mr. Kamble even they knew the fact told them that he was already married. His aunt says,

"Master, there is no harm in getting marry again. Why can’t you have two wives? I am ready to do anything for you."(p.69)

Mr. Kamble kept visiting his uncle and aunt. Shantabai suspiciously one day asked her husband whether he was going to marry his uncle's daughter. He answered affirmatively and said, "My aunt is ready to give me whatever I demand." Shantabai angrily said,

"I can not live with you. I want a divorce. I will go back to my father’s place." Kamble master said, "I don’t know what to do? But this whistle of carrot may sound or not but I promise you that I will never leave you. So don’t be afraid." (p.70)
This shows that in those days the remarriage was accepted. A divorcee daughter was a liability and an employed person even with a meager earning of 12 rupees (of course it was consider big amount at that time) could remarry and have two wives at the same time. This also shows the lack of dignity the wives received and they were considered as mere objects of pleasure in the family.

She was carrying having seventh months of her pregnancy. But within a year of her marriage she has to come back to her father’s place. On the very next day her husband got married with Dhodibai in the temple. He came quite often to see Naja and persuaded to come home to stay with him again. But she and her brother and Appa were so firm that they did not even entertain Kamble Master after that.

Before her marriage Patil Teacher has told her to apply for the post of a schoolteacher. In reply to that she was invited for the interview at Solapur. She went with her brother for the interview. Facing money shortage, they went there half of the distance on foot and half by bus. On the same day they came back. Her stomach was aching due to strain of the whole day’s travelling. Her feet were swollen due to the heaviness. She could not sleep for the whole night. Her father could not but wept over her miserable condition.

2.10.3) Struggle to achieve success: --

Soon she received the order from the school Board to join the school at Aklooj in a Medical leave of other teacher. There was no means of transport to go to Aklooj but a horse. She rode horse while her father walking along with her. The result of all this tedious journey is that she lost her first male child. (P.75 ) It was a great shock for the whole family. She was on maternity leave but with the loss of child it was very difficult for her to stay at home. Luckily she received her permanent order to join the school within seven days at Kurduwadi. She took some important things such as plate, glass, Tawa and bedding along with her to join the Girls’ school on 16th January 1942. She says,
"I was very happy in the company of the lady teachers and girl students." (P.77)

Her father was always with her whenever she went. With his strong moral support, she was ready to face any calamity.

In Kurduwadi people came to know that she does not stay with her husband, they were trying to trouble her time to time. It was very difficult for a woman to stay single or leave the husband. She was always looked suspiciously but she gave them back strongly. Although she has succeeded in achieving her identity in terms of completing her education and getting job, still she continue to suffer and live in agony of physical and mental torture.

In Kurduwadi she could read in the newspaper Dr. Babasaheb’s speeches given at Solapur. He used to advise to the people of the community,

‘Wake up, don’t do the mean jobs like collecting the fire woods for burning the deads, taking the dead animals out if the village, eating beef, sending errands instead of this educate your children and adopt good habits like cleanliness and neatness.’ (P.79)

In January 1943 for the first time she got a chance to see and listen to Babasaheb at Solapur. She went to Solapur along with other teachers by railway. There she found that the whole Solapur was ready to welcome their ‘Baba’ in clean cloth in clean city. All the ladies welcomed ‘Baba’ with Aarti (a plate with lighted lamp) While performing aarti she said,

“I wish you a very long life” Babasaheb replied, “Child, why are you asking for my long life? I have done my best to serve the Untouchables.” (p.80)
She describes Babasaheb, a tall, well-built, wide forehead, and big eyes with straight nose. She could barely reach up to his chest for the first and last time she saw him closely. She says,

"I never saw him again." (p.80) During Baba's speech the ladies were heard saying 'why should we worship the god of stone? See our living God' (p.80)

She felt that his speech should never come to an end.

Meanwhile her husband tried his best, every trick to bring her back but she did not pay heed. Dhondibai died and then only they continue with their relationship. Due to their transfer they could not stay together.

2.10.4) Successful Career: --

In 1948 she was transferred to Kadas where she experienced some instances of gender and casts bias. There she came to know that two lady teachers were beaten and driven out of that village.(p.92) She was called by Mr. Gaikwad, Sarpanch, head of the village. She was warned that she should not interfere in the two parties of the village. The two ladies left the village for this reason. She told them that she is much more confident than those ladies. She doesn't care for anything because she is Mahar and does not have anything to loose.(p.93) The villagers were shocked to see her confidence. She could not tolerate the gender and caste discrimination without seeing her efficiency as a teacher.

Her hard work and efficiency resulted into the increase in enrollment of girls in the school that it changed the mind of people in her favours. The people who were trying to drive her out if the village, same people were demanding the same teacher for their children. This was the paradigm shift observed in the behavior of the people. Even if she was a teacher, once she was denied drinking
water. The upper caste boy contaminated the water by mixing cow dung in it. In a feat of anger she got the old well cleaned with the help of the people of the community and then only they got enough drinking water. In 1945 she could build their own house in Karagani. All her family members were very happy that they have their own house. (P.95)

In 1950 she was selected for Teacher’s training in Women’s Training College, Pune. The hostel was under the supervision of Mrs. Atre, wife of Acharya Atre. The hostel atmosphere was very healthy. On every Sunday Acharya Atre used to visit the hostel. In the first year of the training a long trip was arranged to U.P. and Kashivishweshwar. She asked for the blessings for getting life to her children and promised to feed five fakirs and five annas to each. That long trip had an immemorial impact on her life. (P.98)

In the second year of the training a very sad incident of her life took place that her hundred years old father passed away in 1952. For the first time she found her an orphan because after her mother’s death, her father was everything for her. She lost the treasure of her life.

2.10.5) Acceptance by the Society: --

After the completion of the training her maiden name ‘Najabai Sakharam Babar’ was changed into Mrs. ‘Shantabai Krushnaji Kamble’. This changed name was published in the Gazette and she received the trained teacher’s certificate of this name only.

At that time the Sarpanch (Head) of Kadlas went to the Educational Officer and said,

“We want Babarbai for our school.” The Officer said, “I will give you Kamblebai for your school.” They were arguing over the issues. Then
the officer made it clear that, "Babarbai has changed her name. Now the same teacher's name only Kamblebai." (p.100)

They started laughing. Every cloud has a silver lining. In her agonizing life there were some interesting incidents also. There was a custom in the society to change the maiden name of a woman after marriage. Due to that there was confusion but ended happily. It is the acknowledgement of her honesty and hard work. She was accepted in the society as a good teacher.

She applied for the District transfer from Solapur to Sangli. So she was transferred to Aatpadi in 1953. In the same year her husband was also transferred to the same place. Exactly after twelve years they were staying together. She delivered two sons and a daughter. Her hard work paid rich dividend and resulted into the improvement of the school with respect to the increase in the enrollment and 100% result of the Vernacular Final examination every year.

Her life became so busy and fast at the home front also. With two sons, the first, two and half years and the second was just two months old. She has very hectic schedule in the school. Additional workload of the guests on the other hand often left no time for her to eat. In a day only once she could eat that is also in the night at around ten o’clock. So her life was a continuous struggle and a manifestation of double battle at home and career fronts.

Aatpadi was now became the center of Vernacular final Examination. She herself experienced the trouble of the same in her school days. So with the help of her husband and other teachers she arranged for the food for the untouchable students at their own cost, in their own house. She was fully aware of the difficulties of the students and hence came forward to offer the timely help. This sensitivity towards the needy was the result of her life, full of hardships.
In 1959 she was promoted to the Headmistress. When the Education Officer would visit, she would get very good remarks about her innovative work. But the village leaders would never visited the school and never appreciated her work as she was from lower caste. They consider it below their dignity. In 1964 on 20th September she was transferred to her own village, Karagani. Her fame and popularity had already spread in the district. That school just had first to fourth standard classes having just eighty students on the roll. An Educational Officer Mr. Kalal once called her and said,

“Kamblebai, you have developed the school of Aatpadi and wherever you had transferred. In the same way you should develop this school also.” She replied, “Karagani is my own village so definitely I will try my level best.”(P.119)

In the evening after the school got over, along with other teacher she would go to house to house to persuade the illiterate parents to sent their daughters to the school. She required extra efforts for counseling such people. Along with her husband, Mr. Kamble, she would conduct ‘Adult Education’ classes in the night for men and women. Her husband was a good singer and played ‘Tabla’ also. Both of them together would teach them the folk – songs, Bhajanas, Ballads along with reading, writing and to prepare speeches and many more things. It was the remarkable thing on the part of this couple to awaken the people of their own community and also others academically and socially too.

With this positive and constructive efforts the classes expanded up to 7th standards. From number 80 the strength of the girls increased to 250. There was no enough place to accommodate such large number of student so with the help of the village management the new rooms were built. She compelled the
girls to observe discipline, cleanliness and developed the liking for the school. As the good work is always rewarded, in 1980 as per the seniority, she was promoted as an Extension officer. Initially she was not ready to accept this post. Her retirement was just six months away as it was the end of her career. She did not want this responsibility just for a short term. Her two sons, a professor and an artist from Mumbai complimented and wrote her,

“We are very happy with this news. It is better to retire as an officer than to retire as only teacher. So accept the order and join immediately.”(P128)

She retired on 1981 as an Extension Officer of Education respectfully. To bid her farewell, send-off function was arranged by all the teachers and educational officers. This autobiography is a success story, in spite of all odds; she could achieve her identity as an education officer. Her life is a guiding light not only for her family but also for the society. Especially for those women, for whom living a dignified life and search for identity is still a distant dream. But this dream seems to be achievable with such ‘Daughters of Maharashtra.’

2.11. SECTION – V
BABY KAMBLE (1929)
JEENA AMCHE (1990), (OUR WRETCHED LIVES).

As it is already mentioned in the beginning of the fourth section that there are different opinions about the first Dalit woman autobiography. The littérateurs and eminent writers in case of this autobiography have raised the same issue. In fact Babytaï herself has claimed when the researcher interviewed her personally it was found that her’s is the first Dalit woman’s Autobiography. In the preface written by Maxine Brunson is also mentioned that ‘this is the first autobiography in Marathi Dalit women autobiographies so the book acquires
historical importance.' According to the written evidences it is published on 23rd May 1986. Before that it was published in the Diwali issue of ‘Stree’ (woman) magazine. So with the chronological order also it becomes very clear that Shantabai Kamble’s autobiography is the first in Marathi Dalit women autobiographies.

2.11.1) Childhood: -

Babtyai Kamble is born in 1929 in Veergaon, a village in Western Maharashtra i.e. taluka –Purander, Dist. Pune. It is a unique autobiography because she writes less about herself and more about the society, age –old traditions, superstitions, male – domination, girls and women’s inferior status in and out of the house, before and after marriage. Different status of Dalit women than the privileged class, inhuman treatment of married women by her all family members including small children. With the unique social documentation and historical importance the book consists of in all total eleven chapters that could be roughly divided into three parts.

In the first part she describes her personal life. She tells us about the village Veergaon; her mother’s native place, about her parents, grand – parents, aunts, brothers, her uncles and cousins. She has got minute power of observation that with their descriptions we get many names and information about their nature. She spent her childhood at Veergaon, her mother’s native place. In 1937 just to continue her education, she shifted to Phaltan to stay with her parents when she was just nine years old. Her father had a very strong influence of Dr.Babasaheb’s thought over education. So he decided to register her name in the school.

The second part deals with the memories of the contemporary Dalit society and life. Since the story is not of her own alone, it is the depiction of a collective trauma – of the community. As Bama says in one of her interviews that she
could not build a monument, could not build a sculpture, so she has written a book.

The third part is about her own social life, her reflections on the existing social system. This indicates her deep affection and compassion and concern about her own community. It also reflects the deep positive influence of the Ambedkarian ideology and the mindset framed due to Dr. Babasaheb’s thoughts and movements.

She begins her autobiography with the interesting story of her birth. Before her birth, her mother delivered three daughters in a row after a male - child. But unfortunately all the children died in their infancy. For a long period her mother could not conceive. Her mother prayed Goddess Kalubai and put Angara (holy ash) on the forehead and then she was born. So from that time it was believed that her birth is nothing but the gift, due to the grace and blessings of the Goddess.

She fell very sick when she was just one and half years old. The fever persisted for fifteen days. During her fifteen days of her illness, her physical condition worsened that they all thought that this child would not survive. They started preparing for the cremation by digging the grave. Whole night the mother sat with the child on her lap. Whole night people were reading ‘Pandavpratap’in order to give her holy farewell. But in the morning they noticed the movements of eyelids of the child and the warm body then they realized that the child is still alive. As they believed that Goddess has saved her life so they offered a live cock in the grave dug for the child. This was very common custom in those days this very clearly indicates that the Dalit community was completely drawn in the ocean of superstition, illiteracy, poverty and lack of hygiene.

Her father Mr. Pandharinath was working on the canal. He was short and thin. The British officer who was supervising that work was not very happy
with this short and thin man wearing rags. But very enthusiastically and honestly he did that work with the help of other labors. The British officer became very happy and promoted him as a contractor. She spent early days of her childhood at Veergaon at her mother’s native place with her Grandmother. This family was the richest family of that village at that time. Her Grandfather, Malhari was working as a butler on 16 rupees salary per month for a European Sahib. He could converse in English. Her Grandmother, Seetabai always helped the needy, married women labors by giving them bread, dried beef and tea for sick people. They used to call her lovingly ‘Begabai’ so both were praised and respected by the people of the community. Small girl, Baby used to wear silk clothes and lots of ornaments. Ten or twelve Mahar families were staying very happily. So she has very intimate feelings about Veergaon.

After the age of nine she went to her father at Phaltan. Her father was highly motivated by Ambedkar’s whirlwind of education movement. The revolutionary thought captivated his mind and he took the firm decision and put her name in the school along with her brother, Babu (P.107) He had very high regards for Dr.Ambedkar. At that time illiteracy, ignorance and superstition are the prevailing factors. He wanted the society should get rid of these social evils. He wanted to eradicate the inhuman social customs. He used to hold his meetings at religious places, in the Fairs or in some rural area so that he could communicate and persuade large number of people at a time.

2.11.2) Formative years and Dr.Babasaheb’s influence: --

In one of his gatherings at Jejuri, he said, “From generations you are working so hard but the God has not done anything good for you not even sympathizes with you. Since centuries you are working and staying at dirty, filthy places, so what good has been done for you? You are not worshipping God but ignorance, superstition so first you educate yourself and then educate your
children, and your family. Your standard of life will improve with your educated children and you will get rid of this hell. They will become aware of your humane nature and human rights. (p.63-64) In such harsh words he attacked profusely on existence of God, destiny and stressed the importance of education.

Such type of radical changes took place because of Dr.Ambedkar’s movement of education and boost moral strength for that she is very grateful to Babasaheb. She describes how Dalit community became aware of their human rights through the historical incidences like Kalaram Mandir Satyagraha. It was not the fight for just the entry in the temple or to achieve God but the fight for the equality because the entry in the temple, hotels or any public place was prohibited to Dalits. She says,

“In Phaltan there were two hotels only one is Ramlaxman hotel and the other is Sawatamali hotel, both were named after the Gods. For Dalit community the owners used earless cups and kept outside the hotels.”(p.120)

Dr. Ambedkar’s speeches sparkled the minds of these inhuman people they got unique moral strength so that they can fight to acquire their political and social identity.

In this autobiography, Baby Kamble depicts the typical picture of that village and that community, especially of the Dalit woman. In spite of the poverty and ignorance they lived very lovingly and happily. The day of the women usually starts very early in the morning for cleaning and grinding the grains and fetching water from far for the day. The sound of the grinding, singing and the cock crowing used to mingle together. At that time small Baby would come out of the bed and sleep on the lap of Grandmother. Granny, spreading her right leg used to sing a song while grinding. The whole locality would bloom due to
that music. Through the songs the granny and all other women used to praise
the children, parents, brothers and sisters and in-laws the songs were full of
glory to satisfy their minds momentarily hoping for the well –being of their
kith and kins. Those moments of happy memories were enjoyed helping them
to forget the hardships of the day-to-day life. Children used to be delighted and
excited.

2.11.3) Prevailing social picture: --

Babytai gives a very fine but pathetic picture of many social customs that were
prevailing among the society. The people who were staying in poverty and
ignorance, they could not free themselves from the grip of superstition. She
had told many social and religious customs. The age-old traditions and
customs were very deeply rooted in the minds of people before conversion.
They inherited their rigid mindset of following the traditions and customs in
the caste system. The idea of righteous behavior, sin and goodness was the
product if age-old traditions and false status symbols were attached to these
customs.

Mahars were supposed to live within their limits and boundaries led down by
the religion. They should greet and respect upper caste people in a typical way.
They should get off the road if the upper caste person approaches. If in the
house where the woman has just delivered a baby, people should spit out three
times, wait outside the house for a while and then enter the house in order to
keep away the bad spirit or ghost.

The Mahars were forced to live at the outskirts of the village at the same time
all the mean and humble jobs were compelled on them by the upper caste
people for their own benefits. They had to toil the whole day in their service
and carry out all the mean jobs of cleaning for the mere stale food in return.
They used to carry a stick with bells to indicate their presence and arrival.
Because they were not welcomed, allowed or to move around freely. It was a bad omen to hear the sound of Mahars while eating. (Manusmriti)

Mahars were involved in all the hard work of the village but never allow eating together. They had to satisfy themselves only on the leftovers. They were not allowed to stand straight but they have to bow even in front of the children. They have to salute everybody with ‘Johar Maay Baap’. He was compelled to send messages on every occasion such as birth, death, and sickness in any kind of hostile weather. He was delighted even he gets the clothes of the dead body. The age old traditions and customs were the indispensable part of the Dalit community. This book explores the mind and soul of the Dalit women's and the social structure at that time. Prof. Vilas Jadhav says,

“This book is not merely describing the personal happiness and sorrow but it has the music and tone of social life. She has unfolded different aspects of poverty and explored the universe of the lives of Dalit women around her.” (Kesari, Sunday, 6th July 1986)

The plight of married child of Mahar community was very miserable and pitiable and the greatness of that period was not to allow women to go beyond the threshold of house. e.g. the wife of Pandharinath mistri (her mother) had never seen the sunlight of the day nor anybody has even seen her nail. Confinement of the woman within the four walls of the house was a matter of great pride for even the Dalit men. If the daughter-in-law does not behave properly, she does not listen to the elders, if she neglects her household duties or not even Johar (salute) the upper caste person, then all her people at her husband’s side would criticize her mother. (p.53)

Since 1940 the lives of all the women was somewhat similar. Mahar women, child marriages, the troublesome mother in law, the suffered daughter-in-law, the troublesome father in law, the sister-in-laws, brother-in-laws and the
neighbors. A small, immature girl child would get marry at such age that she is unable to understand what is marriage? What ‘husband’ means? She would enjoy the marriage rituals that would be celebrated for four days. Early in the morning, with the cock crowing, she would work continuously as grinding grains, fetching water from the distant place, collecting fire woods for the day, preparing bhakaries and so on. At the late afternoon she would get time to eat the leftovers if any. Most of the time she would eat dry bread with salt or red chilly powder that also she has to take secretly before her mother-in-law could notice.

If she tries to run away in order to get rid of this hell, then, her feet would be tied. At her mother’s place also such a girl was not welcomed because after marriage she is no more their property but husband’s. If she comes back to her husband’s place then in the night, without her knowledge her nose would be cut. In this manner she would be tortured by all possible ways. The mother-in-law takes great pride in doing all such humiliating things. Sometimes she would get jealous of her youth. The whole village gets involved in this torture plans.

Even the husband and wife were not allowed to glance at each other. They should not talk to each other in front of the elders. When the daughter-in-law gets her menses, the mother-in-law used to keep awake whole night so that they should not come together in the night. It was thought that the daughter-in-law may spoil the son, he might forget the parents, and he might become a hen-pecked husband. Marriage celebration was the very happy incident but going to husband’s place was nothing but like going to jail, a hard labor. It was like a great calamity. (p.97) Smartly enough she would pollute the mind of her son by telling him to keep an eye over her when she goes to fetch water. Then the corrupt minded husband would continuously beat her throughout the night. Whole day she had to work and in the night she would face this kind of
torturing. Hence in the society she has been exploited economically and at home she is the victim of physical and mental exploitation and torture.

Sometimes in order to get away from this tyranny, the daughter-in-law would pretend of that she has got possessed by Goddess and would try to win the sympathy of the people. Out of fear all the women including her mother-in-law, they would put turmeric powder and kumkum on the forehead of the possessed woman and touch her feet. In fact upper caste people never allowed them to enter in the temple, but all the time they were busy in performing all such meaningless rituals. Sometimes the reverse case would take place. Some women from the spectators would get possessed and would say, this is an evil in your house. Don’t ever trust her. my blessing will save you from this evil spirit. But you too have forgotten Goddess. Give away the first-born baby of your son to the Madmalu. (Goddess) The poor small daughter-in-law would endure the beatings and curses of everybody including the children in the household. Pinching her cheeks, beating and creating a scene were the part of her daily life.

Through this book she brings the incredible realities of Dalit community. She knows very well that grinding poverty is not the only root cause of their miserable plight but the social discrimination and strong influence and control of religion. It makes very clear that the inhumanity and social injustice, which treated human beings worse than animals. More astonishingly it was enforced on them by religion in the form of traditions and superstitions.

2.11.4) The purpose of writing: -

While telling her intention of writing this book Baby Kamble has written, during my 50 years of lifetime
I have observed minutely and the things which I have perceived, have tried to depict in my writing because the life of Mahar community 50 years ago, when they were fully bound by the chains of slavery, millions of years, people of this community were enslaved, in order to show the future generations how they have lived in slavery. For this I have made the efforts to write and show the world the hellish world in which they lived for the centuries. This degrading, inhuman situation of living that was enforced on them by a particular society should be known to the future generation. The important thing is that we are saved from this perennial hell by our Bhima (Dr. Ambedkar) this pending duty, which was waiting for thousands of years, was done by Bhima alone. How could the future generations come to know if we don't tell them the inhuman situation we have gone through? This is the purpose of my writing. (P.1)

While telling about the inspiration of writing of this autobiography, She correlates her intention to the most historic incidence in Indian women’s life that is when Dr. Ambedkar presented ‘Hindu code Bill’ for the emancipation of not only Dalit women but also all for all the Indian women. She says, “My Bhima, the righteous, the Savoir and the son of the whole Universe who gave birth to ‘Hindu Code Bill’ who gave the soul inspiration of my humble pen worked well and I could realize that Truth is at the center stage of Life. She gave vent to her feelings through the poem:

What do I have that I offer to you Bhima
I offer the flowers at your feet
Where my agonies got voice
Each flower that I offer
Are forms of my agonies?
Washing your feet with the tears
Dropping out of my eyes

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Lighting the flame with the fire
Blazing out of the soul
I see you Bhima in the blazing flames. (P.5)

She is very grateful to Babasaheb for the awakening towards the education and the inhuman status in the society. This awakening has brought drastic change in the lives of thousands of Dalits. Hence instead of writing more about herself she has written only about the miserable plight of Dalit community enforced on them by the society.

2.12. SECTION – VI

SHANTABAI DANI (1918-)

RATRAN – DEEN AMHA (1990) (DAY AND NIGHT FOR US)

Shantabai Dani, the social activist, staunch supporter and follower of Dr. Ambedkar’s educational and political movements. She did not write this autobiography on her own. Mrs. Bhawana Bhargave puts it into Shantabai’s words. Shantabai had narrated her life story to Mrs. Bhargave. Yet it should not be called as a biography as Mrs.Bhargave arranged it in the autobiographical form. In the preface it has been mentioned that when Government of Maharashtra honored Shantabai with Savitribai Phule award, the eminent writer, poet Mr. Shirwadkar alias Kusumagraj and Mrs. Bhargave interviewed her on Mumbai Television it is at that time, Mr. Shirwadkar had inspired Mrs.Bhargave to write Shantabai’s autobiography. Mrs. Bhargave was the right person to handle this work efficiently as indicated by Mr. Shirwadkar’s words of trust and encouragement,

“Mrs. Bhargave is the multifaceted writer. She is a scholar who has acquired excellence in the field of education and social orientation. The
most important thing is that she is a bosom, lifelong friend of Shantabai. She has made it unique piece of work of art what Shantabai has narrated her. (P.7)

This is how the process of writing an autobiography took place. Mrs. Bhargave a multifaceted and talented writer whose attempt for this writing biography of Shantabai is similar to autobiography since she has written the first hand, primary form of her story so as to impart autobiographical status to her work.

Mrs. Bhargave, at present working as a Trustee and Deputy Secretary of ‘Kusumagraj Pratishthan.’ A new course has been introduced ‘Sahityabhushan’ since 1996. Mrs. Bhargave had contributed substantially in getting it activated all over the Maharashtra. She is associated with many social organizations. She writes regularly in the newspapers. She has already published a biography on Padmashree Dadasaheb Gaikwad on 1968 that has received Maharashtra State Prize.

The title of this book is very significant. Mr. Shirwadkar had himself suggested it spontaneously that signifies Shantabai’s never ending agonizing life; paradoxically carrying a message of social transformation through non violent means based on Buddhism and Dr. Ambedkar’s principles. The words ‘Ratran-din Amaha’ are the words taken from the initial lines of the famous ‘Abhanga’ by Saint Tukaram. It is very appropriate because it is the story of a fighting lady in the war of social transformation movement like never before. The ordeal of getting the revolutionary thought of Dr, Ambedkar in real life and carry the social work accordingly against all odds was not a simple task. Shantabai has sacrificed her whole life, remained spinster for this noble cause. Her life is nothing but Ambedkar’s philosophy that she not only preached but also practiced through out her life.
Shantabai was born and brought up in Nasik city, which is on the religious, political, cultural and historical map of India. It is well known as a pilgrimage of the Hindus due to sacred shrine, Panchvati on the banks of Godavari River. It is important as the Currency printing Press; moreover it is a link city interconnecting the major cities like Surat, Jalgaon, Pune, Mumbai and different states of India. It has the entire potential component for emerging as the growing city with respect to Educational, industrial and cultural center.

2.12.1) Childhood: --

Shantabai's mother gave birth frequently to a boy and a girl alternately. Before her a girl was born so they were expecting a male child just before her birth. At that time delivery did not take place in the hospital but at home, under the supervision of an experienced woman. A boy elder to her had expired so her birth after this incident was unexpected and shocking also. Her perturbed and anxious father repeatedly said, “This girl is born and my peace is gone.” (p.1) He repeatedly uttered the words, “My peace is lost.” That was the reason behind naming her ‘Shanta’ meaning ‘Peace’ (which was lost with her birth). Her life itself start on odd note, she was born when the family was expecting the male child. The only good thing of her birth was that she was fair and good looking which according to her father,

“fairness does not depend on the caste you are born in.”(P1)

The early days of her childhood were spent in Khadkali (a rocky barren land in the outskirts of a village) Her father and all her three uncles stayed in the separate huts but she was pampered by all of them.

Although her mother was illiterate from the Mahar community, she has the wisdom and knowledge from her own experiences that her daughter must be educated. Shanta’s elder sister Sonubai was married in her childhood and was
going through very miserable conditions. She had to do all the meek and humble jobs like collecting the cow dung, firewoods, and bones to keep her family alive. Money earned by selling these things was often snatched away by her husband for liquor. He was very vicious tyrannical husband often beat her inhumanaly. He never earned money, never did work but kept Sonubai starving. Shanta’s mother believed that the lack of education is the reason for this plight. Hence she wanted to educate Shantabai so that she could lead a comfortable and dignified life. She often said to her,

“The only ray of hope for the poor is education.” (p.3)

Since her childhood that sentence was carved on her mind. When the corporation schools were easily available, her mother took initiative to put her in the Missionary school. Her illiterate mother had the wisdom to put her in the Missionary school. Even her father supported the idea of educating the children.

Her father had twelve buffalos and used to supply milk to the European Senior Officers staying in the ‘Bara- Bungle’ locality (colony of 12 bungalows). This was the source of income of the family. Shantabai used to get fresh milk every morning. Her father was educated up to 4th std. So he used to help her in her studies and would tell stories. He had very melodious voice and sang ‘Bhajanas’ on one string instrument. He used to read ‘Pothi’ (holy Hindu book) and interpreted it to the people. They used to gather to listen to him. They offered rice, betlenut and money everyday. He could understand simple English. He used to forced Sonubai to go to school but she never liked it.

During those days the women had to work very hard like selling grass collected from the forest for their living. They would keep the children in a ‘Zoli’ (cradle made out of an old sari tied at two ends to keep the child at sleeping position) by giving the child a mild dose of opium for putting the child to sleep for hours.
or until they return. As if it was not enough, they have to face tyrannical, non-cooperative husbands and constantly nagging, vicious mother in laws to add to the agony.

The mother and the other ladies of the community lived a miserable life. When Shantabai was nine years old, a very sad incident took place. Her elder brother Shankar expired after a short illness. This changed her father completely and made him addicted. That affected the milk business. Her elder brother Anna could not managed the business while their drunkard father always waited to thrash his children. Her Grand mother tried to help the family by selling grass for living. She spent money very carefully; at times she would eat ‘chinchoke’ (boiled tamarind seeds). In fact she had three gold chips and lot of ornaments. But her drunkard son, Shantabai’s father had stolen it all. The untimely demise of the elder son changed her father’s life and ultimately theirs’ Her mother was very much disturbed that

“The happy and contented days will never come again.” (P.7)

Her sister Seetabai was also staying with them. She had run away from her husband who was very suspicious and often beat her severely still she bled. The same thing happened to her other sister Sonubai. Even after the marriage both the sisters had come back. So the family life was very much disturbed. Lack of education and cultural grooming made Dalit men suffered from psychological problems. They took out their frustration on their wives to add to their agony. They were the major obstacles to the progress of the family. The cynical husbands often beat and tormented the wife out of frustration, which made their lives like a lone battle.

Hunger, poverty and untouchability had much to do in her life. There are many agonizing, humiliating and unforgettable instances in her life. Once she returned from the school and found there is nothing to eat. There was a gap of
nine hours so she felt terribly hungry. She could not bear and started crying. The neighbors showed only lip sympathy but did not give her something to eat. The small girl, Shantabai requested the ladies just to give her at least a quarter of bhakari. Her mother who had just returned after the toiling day overheard that. Her mother, a strong lady with iron self respect could not bear that scene and beat her with a stick. In fact she had brought something to eat but did not give her. Shantabai went to sleep crying. Late night she woke her up when her anger cooled down and gave her to eat. While eating both were weeping. Her mother kept saying,

“I am very bad. I beat my hungry child.”(P.14)

Thus Shantabai's childhood was filled with hunger, poverty and discrimination.

Her mother earned very little that is two annas. (1 rupee is equal to 16 annas) She had a very small budget. She used to buy grains of one anna, one and half anna for oil and vegetables, one and half anna for buying sweets like Jalebi or Godishev and the very cheap fruits often partially stained or decayed. She remembers the other incident, the day when in the commotion of the sudden rain fall; her mother had lost the money. She had earned two annas by selling grass and tied it to the corner of the sari. She took shelter in the shed with so many people. She went straight to the shop to buy the fixed items. She found that the money was stolen. That was the big bolt to her. Without disclosing the tragedy to the shopkeeper or asking anything on the credit and without borrowing anything she came home empty handed. A small girl Shantabai was desperately waiting for her in anticipation of getting something to eat, as she was very hungry. She asked the mother what has she brought for her, mother became so emotional but said, “let us go inside then I will tell you.” After entering the hut she just could not controlled her emotions and tears rolled down from her eyes. She held her close and said,
“My dear child, you must be very hungry. I was going to bring all the things for you. I had earned four annas by selling the heavy load of grass after toiling the whole day. But all the money was stolen. It is my destiny which is really bad.”(P.16)

Shantabai always suffered the agonizing poverty full of hunger and misery.

The mother was trying to console the daughter but nothing can console and convinced the starving belly and so the starving little Shanta. Her mother tried to divert her attention by telling her stories, singing songs for her but all in vein. The hungry girl continued crying. In the same condition she went to sleep. Next morning the helpless mother borrowed some Nagli (ragi) flour from the neighbour and prepared a soup with water and salt. Next day she earned double by working hard, brought the necessary things and fed her well. That night she felt very happy and contented. Against all odd Shantabai’s mother struggle to feed her daughters without any support from her husband.

In the pre independence period untouchability was a social custom. She had experienced many incidences of untouchability right from her childhood. Once a Maratha friend of her father invited him for a feast on the occasion of ‘Holi’. They were not allowed to sit with all other people. They were made to sit in the cowshed, where the cattle are kept. Small girl Shantabai asked many questions to her father out of curiosity. The dialogue between the daughter and father goes like this:

Shantabai: “All the other people can eat food in his house but why we are sitting away from them in this stinking place?”
Father: “We are Mahars. How can we eat with them? They will become impure (vital) by our touch.”
Shantabai: “What do you mean by ‘Vital’? What happens if we touch them?”
Father: "What else will happen? It will be a sin for both, the one who is touching and the one who is being touched.
Shantabai: "What do you mean by sin?
Father: "The one that is not noble deed (Punya)
Shantabai: "What do you mean by a noble deed?
Father: "Noble deed means a good task and sin means bad things"
Shantabai: "Aren't we all of us human beings?"
Father: "Yes, of course"
Shantabai: "Then these people touch their cats and dogs. Why not us?
Father: "Hurry up! Don't ask many questions. There are black clouds in the sky. It may rain anytime" (p.22)

The questions of innocent Shantabai reflects the confusion, agony and illogical nature of untouchability that her father is unable to explain so it creates more tension with more questions. His mind was twisted and distorted in the wheels of customs and traditions so he does not feel insulted even if the food is served in the menjer. He is accustomed to this kind of social cruelties and had accepted that kind of humiliating life. Due to poverty her childhood was wilted and crippled. She says, "my childhood was dwarfed and turned me into adulthood before time. So my simple likings were never satisfied, could never wear nice clothes, could never eat tasty food and due to miserable conditions I lived my childhood dull and dry. (p.26) Her addicted father, his extra-marital affair, her mother's helplessness, her grandmother with great tantrums all these things would add tensions to her daily life. Her life was like a constant battle.

2.12.2) Agonies in acquiring education: --

In the Women's Training College at Pune, she was given very humiliating treatment only because she belongs to Mahar community. All the girls in the hostel used to sit together for the lunch and dinner. She says,
“But I was not allowed in the dining hall. My plate used to be placed at 25-30 yards away from them. I was served food from far. I used to eat all alone. From quite above the plate, the bhakari was thrown at me. I was not allowed to use the common bathrooms. I was given a separate bathroom made of Bamboo sticks near the toilet. Although it was Government Training College, all the festivals were celebrated regularly every year. I was never allowed to offer ‘Durwa’ (grass-twigs) to Ganapati. In fact the durwas brought by me were cleansed thoroughly by water and then offered to Ganapati by the upper caste girls.”(30-31)

The castism was still prevalent and she experienced the discrimination in the Training College too. In spite of all these barriers she completed the course.

She was the only Mahar girl-student in the college. The very disturbing incidences have experienced by her in his school days. The gravity increased as the time passed. Even in the field like education, untouchability was practiced freely. Injustice at the meals time was very disgusting. She completed her training while facing mental torture. She wanted to fulfill the dreams of her parents so she pursued it in a very difficult situation. She worked very hard due to a very ambitious attitude of her family members. Without getting discouraged in an unfavorable environment, she completed her training and in 1960 joined as a Primary teacher at Winchoor village at Niphad Taluka.

Even in her career she faced the critical incidents due to Untouchability. She had to face resentment and non-acceptance by the upper caste even after she was appointed as a teacher. Once all the teachers had gone to the temple on a hill along with the students outside the village. Unknowingly but enthusiastically she went right inside the temple, near the idol. When the priest came to know about this he made a big scene and reacted very strongly. This
news went to the Sardar of Nasik, Mr. Winchoorkar, he called Darbar and she
was warned strongly. (P.34)

If the person belonged to backward community, no matter is a man or woman,
teacher or student, the upper caste people behave or treat that person by
considering only the caste. It means every other achievement is insignificant in
case of a lower caste person.

2.12.3) Timely support and guidance: -

There were some social and environmental changes in her life but the timely
help from the people like Dr. Londhe she could manage with it. She did not
like Winchoor, as it was very inconvenient place. She has to fetch water from
far. Her mother for the first time in her fifty years of her age fell sick and was
admitted in the missionary hospital. There Shantabai happened to meet the in
charge of the hospital, Ms. Londhe, a Christian lady from other state. While
talking to Shantabai, She was quite impressed by her determination of
education. She inquired whether she would like to continue with her education
if she helped her. Shantabai replied, “Certainly! I consider education as my
religion.” (P.37) Her mother supported her independent but challenging
decision.

Dr. Londhe arranged for her further education and her stay in the hospital
campus. She appointed a teacher for her English tuition by paying 20 rupees
per month. She was taught English for three classes within a year. Dr. Londhe
was transferred to Surendranagar, Gujarat. She took Shantabai with her. She
learnt Gujarathi also. Now she could converse in Marathi, Hindi, English and
Gujarati. Dr. Londhe was a dedicated doctor and popular among her patients.
Although she was very kind and competent doctor, she was always treated as
an outsider. When it became unbearable, she was shifted to Baroda province in
an equally big hospital. There also she encouraged Shantabai by bringing
many books; she would take her to English movies. She shared her thoughts about the news and articles in the newspaper. It helped to develop her all round personality with broadening of her vision.

She worked very hard for her Matriculation class. She used to study for five hours daily. As soon as she finished her examination, she received a letter and a telegram one after the other about her mother’s sickness and death. Her happiness of doing well in the examination was short lived. About the mother she could only think,

“She is the one who has moulded me. She is the one who has kept the flame of knowledge enlighten in my mind. She never let this flame to extinguish with her courage in spite of the never-ending storms and hurricanes of poverty. But instead she always fueled this flame with her confidence. I remembered the different forms of my mother who was brave, courageous, fighting and facing the unfavorable conditions.”

(p.40)

She knew that she would not make it to the funeral to Nasik since it took 14-15 hours to reach. But she wanted to apply the ashes of her mother on her forehead and believed that every particle of it would bless her to make her life successful in future. Thus it was a battle like situation for Shantabai. Her life was a continuous agonizing struggle, which she has to battle day and night. After mother’s death she felt lonely. The image of her mother in front of her eyes was torturing her. Her sorrow was so deep that she said,

“Tears coming from eyes; it is the very primary stage of sorrow. My mind was fully turbulent and I found myself lost in the darkness. (p.42)

She suffered and endured the hardships during her formative and educative period and her mother expired so her happiness of completing education was
very short lived. She missed her mother and she suffered loneliness. It was a lonely and constant battle.

She received a consoling letter from Dr. Londhe. She wrote,

"If you want to offer a tribute to your mother in a real sense, you should complete your graduation. I am like your sister. So not for yours but at least for my satisfaction you should continue with your education." (P.43)

Meanwhile she received her result in Times of India that she has passed with good marks. She is the first member from Dani family to be matriculated. All were very happy but she missed the presences of her mother intensely. Her mother's wish and dream was fulfilled. Dr. Londhe was also transferred from Baroda to Nasik.

She admitted Shantabai in H.P.T. College, the best college in Nasik. She stayed in the college hostel with the financial support of Dr. Londhe. She gifted her a bicycle also. She was the first lady riding a bicycle and received appreciation of the people. She led very active college life. She read intensively, from Savarkar to Sane Guruji; from Gandhiji’s ‘Harijan’ to Jawaharlal Nehru’s ‘Discovery Of India’, all the famous English writers like Dickens, Chekov, Thackeray, Hardy and Woodhouse. She played all the games like Badminton, Tennis and even she was the Captain of the Girls’ Cricket team. She enjoyed her life at the fullest with her friends.

2.12.4) Turning point in Shantabai’s life: -

Her brother-in-law Mr. Dadasaheb Gaikwad, very closely associated with Dr. Ambedkar since 1924-1925 had a very special place in her political and social life. In June 1942 the College had invited Dr. Ambedkar to deliver the Opening
Address. In his speech he very strongly expressed his views on education and untouchability. Education only helps people to broaden their outlooks. Only in India thousands of people are the victims of untouchability. Any rational person should think over this and you young people should try to awaken the society. Shantabai was so greatly impressed by the speech that at that time only she had decided that,

“Only one motive I have in my life and that is to work for our people. Till my last breath I will work for my people those who are exploited and oppressed. Every moment of my life I will use to make them happy.” (p.51)

She got an opportunity to spend that evening along with her friends at the residence of Mr. Dadasaheb Gaikwad. She thought that evening ‘immemorial’ as it had changed her whole life. She was highly impressed by the very humble, helping nature and down to earth personality of Dr. Ambedkar. She says,

“From that moment my life had got some definite direction.” (p.52)

She was greatly influenced by the speeches of Dr. Ambedkar and Dadasaheb Gaikwad. She actively participated in the contemporary political movement and emerged as the great leader of Dalit movement. In 1942 Dr. Ambedkar had founded Scheduled Caste Federation. His aim was not only to help Mahar people but also all the others who are oppressed, depressed and suppressed should be free from their degrading state. As influenced by these thoughts she started participating in public meetings and social gatherings. Under the guidance of Dadasaheb she used to give speeches. He used to guide her, correct her time to time. In this way she learnt her initial lessons of social work and politics from Dadasaheb. Now she had become the active member of Schedule Caste Federation at District level. She is very grateful to Dadasaheb and Babasaheb that she says,
\begin{quote}
"In their company I learnt the lesson of how to serve people selflessly. I feel myself very lucky and blessed." (P.55)
\end{quote}

2.12.5) Social Movement: -

In 1946 Dr. Ambedkar demanded separate Electorate in the Assembly. As elected Congress members are reluctant to do any constructive things for Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes. Shantabai was ready to participate in that 'Satyagraha.' She was doing her B.A. Dr. Londhe tried to convince her that this examination is very important. You will be a degree holder soon. So leave that 'Satyagraha' and concentrate fully on examination. But as the social activist, for her to serve her people was important. She said, "Examination is not that much important for me." (p.58) Shantabai sacrificed her educational and academic career for social and political activities.

Many women participated in that sit-in. They were imprisoned for three weeks in Yerawada jail at Pune. In the jail also she used to read Dr. Ambedkar's speeches, articles for the women prisoners. She would o read some passages from famous plays of Shakespeare and would tell stories from the novels of Mr. Phadke, Mr. Khandekar or Mr. Madkholkar. The activists never differentiated between man and woman. So women activists participated in that 'Satyagraha' as never before. (p.61) The demand was sanctioned and all the prisoners were relieved from the jail. People had full faith about Dr. Ambedkar that he will only help us to overcome the dehumanizing position so they responded to his call wholeheartedly. They thought that it was their moral duty to follow him. She along with others jumped in the social movement fully.

In 1947 with the liberal attitude of Dr. Ambedkar, Shantabai became the President of Schedule Caste Federation. Once for the campaigning she was going to Raipur in Madhya Pradesh with Mr. Bapusaheb Rajbhoj, the activist
from Pune. Hindu –Muslim riots was going on. Suddenly in the railway compartment the police came to arrest them. They were taken to different jails in the midnight. The party members could not get any information about them. While taking them to Jabalpur jail somehow they could manage to send a message through Mr. Jamanalal Bajaj, traveling in the same compartment. He conveyed the message to Mr. Dadasaheb. The news reached to Babasaheb at once. He discussed the matter with the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Ravishankar Shukla. They were released from Jabalpur jail. At the time of their release they asked the Jailor the reason of their imprisonment. The Jailor answered,

“We invite spies like you from Nijam Hydrabad.” (P.68)

After their release at many places in their honor, the social activists arranged the felicitation programs. As a result they received more acclaims and publicity without reaching their planned destination.

2.12.6) Shantabai’s political career: –

Till 1948 Shantabai’s political career was so expanded that from the President ship of Schedule Caste Federation she was appointed as the Regional Secretary. She started campaigning not only in Nasik but also all over Maharashtra. In 1952 she had contested for the reservation seat from Niphad constituency against the powerful Congress leader, Mr. Govindrao Deshpande. Unfortunately she lost the election. From 1968 – 1974 she was nominated as M.L.A. In 1980 she contested for the Cabinet minister from Nasik constituency. Till her age of 72 -73 that is up to 1989 she was actively involved in politics. She observed that politics was no more a means of working for in order to help the Dalits and to solve their problems. She says,
“The politics has been divided and cracked in so many pieces that I do not want to waste my time and energy for mending it. The allegations made through newspapers, the blames and criticism, the mud – slinging at each other, the false ideas of status, obstructing each others progress and moreover they have forgotten the Dalits, oppressed people for whom they are supposed to work. Therefore I am better off with my educational field.” (P.195)

Of course when she was involved in politics, she never neglected her duty towards educational field. She opened Kinder Gardens, School, High-school, Hostels for schoolgirls, working women. She was fully aware of the importance of education, she devoted most of her time for the upliftment of Dalits, oppressed and the most neglected section of the society. She opened the hostel ‘Ramabai Ambedkar’, ‘Gautam Chhatralaya’ and ‘Takshsheela Vidyalaya’ at Nasik Road and High school for girls in Nasik city. She opened ‘Dr. Ambedkar Dyan Vikas Kendra.’

In 1942-43 she became the President of Scheduled Caste Federation. In 1948 she became the Regional Secretary of Maharashtra. In 1952 she contested from Niphad constituency against the Congress candidate Mr. Govindrao Deshpande. She could not win the election. In 1966 she tried for the Republic Party alliance with Congress. From 1968 –1974 she was nominated as M.L.A. In 1980 she contested for the seat in the Cabinet minister from Nasik Constituency.

When she was the Cabinet Minister she got an opportunity to go abroad. In 1968 Malaysia had organized World Buddhist Conference. She got a chance to attend the same for eight days. She could interact with so many people at a time from all the corners of the world. She attended the meetings, prayers and came to know the importance of Buddhist religion as an internationally
acclaimed religion. In her eight days journey she traveled by ship. It was a thrilling experience of her life.

In 1970 Japan had organized the Conference for Peace. It was the 25th year of 'Hiroshima -Nagasaki' bomb explosion. She participated in that conference as 'Shantisainik' at her own expenses. She went there along with Mr. Mourya, Mr. Ganar, and Mr. Phulzele. In her fifteen days stay of Japan she visited many places. She was totally impressed by the progress and development that Japan had made in these 25 years. She says,

"In these twenty–five years Japanese men and women are so hard – working that there is not a single sign we could see of destruction caused by the bomb explosion. Everywhere clean and broader roads and beautiful greenery." (174)

She was impressed by the Japanese' cleanliness and hospitality. She visited many places like Tokyo, Osaka, Buddhist Viharas, and Women's Organizations and discussed over many issues with the help of the translator without any kind of difficulties. In Tokyo she visited an Industrial Exhibition Expo – 1970.

In 1972 she attended World Buddhist Conference in Srilanka for ten days. She traveled by train and by airplane along with Mr. Bapusaheb Rajbhoj and her friend Sarita Ujagare. She found people from Shrilanka very religious. Buddhist religion was dominating as Samrat Ashoka had spread and preached Buddhist religion through his children Mahendra and Sanghmitra. She saw that a wife of Judge was sweeping and cleaning Lord Buddha's temple as a part of her religious duty. She visited Glass House and 'Bodhivruksh' in Anuradhapuram. She even visited Candy, very beautiful and attractive city.
In 1976 on 11th and 12th January she called a meeting of All India Republic Party. All the leaders and activists from all over India responded on a large scale. They had a discussion over many important issues like the burning problem of Landless people, the need of Youth organization, Women organization, Samata Sainik Dal, Workers' problems and unemployment. At that time our late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi had declared 21 points program. Out of that 11 points were beneficial for the progress and development of Pad -dalits. So that program was happily welcomed by all of them. She was continuously busy with the morchas, struggles, Satyagrahas, conflicts and taking care of oppressed and exploited people from different stratas of the society. The important historical incidents will be explained in details in the next chapters.

She was the devoted selfless leader of Ambedkar’s movement. She worked in every important field such as Education, Society and Politics. From the beginning she had set her goals as per Dr. Ambedkar’s principles of serving the poor, oppressed and neglected sections of the society. She was against the groupism and splitting from the aims and objectives of the Party. Hence she left politics and concentrated fully on the most important issue, Education with a very constructive approach.

2.12.7) Selfless leader and an Educationist: —

She was actively involved in politics up to 1989 till the age of 72 -73. She was always occupied by solving the problems of needy. She took help from the concerned officers and authorities of their respective fields time-to-time and sought help to the needy. She had adopted the path shown by Dr. Ambedkar. For her selfless service to the humanity Maharashtra Government had awarded her twice. In her life she was very closely associated many people who helped her in her difficult times. She says,
"Many of friends are from different classes, castes and creeds. In our friendly relations my caste, my age or even my position had never created any obstacle or any kind of differences among us." (P201)

In her sickness, without expecting a single pie they would rush to her with a single phone call. If she tried to pay them, they would say,

"Tai (elder sister), you have done so much for the society, we must do something for you. If we do not do then we would be very unlucky."(P.202)

This shows that she was finally accepted by the society.

She knew that this is the result, reward of her selfless service of humanity but still she is very grateful towards them. She did not think something special about her. At that age also She has selfless love, respect and gratitude for all of them around her.

2.12.8) Unique honour to Shantabai: --

She ends this autobiography with a sweet memory of the remarkable incident. Mr. Shirwadkar was honored with a prestigious Dyanpeeth Award. Nasik city was overwhelmed with that. The felicitation program was arranged in the presence of Ex- minister of education, Honorable Mr. Madhukarrao Chaudhari. Every body was eager to felicitate him with a garland or a bouquet. Mr. Shirwadkar was reluctant for that kind of felicitation. But everything was decided; the whole city was in full gear for the felicitation program. Ultimately on one condition he got ready to accept the felicitation. The condition was only one person from whole Nasik city would be felicitating him. As per his wish that ‘only one’ person was none other than SHANTABAI
DANI. When she came to know about that she was surprised and overwhelmed with happiness. In a simple but very effective way she says,

"I would not have got any other highest honour or any other highest position than this. I am fully grateful." (P.203)

At the end she expressed the biggest resolution to build a monument of Dr. Ambedkar on account of his Birth –Centenary year. She is a role model for value-based politicians. At the background of the politics of power and convenience, she guided and led people honestly and selflessly. The value-based politics calls for the sacrifice of worldly pleasure and demands a high price. Her battle was not only with the opponents but also with the alliance; stand by the honest role for achieving this goal, it was a challenging task. There is a situation of battle continuously arises has to faced with lot of confidence by keeping the drive of social change alive. You have to carry on this difficult path ignoring the opposition and criticism.

Shantabai had adopted such difficult path and through this writing narrated the fierce battle of the contemporary movement of Dalit social change. These words are the true reflection of her life. It means situation of battle is the daily affair, every day and night. It is a continuous battle against the unfavorable condition existing in the society for Shantabai.

The women selected for this study are special in the sense they have encountered in their lives the ‘triple exploitation in the form of class, caste and gender. In Babasaheb’s language “Dalit women means Dalit of Dalits.” These women autobiographies are a living, shining examples of successful life-stories, which begins with all the miseries and oppressions and emerges as a successful women with identities and fulfilling, enriching life which is full of gratitude and a desire to give back to the society. Their lives are like guiding
light for not only for the backward women of their own native origin but also for all the women on Mother Earth.

The philosophy and the ideology in their writing come from Lord Buddha, Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The same philosophy, ideology and the principle are personified and manifested in the form of their successful lives. The social structure and the historical background molded their lives. The social structure of their time carried many hurdles and obstacles in the form of unfavorable traditions, customs, superstitions and beliefs. They could overcome the hurdles only with the power of effective philosophy and their own perseverance. They continuously struggled to achieve the best of their capacity.

There is a commonality found among these women writers that they all had a dream. They all faced the most adverse conditions. They all followed the path of education. They all belong to the contemporary movements of social transformation. They all had many questions about their inequality. They all lived through the severe poverty and the agony enforced on them due to social discrimination. They believed in leaders of their time and struggled to achieve their basic human rights. These women had the unique self-confidence that came from independent thinking and awareness about the social and political movements of that time. Their parents dreamt and showed confidence in them so they strived to achieve the educational and political milestones.

They felt the sense of achievement when they achieved some milestones in their lives. Thus the life-stories of these women in this social and historical context are a fine example to show how we can achieve the goals in spite of the severe problems in life. Their lives follow the principle of giving back to the society and living for the society. They traveled the most difficult path and achieved better life and status. The difficulties they faced were the blessings in disguise when they were enlightened with Phule-Ambedkar philosophy. They
realized the difference between the lives of their own parents, other family members and the life of the normal upper class people. The realization of the slavery of thousands of years inspired them and sown the seed of freedom and dignity in their minds.

It was a sense of realization, a sense of empowerment, which could be compared to self-confidence of an elephant that was chained since childhood. But realized suddenly that it is strong enough to break the chain easily. It is like an eagle, which just realized that it has the strength and capability in its wings to glide in the air and soar high in the sky. Their contemporary leaders like Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Martin Luther King (Jr.) showed this light of freedom to these women writers. Their stories are the inspiration of overcoming all kinds of fears; fear of self and fear of others.

This section of the society, which was stunted due to social discrimination gained confidence after observing the miraculous achievements and deeds of their leaders that inspired their minds and fired their conscience to achieve their identity and become what, they can and should become in their lives, in the backdrop of unfavourable social and historical background.

So in this chapter the researcher has described the existing social structure and also the historical and political movements with modern historical background. As we all know this was the period in the world history when the World – Wars were shaken up. For the first time the entire mankind feared its destruction. The strongest countries in the world were humbled due to destructive weapons. The mankind realized the futility of human life but also the greatness of human values. The need of the peace and brotherhood was felt just like King Ashoka felt after the war of Kalinga.

In this chapter the existing sociohistorical conditions showed the discriminations and atrocities the women – writers faced. This period also
witnessed the winds of change, which served as the right conducive and incubating environment capable of giving new life to these women. All such factors inspired the social reformers of that time and to their efforts were successful. The lives of these women writers in such social, political and historical background acquires special importance in this study. In this type of social and historical environment, the seed of realization that is self-recognition was sowed and germinated in the minds of the women-writers that became the turning point in their lives and sparked off the struggling process to come out of the slavery and hibernation. This process of self-realization is described in the next chapter.