Chapter IV

Modernity in Dalit Autobiographies

Modernity is a universal phenomenon; each epoch, or a given time or even whole human history has witnessed it from time to time. Sometimes it is measured with empirical evidences, sometimes with moral criteria. It is a complex idea and has as many definitions as one would please to give. Usually, the term ‘modernity’ is associated with social sciences and humanities to specify an era or period, and also to indicate the ensemble of particular socio-cultural norms, attitudes and practices of a particular time-span. Marshal Berman takes this phenomenon a bit ahead and declares that ‘modernity’ also refers to the subjectivity or existential experience of the conditions it produces, and its “prolonged effect on human culture, institutions, and politics” (Berman, 15). As a historical matter it refers to a time frame that rejects or questions tradition; prioritization of individualism, freedom and formal equality, technological progress and human perfectibility; rationalization and professionalization; a progressive movement from one to another point.

While tracing the roots of the term ‘modernity’, we learn that it is Charles Baudelaire who coined the term “modernity” in 1864, in his “The Painter of Modern Life, to refer to a particular relationship with time, historical discontinuity, openness to the future and uniqueness about the present. This observation can be analyzed with the help of Marshal Berman’s categorization of modernity into three phases, “Early (1500-1789), Classical (1789-1900), and Late (1900-1989)” (Berman; 1988. 16-17). But while defining the term, we face challenge of giving a strict sense of the word. Because, each sphere of our society has different meaning of modernity; politically speaking, modernity is rejection of Aristotelian thoughts.
with new analysis of current political scenario. In sociology, it overlays the previous formation of traditional and customary life without necessary replacement. In philosophical sense, critics believe that the loss of certainty, and the realization that certainty can never be established, one and for all. He also has declared that it is until nineteenth century, we don’t have true modernity. In the field of science (in present day sense), modernity is clearly visible. Other critics like Sudha Pandya and Prafulla Kar say, “The Latin word “modernus” from which “modern” is derived was used first in the fifth century to distinguish Christianity from paganism as a religion characterized by a modern outlook, which was supposed to be a superior outlook to that of paganism” (Pandya and Kar 10). Therefore, the first use of the term “modern” has been deployed in the Western thought as a term for self-valorisation. During the sixteenth and seventeenth century, we see series of new ideas and scientific inventions that gave many new thoughts and rejected old hypothetical arguments; basically those arguments were based on religion. In artistic sense, all the above said shades of modernity certainly shaped the taste of art and literature. Modernity in art is not just a state of being modern, or the opposition between old and new. Advancing inventions in technology are affecting artistic techniques and the means of manufacture, and have changed rapidly the possibilities of art and its status in a rapidly changing society. No one thought photography would challenge the place of the painter and painting. Architecture was transformed by the availability of steel for structures.

The shadow of modernity does not limit to the above mentioned spheres, it is visible in every human activity. For the sake of argument, only few facets of it are mentioned. But it is convenient to give a hypothetical framework to ‘modernity’ with the help of those arguments. Perhaps it would be more convenient to see modernity from the twenty first century stand point. It was the early twentieth century when philosophers and thinkers like Friederich Nietzsche,
Henri Bergson, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud questioned the previous age’s rational ability to explain both physical and social world. Although the term ‘modernity’ generally refers to the collective literary trend in the early the twentieth century, it is more precisely applied to a group of British and American writers- such as James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot, who crated carefully worded images in colloquial language. In other sense of ‘modernity (‘ism’ as a movement), these writers (schools related to them) broke the traditional plot structure of narratives, experimented with language, fragmented ideas, played with shifting perspectives, and drew self-conscious attention to the very nature of language itself. Therefore, one can say that modernity is rejection/interrogation of past, shift from past to future, and newness in science and thought.

In the present context one more issue emerges amid the discussion; the Western roots of ‘modernity’. Most of the parameters in the world are received from the Western or European context. Due to colonization and free trade across the globe, the West has influenced every aspect, in ‘modernity’. Critics Sudha Pandya and Prafulla Kar argue:

The story of modernity corresponds to the narrative gradual and systematic progression of the West from its classical past to its major technological success which occurred between the two world wars. The large-scale devastation during the two wars and the holocaust had two kinds of impact on the practitioners of modernism. One was onset of the mood of disillusionment with the notion of humanism and progress inherent in the very goals of modernity; the other was an urgent need for an alternative system of order that could replace the one which was lost. (Pandya and Kar 12)
Since the term is used to describe a wide range of ideas and developments, it is important to magnify it and see its applicability in the present context. Having grasped various characteristics of modernity, I would like to keep a distinction from the term ‘modernism’ or ‘modern age’ as a discrete term applied to the cultural conditions in which the seemingly absolute. Therefore, in the present context, two Dalit autobiographies- *Government Brahmana* and *The Branded* are seen and analyzed based on the tension between many issues. In the two Dalit autobiographies the elements of modernity have played an important role in shaping the authors’ lives.

Like Laxman Gaikwad’s *The Branded* and Aravind Malagatti’s *Government Brahmana*, Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri* and Sharankumar Limbale’s *The Outcaste* explore the basic questions of Dalit literature, yet they have contrasting dissimilarities in their styles. *Ooru Keri* is a smooth narration with light humour, *The Outcaste* is stark and quite realistic portrayal of Dalits with less focus on humour. In fact, these two autobiographies share more dissimilarities than similarities. *The Outcaste* has set certain standards in Dalit literature by portraying real-life characters and incidents in autobiography. *Ooru Keri* is little distorted in presenting real-life characters and incidents as light humour prevails over grim reality. Geographically speaking, *The Outcaste* is set in southern part of Maharashtra and *Ooru Keri* is set in southern part of Karnataka. Their language, culture, socio-political issues differ to certain extent, even then they had experienced the heat of the Dalit movement. The dissimilarities lay down strong base to the subject of these autobiographies. Therefore, Limbale’s and Siddalingaiah’s approach towards modernity or modernity’s influence in shaping these two autobiographies varies. *Ooru Keri* and *The Outcaste* endorse and fight
the idea of modernity in their own style. So, few elements of modernity which have been already discussed have varying impact on the each autobiography.

Today we talk about post-modernism as a universal phenomenon. After the world war, third world was carved out of colonial regime. The emergence of the third world gave hopes of a new era with self governance, lien of all rights, monopoly over natural resources, and self-reliance over industry. Moreover, post-war global political situations gave rise to globalization. Keeping aside the cons of globalization, the pros was the accessibility of privileges in every corner of the world. The globe has witnessed this shift in every sense; democracy has replaced monarchy, colonized have claimed homogeneity, slavery has come to an end and industry has spread its wings in every country. As a result, there is constant communication between people of different continents.

In case of India, we have witnessed the shift from dependency to independency, from rigidity to flexibility, from anarchy to federal and democratic systems; in a sense, we are truly moving from modernity to post modernity. Having said so, the plurality of this nation allows us to introspect and see if the prospects of this nation have reached the last man of our society. To achieve overall achievement and progress towards post modernity, first of all, modernity should have reached each and every one, and then only welfare of a nation is possible. But the outcome of introspection seems to be disappointing as the Dalits have been excluded from mainstream. The Dalit and poor of India have been under the bottom of social hierarchy who should have been major focus of modern India.

In the last two chapters the plight of Dalits, their struggle for liberty within the society which led to a cultural movement called Dalit movement, has been discussed. The movement made Dalits conscious of the missing opportunity of
modernity which was enjoyed by the rest of the world. The messiah of Dalits in this modern age, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar blazed a new path towards Dalits’ emancipation by getting access to aspects of modernity such as education and political representation. He set himself as an example to all downtrodden to rebel against physical and psychological slavery of centuries, and showed how modernity in Dalits’ lives could bring land-sliding changes; the change would be a revolution. And “For a successful revolution it is not enough that there is discontent. What is required is a profound and thorough conviction of the justice, necessity and importance of political and social rights” (Ambedkar no page no.).

The fighting spirit for equal share in modern world continued to reckon in post-independence India. Particularly, Dalit movement made sure that the intension of active participation in social activities gets realized. In this process of embracing new world of internal liberty, Dalits had to undergo great hardship which is captured beautifully in the four autobiographies Government Brahmana by Aravind Malagatti and The Branded by Laxman Gaikwad, Ooru Keri by Siddalingaiah and The Outcaste by Sharankumar Limbale. The experiences of Dalits’ lives with the modern world become different from others due to social stigma which they carry by birth. The narratives of these two texts become community narrative by catching the pulse of Dalit experience amid the shift from old to new. The shift not only brought hopes but also unsettled the Dalits’ lives by posing incomprehensible challenges. Dalits have been living in social structure which is existing since epochs, but the modernity which is completely new has put them into a dilemma; whether live in old society or embrace the modern opportunity.

The unsettlement created by incomprehensible challenges was rooted in various aspects of modernity. Aravind Malagatti and Laxman Gaikwad confronted
the implicit modernity almost in the same period of history, but their reactions, approaches and experiences were different. They are different because of many internal and external influential factors. *Per se*, modernity is always a new trend that tends to disagree with tradition. Dalits being part of traditional suffering, justified by religion, they were astonished to see the new world of liberty. Each author explains categorically what happened with them when they attempted to embrace modernity. They were circumscribed by new and aggressive challenges never ever found in Indian history; because this phase of modernity was the result of colonial period and post-war developments. Both *Government Brahmana* and *The Branded* have many things in common; growth of narration, shift from childhood to adulthood, migration challenges, educational, institutions, etc. Here, all these events are knitted into a narrative that tells the saga of Dalits lives.

In the process of rejection of old norms and orthodox mindset of our society, the autobiographies paint a painful picture. The literary picture of their revolt seems to be expressed through the passage of modernity. Sharankumar Limbale observers, “‘Rejection’ and ‘revolt’ in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalits’ pain. They are directed against an inhuman system that was imposed on them. Just as the anguish expressed in Dalit literature is in the nature of a collective social voice, similarly, the rejection and revolt are social and collective” (Limbale, *Towards* 31).

At the initial stage of the chapter it is argued that modernity is a shift from tradition or orthodoxy, we are stepping towards post-modernism, and Dalits have been out of modernity. But the question arises whether both Dalit and modernity or aspects of modernity go hand in hand. Former is the epitome of traditional clutches, latter one is a process of getting away from the tradition.
The relationship between modern world and subalterns is always a contradictory one; modernity has proved to a double edged sword for subalterns. “A wealth of literature in India now testifies to this theme, and my own work has been centrally concerned with the effect of new hierarchies constructed on the basis of older relations of power .... But if modernity excludes and creates new hierarchies, it also excites, and in this sense, includes subaltern classes” (Rangaswamy 504).

As Kalpana says, new hierarchy or social class is anticipated when Dalits confronted modernity. Here is an attempted analysis of few aspects of modernity in the two Dalit autobiographies and the following results. Per se, the definition of modernity cannot be given within a limited sense as it spreads across human activity. But for the sake of investigation of the two Dalit autobiographies, let us consider few aspects of modernity that are, most probably, relevant in this context. The aspects of modernity such as education, urbanization, industrial society, democratization, homogenization of subalterns, and Dalit consciousness form a meaningful background to the discussion when that very of idea of self-respect is a modern tradition. Therefore, calling oneself ‘Dalit’ itself is modernity for us. All these aspects cover a wide range of spheres like economical, cultural, social, and political to deviate from haphazardness of its applicability. The following analysis of the two autobiographies is built upon these restricted aspects of modernity.

A glimpse at the autobiographies would give us better understanding. While the spread of the Ambedkarite Dalit movement after 1990, Dalit autobiographies became a norm. Much of contemporary Dalit literature is autobiographical, even as they reflect the various facets of Dalit movement in different context. Aravind Malagatti’s Government Brahmana, the first Dalit autobiography in Kannada, is different from other such autobiographies in a sense that it talks about the travails of a Dalit in a tone that excludes self-confidence, uninhibited by the constrains
imposed by society. It is the life story of an educated Dalit, which at no stage forsakes the study support of humour.

The phrase “Government Brahmana” is coined by upper caste people in Karnataka. Since the Dalits are beneficiaries of reservation, they are dubbed as government – propped Brahmins. Aravind Malagatti used this phrase as the title of his autobiography, to ridicule the very mockery of the Brahminical castes, and proved that a Dalit is in no way inferior to people of other communities. The text does not exhibit any self-pity, but rather a sense of pride. In the following pages, we present an exclusive translation of a chapter from Government Brahmana.

*Government Brahmana* is an “ordinary” story that of an “ordinary Dalit” which struggles to answer surfacing questions that surround any piece of narrative writing: Why should he tell the story? Is this an individual Dalit’s story or Dalit community story? What makes it different from other Dalit stories? This book, however, does not have a particularly didactic quality. The tone questions more deeply. The stories question the self as well as questioning society. The author takes us into the intimacy of his life from storytelling.

Tribal groups, low castes and host of other subalterns do not fit the broad categorization mentioned above. They are so isolated from us socially and politically that one never has any idea about their existence and their miserable plight. Crushed by grinding poverty and the caste system, their voice barely reaches our cities – big and small – where all the power is concentrated. *The Branded: Uchalya* is the eye opening autobiography of Laxman Gaikwad, translated from the original Marathi by P. A. Kolharkar.

Laxman Gaikwad, born in 1956 in Dhanegaon in the district of Latur in Maharashtra, gained international recognition with the publication of *The Branded*, the English translation of his Marathi autobiographical novel, *Uchalya* (1987) in
1998. For the first time, his autobiography brings to the world of literature the trials and tribulations of his tribe, Uchalya, literally the pilferers, a term coined by the British who classified the tribe as a criminal one. With great intensity, he depicts the feelings, sufferings and emotional complexities of his tribe who were viewed as criminals. He has been the President of Jankalyan Vikas Sanstha since 1986 and of Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Organization since 1990. He received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1988.

Gaikwad belongs to the community of Uchalya or Pathruts, a tribe enlisted by the British Raj as criminal under the Criminal Tribes’ Act, first passed in 1871 (but now Denotified). They generally engage in odd jobs that are seasonally available. Due to crushing poverty and the stigma of belonging to a ‘criminal’ community, the tribesmen of Laxman Gaikwad have no choice but to resort to stealing or theft. Gaikwad tells the story of his early life along with the people and the significant others who surrounded and shaped him. Gaikwad prefers his book to be read from a sociological perspective rather than a literary one.

Gaikwad’s community involved themselves in pick pocketing as the caste ridden hierarchy had rejected this group and consigned them to live as animals. Every novitiate ‘thief’ is initiated into the art of stealing. Since a gang member should not reveal his accomplices to the police, a novice is deliberately subjected to severe beatings that make them ‘immune’ to police torture. Gaikwad gives a terrifying picture of such an initiation. The *Bharat* blade used to cut the pockets is always worshipped like a deity before a thieving expedition because it provided them their livelihood. Gaikwad gives a crude and at times graphic description of the pitiable condition that he and his extended family had to endure, the difficulties his family faced to get proper meals and how they were beaten, harassed and hounded and their women molested (generally on false pretence) by the police. Such a description in coarse and crude language of the atrocities caused by the
system in which these groups are forced to live would not go down well with people who are used to the luxury of shiny cars and air-conditioned buildings or who are just born in an upper caste family.

The title of *Ooru Keri* itself tells the whole struggle of Siddalingaiah who as a Dalit endeavors to take leap towards modernity. It is a saga of a Dalit’s encounter with modern world. At every stage, the narrator’s migration marks a step ahead in approaching the modern world. His life is made in ‘keri’ an exterior of a village meant for untouchables; ‘ooru’ is a central and major sphere of village. ‘ooru’ has all accessibility to every modern element, and it can communicate with the rest of the world, but ‘keri’ has no such privilege. The people of ‘keri’ find salvation in serving the ‘ooru’ dwellers. Thus, untouchables had hardly any hope beyond ‘ooru’ or ‘keri’.

Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri* portrays his life-long struggles with poverty, hunger, and humiliations in the village Magadi of Karnataka. *Ooru* is the place (village or a town) where all non-Dalit castes- from the Brahmins and the land-owning castes to the service castes like the barbers- live, and it contains the settlement’s main temples. *Keri* is the place where Dalits live; it is geographically separated from the main body of a village; socially, it is set off from the mainstream society. Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri* begins with the comment, “Ours was the last house in the colony” (Siddalingaiah 1), which signifies his place in the village. His house was last in the village, its roof had collapsed. It was made by mud and slight high which shows that how Dalits are backward. His further narration with regard to his house family, settlement gives an interesting picture of the autobiography.

Sharankumar Limbale’s *The Outcaste* has been a personal narrative that attacks directly the hypocrisy of our society’s class system. The work shows the
intensity of the pangs of Dalits. Sharankumar is self-conscious Dalit; the consciousness of being subjugated because of his birth caused him great harm throughout his life. *The Outcaste* mainly focuses on the identity crisis of the author at various stages of his life. Not just that, it reveals the hidden agenda of Marathas who hammered the Dalits physically and emotionally constantly so that Dalit can never think of liberty in a free country.

‘The outcaste’ denotes untouchability. It is about the author’s birth stigma and continuation of that stigma through untouchability. Sharankumar Limbale makes a sincere effort to convey the readers how he has been outcaste because of his birth. Though he is born to an upper caste landlord, he is denied of his father’s legacy at least for namesake. He is torn between identity related questions which found no answers. His misery becomes severed when he lives an untouchable life within his community. His mother’s and grandmother’s lives fuel the already haunting questions. In short, *The Outcaste* is bitter saga of Sharankumar Limbale who faces untouchability, humiliation and intractable questions.

A close observation of title reveals another layer of its meaning. The outcaste narrates the life incidents that go beyond social domain. The birth stigma follows wherever the narrator goes. He has been an outcaste in every aspect of his life. He is being an outcaste from every opportunity. He is deprived of all the modern elements because he is born outcaste. So, his being an outcaste, modernity too fumbles to reach him.

These autobiographies have found their expression with great struggle and sacrifice. As it has been mentioned several times that education, which is the root cause of Dalit identity, has played vital role in Dalits’ lives. In the chapter II it is to see how education became a boon to Dalits who started to read and write during the colonial period. Later, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar set a water-mark to every Dalit in terms education that brought drastic changes.
Dalits have been kept out of the privilege of education since way back to our memory in the name of ‘varna’ system. Though the ‘varna’ system is no more relevant in any sense, now it has taken the form of caste. Education could be only tool to realise one’s own situation. “Culturally, they (Dalits) have weak base. The language they speak, the habit of food they take, the tradition they practice, and the way in which they live – are homogenous in the environment. Thus, there is need for a continuous and consistent cultural inner refinement. This comes up only when there is higher level of education and deep understudying of society” (Rangaswamy 303). Therefore, as a political deed, Dalits were kept away from this means of knowledge. Dalits remained a neglected segment of society for a long period. Poverty ridden and oppressed, their condition worsened instead of improving. But gradually, in the last century, with the access to education, awareness and consciousness spread. And they strived for self identity and human dignity for themselves.

Here is an attempt to see how education played a major role in shaping the lives of Dalits. Education, being a modern tool from the West, brought greater and immediate changes in Dalits lives. Dalit autobiographies are living examples to it. While asserting Dalit identity and step with the changing world, word knowledge helped the Dalits. At present, the four autobiographies tell the readers how education shaped their lives in accepting or facing modernity. Education itself is a modern aspect as it opens up our mind to a new world.

Both Gaikwad and Malagatti present their stories of struggle while gaining this modernity. The autobiographical narrative presents the struggle of Gaikwad to get education and respectable job. He gives a stark picture of the abominably unhygienic living conditions of the tribe. Moreover centuries of oppressions make them believe that their community would be doomed if the children from Uchalya community go to school. In fact these members believe that professional thieves
can guard themselves against starvation, they train their children for stealing. They also train them for the beating of the police. Gaikwad’s grandparents Lingappa Gaikwad and Narasa bai, brother Manik Dada, Anna Bhau and Harchanda solely depend on thieving. However Gaikwad’s father and mother earn their income by respectable means. In fact Laxman’s father, Martand encourages him to acquire education. So, the author confesses, “Father had firmly resoled to that he would send his Laxman to school to get educated. That was how I came to be educated, otherwise I too would have been a thief and led the usual life our community” (Gaikwad 34-35). It is only education which helps him to get a decent job and also encourages him to fight the oppressive practices.

Here, due to crushing poverty and the stigma of belonging to a criminal community, they are left with no choice but to resort to steeling or theft. Laxman Gaikwad discloses the story of his early life almost smashed by poverty, hunger illiteracy, “They (Dalits in Maharashtra) could not find a place in state education for the simple reason that the Peshwas government was a theocratic one based upon the cannon of Manu, according to which the Shudras and Atishudras were deprived of the right to education” (Rajawat 01). Superstitions and indifferent attitude adopted by society towards Dalit community continued in independent India.

Martand’s urge for education was not an immediate result. While working in Chamle’s farm, he observed others who lived respectfully without being subjugated to any crime. He advises Laxman, “We should live like other village people” (Gaikwad 21). The new thought in the character’s mind brings in a desire for modern way of life. At school Laxman was taught about Gautam Buddha, Gandhi, moral of an ideal society by his teachers. All this was a new world altogether. But the education did not change his position in a fortnight. When he returned home for job to look after his father, he was insulted saying, “What
works! Fuck in hell! He is from the Uchalya community, will it ever mend itself!” (Gaikwad 115), though he was better educated than many upper caste people in the village. Having seen modern world through the window of education, Laxman was well prepared to face every humiliation against him. “He is against the caste and patriarchy and in a peaceful way challenges the evil practice of the dominant order. Education is the only way which conscious Laxman of his rights that leads in the race of socio-economic ladder towards mobility” (Sharma and Devi 91). The Branded shows that it is only after getting education that the protagonist narrator is able to give voice to his feelings. Social structure he inhabited only allowed him to ‘speak’ in limited ways.

Government Brahmana is the first Dalit autobiography, but it set a new trend in Kannada literature. Malagatti writes his autobiography with a new vigour yet applies subtle tone of mockery. His work can be divided into two parts based on his experience; childhood and adulthood. Both the stages of life are determined and dominated by the struggle for education. Modernity brings new phase erasing the old one. But we human beings face great difficulty in adopting that newness. We face new challenges that seem to be strange. To quote Malagatti’s words, “… a few friends who studied with Maali now maintain a distance and address his as ‘ri’. No matter how much he attempts to get close, they shy away from him. They no longer talk to Maali or tease him like before. Instead, they move farther and farther way. Reason: they are under the illusion he is a ‘big man’ now” (Malagatti, Brahmana 1), express the plight Dalits who confront modernity. They are neither in a position to celebrate for new life, nor do they mourn the increasing distance from the social life. Malagatti’s grief should have been reduced when he got education and good job. But in reality, his problems increased due new and unexpected turning points.
Like most of Dalits, Malagatti too faced hurdles during his school days. He was used as a sweeper in the classroom. He was not allowed to drink water, and he was addressed by caste name instead of given name. He says, “Aravind Malagatti was not called by his fellow students of upper castes by his name, but they insulted him by calling him as katti (‘katti’ means donkey or ass). At every level of school, a Dalit has no self identity. Thus, at school also there was prejudice shown against the Dalit students” (Janani 180). The humiliation of those days kept reminding his conditions. The humiliation led him to acquire education and achieve equality. Today, the ‘malakatti’ is Prof. Malagatti who speaks and the whole state listens, he criticizes the injustice and the same society accepts his views.

Education empowered him, transformed him from untouchable to a Dalit. It helped him in carefully watching the modern developments, and absorbed them in order to channelize his view and works into Dalit movement. This modernity equipped him with an ability to be critical about his society in order to bring in anticipated changes.

Anyone who gets educated starts to think from different perspectives of his or her world. Dalits learnt letters, and thought of their sub-human conditions. They started to interrogate each and every norm of the society that caused them harm. This sort of constant churning of thoughts enabled by education has brought humongous changes in the lives of Laxman Gaikwad and Aravind Malagatti. During the process of education, they ask themselves continuously who they are, why they are different from others, why they cannot afford to minimum comfort, how they can come out of such human suffering. When Malagatti claims, “I do not have any illusions of becoming a mahatma by presenting these few pages of my life story. I am quite ordinary. By this, I do not intend to say that the experiences revealed here are only those of an ordinary man… those of every ordinary dalit” (Malagatti, Brahmana 1). Thus, he is referring to a collective experience of Dalit
community which according to him is the same. Changing time has brought self-awareness; the awareness has forced Malagatti to seek answers to his life-long questions, and he successfully finds answers to them. As a result of this self-awareness, which is a product of modern world, Malagatti places his identity within the society by seeking equal treatment and acknowledgement of his existence.

In *Ooru Keri* and *The Outcaste* certain elements of modernity are used and analysed as parameters to see how the narrators faced modernity. As it is mentioned several times that each autobiography has its own story to tell *sui generis*. Having sharp contrast in style and theme, *Ooru Keri* and *The Outcaste* have tackled the challenges of modernity.

Education has been a turning point in Dalits’ lives. It is a primary concern of the both autobiographies. In *Ooru Keri*, it is candidly expressed how education brought the narrator to a new world. His first triumph was witnessed in school days. During school inspection, he mimicked the inspector that caught the attention of the whole school. He says, “I thus became very popular among the boys” (Siddalingaiah 11). Before this, he was reluctant to join school. His acting lessons made his school days memorable and attractive. The anecdote of Nagappachar who lauded for compulsory education, left a strong impression Siddalingaiah. Thus, the impression of education is amalgamated in his sense of humour; the humour that predominantly shapes the autobiography.

Siddalingaiah’s thirst grew when people of Srirampura made him read postal letters and rewarded him with little money. The reward and respect deepened his interest in studies. So, he says, “I was equal to god. The honorarium they gave me was very attractive” (Siddalingaiah 34). He did not miss single opportunity to learn and speak. Little rewards and appreciations made him forget his miseries in the society. Education had taken him to new world of hope and future that is flawless.
His uncle Gagamalagiah enriches his dreams when he taught him some oratory skills. Soon he was called an orator by everyone.

The graph of author’s growth is seen only in education. From Megalahatti to Bangalore, Siddalingaiah ever turned back; he just proceeded with the progress. It is through education he does everything. Incidents of Iyer hostel clearly indicate the nuances of an emerging mass leader. We see a protesting Dalit against injustice when older boys snatched ragi ball from young boys. He narrates, “A huge boy, who behaved as though he had found a treasure in me, called me to his side very affectionately. He told me to accept the ‘extra’ and hand it over to him. I turned down his request, saying I would eat any extra mudde myself” (Siddalingaiah 48).

The narrator tactfully uses the incidents of hostel life ad fight for food to explain how even government run Dalit hostels posed the worst situations. Government education facility was available, but at the cost of starvation. Unseen hands were actively working to snub the Dalit students, so that they can only think of food, not education. But for the stubborn Dalit students, who were ready to sacrifice food for the sake of education, always crossed hurdles. Siddalingaiah mentions a story of his friend as an example, who used to sell ice-candy, later becomes a senior official of the Karnataka Government.

_Ooru Keri’s_ strength lies in its selection of incidents. Narrator’s stay in graveyard reveals another change that education had brought; with his extensive reading and poetry writing, he had developed rationality. The rationality propagated him to reject the existence of God. He explains, “By that time I had already lost faith in god. I still suspected that ghosts existed. I used to sit long hours in the middle of the night and to sleep. People living in the extensions adjoining the graveyard believed that ghosts hurled stones on to their roof tops” (Siddalingaiah 71). The rejection of God automatically made him to question the
existence of ghosts. In turn, the sprawling graveyard brought solace where he could compose poetry.

Being educated and influenced by Ambedkar and Periyar, Siddalingaiah began to deliver speeches on Ambedkar and caste system. His attitude towards the religion was rational and he started opposing Hindu beliefs. Therefore, he acquired more knowledge about the orthodox Hinduism and caste system. He and graveyard workers always discussed on the subject of God. They were strong believers of God whereas Siddalingaiah was rationalist. Therefore, they could not accept his argument that God does not exist.

Further, education introduces him to a world that was beyond his imagination. His elaborated reading of Ambedkar and Periyar widened his wisdom. With his sharp and witty oratory skills he had made his place among college students. His association with Leftists places him among then leading politicians and journalists. The saga of Ooru Keri ends with the remarks on the narrator’s education, wherein he receives gold medal in M.A. From Megalahatti school’s little appreciations to Bangalore University’s gold medal, it was education that helped a Dalit in souring to the heights of success.

Thus, all these sufferings in Bangalore as a slum dweller, Dalit student and a factory worker, he has duality in his experiences. He has broader society where he can raise his living standards with hard work. At the same time his birth identity does not leave him, it makes the situation worse by making conscious of his plight.

*The Outcaste* has different and serous story tell about the role of education in Dalits’ lives. It certainly takes the narration from dark to light, but it’s more insightful rather than materialistic. Education played a vital role in creating awareness in the protagonist.

Sharankumar Limbale believed in the Ambedkarite dogma ‘educate, organize and agitate’. These three words exactly resemble the three stages of *The Outcaste*;
childhood or school days, association with Dalit Panthers and social activities. For all this, education forms a basis. That’s why the first chapter opens with his school days. Unlike Ooru Keri, The Outcaste records miserable life of the narrator realistically. There is a serious thought over school education and the author feels blessed for getting education. He is thankful to the availability of education for Dalits, and says, “Thanks to the widening network of primary schools, some of the children from these communities found accidental access to those schools and managed to get glimpse of the glory kept hidden from them for over two thousand years, the glory called the alphabet. It was these children, growing up under the influence of the social awakening initiated by Ambedkar, who gave themselves to writing, like virgin land giving itself to new seeds with fecundity” (Limbale, Outcaste xviii). Schools were the only and absolute gateway to enter the new world. Outside the classroom, there was sheer disappointment as everything was associated with his identity. Sharanamma Gorebala believes, “Education system is the only system that moulds life, brightens future, a humble life that can think of redemption, particularly primary education. But, it is clearly visible how it is into the dreadful possession of rancid orthodoxy” (Malagatti, Charitre 756). Untouchability still existed in schools, yet some dedicated teachers never had discriminatory attitude.

It is school that fetches the author’s due respect to his birth identity. His teacher Bhosale registers Sharan’s father’s name from the first time and calls him ‘patil of Baslegaon’. This makes him to be more devoted to studies. Limbale expresses gratitude, “I owe my father’s name to Bhosale, the headmaster” (Limbale, Outcaste 45). Initially he feels uncomfortable, but later he takes pride in it.
Literacy was not the lone achievement; there were humane and civilized changes in Limbale. During school days, the moral stories left great impression in him once he handed over the money that he found. This act boosted his morale. His teacher appreciated his honesty and highlighted as a pride of the whole school. The support was unbiased; the unbiased support made him to say, “The joy my act of honesty brought me was more precious than those thirty rupees” (The Outcaste 6). With growing education and knowledge, Limbale and his friends were acquainted with modern way of life where untouchability had no place. During holidays visit to home, the conditions at village caused great disappointment. He says, “We hated the very idea of untouchability. With our education, there grew in us a sense of pride. Casteism made us bitter” (Limbale, Outcaste 76). But such thoughts prompted them to fight against the social evils. The self pride was the first step towards the change caused by education in the lives Dalits.

The self-consciousness of a Dalit individual or Dalit community in these autobiographies came in the face of modernity where specific objectivities are formed. Modernity came to India accompanied by colonialism where modernity and caste systems were intermediated. The haunting brand of ‘criminal tribe’ makes The Branded unique in its nature. During 1970s and 80s, the growing Dalit movement created a space for Dalit identity in Maharashtra. Mass communication, transportation, technology made the awareness spread easily and quickly. Dalits across the country started to assert themselves ‘Dalits’, they could identify their existing problems and their nature. Gaikwad tells, “Everyone in this community feels smothered and suffocated in the social environment in which he or she is forced to live. I often give voice to their plight, their trial and tribulations through lectures and discussions. I know that my people need to be educated and taught to think” (Malagatti, Brahmaṇa vii). His acknowledgement of his identity
with his community, his reflections on the plight of his people, and his desire to step-up with the changing world is explicit throughout the autobiography.

On one side Gaikwad sees modern world and its promise to enrich the lives, on the other side he sees shackles of caste identity. The Branded shows such duality of Dalits beautifully. The Branded gives a clear example of the colonial construction of the nomadic tribes, lower class and out castes. It was during the British Raj that the Uchalyas were branded as ‘criminals’. Even after independence they were denied rehabilitation. “The education, economics, religion and politics of the mainstream society never touched to them. They were automatically pushed into the dark world of superstitions, of ignorance and of primitive norms of wild justice. The Uchalya community therefore is reduced to outcaste lower than the lowest untouchables and thrown on the margins of the social hierarchical structure” (Ambhore and Masure 29).

But, change in lifestyle and attitude brought Gaikwad an internal shift that made him feels what is to live like a common man. He remembers, “I began to say that eating crabs, fish, pigs everyday was sin. I began to observe Fridays and Saturdays in Shravan months as fasting days. There was one behind one reason behind all these activities. Of all the people in our community I alone was received in houses, touched, spoken so gently and well-treated. Nobody was ever treated with dignity. I felt proud that I was being treated with dignity” (Limbale, Outcaste 83).

Having tasted the life out of circle, his self-consciousness always battered for the change in the lives of his community people. His self-consciousness becomes a collective one. Therefore, at the end of his autobiography he declares, “Now my obsession is to seek various ways in which to foster and strengthen tribal movements intellectually so that a complete transformation can be achieved of the
Nomadic, and Denotified Tribes, the Scheduled Castes, and the exploited and downtrodden underdogs” (Limbale, *Outcaste* 233).

Apart from education, modernity enters into the lives of Dalits through urbanization. The form of village and keri, social order of rural India has been suffocating for Dalits. But, urban atmosphere brings new aura of modernity through different opportunities; the opportunities are open to all in urban area, whereas in rural area everything is controlled by upper caste or landlords. Here, the word ‘urban’ doesn’t just confine to city culture, but also it refers to change in attitude from tradition to innovation. Hence, contextually urbane means both modern attitude and migration from villages to city atmosphere. The shift from village to urban creates a situation where Dalits are put across new difficulties to face.

Malagatti and Gaikwad refer to urbanization as an aspect of modernity in various ways and incidents in their autobiographies. Invariably, both achieve this point of life only after basic education in their respective places. They move away from their birth places to seek new destiny and status. Urbanity provides great opportunity for the betterment of the authors’ lives with socio-economic support. They change their living conditions, ideology, and also attitude towards society. The wound of suffering gets neglected for a while. But, the stigma of their caste doesn’t leave them; it keeps following like a witch-hunter.

Inability to handle gifts of urbanization increases the grief of Dalits. Malagatti narrates the idea ironically, “Appa had brought zero machine for cutting hair. My brothers fought for the chance to cut hair with it.... ended up being hit hard against the wall, losing its teeth. It was as they say, ‘Breaking teeth during the very first kiss’” (Malagatti, *Government Brahmana* 108). Old scythe was replaced by the machine, and this modern technology worsens the situation between the brothers instead of helping them cut their hair. One may not take the incident
seriously, but it hints subtly at the consequences when Dalits embrace urbane qualities. Malagatti’s ability to see the human suffering through mild tone is excellently displayed throughout the autobiography.

The clash between tradition and modernity is blurred in *Government Brahmana* due to its subtle and mild tone while telling the author’s experience. Even a grave incident is presented with light humour. When he was studying for the exams under the street lights by unknown mongers? He deviates the issue of unhappiness to a light matter by mentioning two Muslim women who were smoking and roaming on streets at midnight. When his reading was troubled by some saboteurs, he wanted a match a lamp. This incident has grimness but turned into a negligible incident when he meets two smoking men but they happened to be Muslim women. He says that he enjoyed a hearty laugh over that. He did not discuss this with anybody. When the street lamp went out repeatedly, the memory of this incident surfaced in his mind.

The above mentioned anecdote is explained explicitly in *The Branded* with extended explanation of incidents of Gaikwad’s life. He narrates his life incidents in dichotomy; rural and urban life. Both sides reflect his struggle to gain his Dalit identity. Having experienced the traditional and modern worlds, Gaikwad comments that the entire society lives a hypocritical and snobbish life, which is section wise within the framework developed exclusively for each divided section. All the developmental plans aim at socio-political-economical equality, so is the urbanization process. People from villages have been migrating to cities with the same hope. Yet, for Dalits place doesn’t matter. Gaikwad starts to work in Latur while attending high school. He gains good respect from everybody, goes to other community friends’ house, learns the mannerism. He feels esteemed when he stays in Latur, and is addressed as Laxman Gaikwad and that too by Maratha boys. He felt that he had risen in status. But it is his old costumed village where people tease
him saying, “Fucking hell! This Pathrut’s boy now moves about dressed like a sahib” (Gaikwad 115). Orthodox villages never accept him as a changed man with the effect of urban culture.

Both the narrators share their experiences of a new world which is full of hypocrisy yet offers good things to Dalits. This modern aspect gives hopes to poor and simultaneously the same poor and Dalits are caught between the modern world of hopes and orthodox society and caste system. The narrators carry heaviness in their hearts after witnessing nakedness of urban culture, the teen age and growing minds see this side of the world in an ironic way. Malagatti juxtaposes hypocrisy of urban women and natural life of rural women by referring to Mangalore incident, where the startling difference is that, while the village women smoked without any embarrassment, he saw this liberated attitude among ladies of the city, which has made him smile at their hypocrisy. He feels awkward looking at the changes in the modern entity. Such incidents make him think of his childhood rather than moving with the changing times.

But Gaikwad puts forth his confusion over modernity of city life. Though he gains self esteem and confidence in Latur, he is also disturbed by the daylight robbery by the elite class and the bureaucracy. He is astonished to see the gap between poor and rich which is not less than any caste discrimination. He tells how the modern world was invisible to the Uchalya community in order to keep them underdog. The disgust of unjust is, perhaps expressed in indirect symbols like pig, imagery of slaves and unhygienic way of life.

When he joins as a peon in the Latur Municipality, he refers to Octroi post where from lower to high rank government workers cheat and take money in underhand deals. Municipality offers him immediate economical requirements, but being an awakened Dalit, it was difficult for him to take bribe which was unjust. He says, “Even highly placed officers in the Municipality stoop to fraud and
underhand dealings. I often thought of how people of my community who stole only for their two daily meals, were punished as thieves. These big officers defraud their organizations and institutions in broad daylight; yet no one says a word against them. I began to become conscious of such anomalies” (Gaikwad 177). He recalls the torments that had befallen on his family men and women who were being forced to steal just fill their stomach. As a result, police received promotion by catching such ‘criminals’, village Patils filled their treasury, and society took great pride in ill-treating such ‘branded’ people. Hence, Balachandra Phadke calls The Branded a work that “stirs up a hornet’s nest with questions” (Phadke 223-24). In this way Gaikwad expresses his anguish brought by modern world in his life. He was trying to seek a new in life in the modern world, in turn the same new world kept reminding him what and who he was.

The process of urbanization has direct impact on The Outcaste and Ooru Keri. Ooru Keri has the first impact with constant migration from Megalahatti to Macnhanabel, to Magadi, then to Bangalore. Appagere Somashekar aptly says, “The heralds of life will influence one’s experience, thoughts, and ground. Due to his father’s miserable conditions, Siddalingaiah is forced to move to Bangalore. As a child he observes various wonders of the city life and responds to them in amazement” (Malagatti, Charitre 766). In this process of migration, Siddalingaiah’s life gradually moves from village to urban world. The new world offers new opportunities along with new challenges. His first experience with urban world is told when he hears the story of Gandhi. For him Gandhi had been God, but his grandfather opens his imaginative mind. The difference between old and new world is visible clearly when the narrator’s family moves into Srirampura. Narrator experiences unseen and unheard things. But nowhere he and none question his identity in that locality as urban world hardly is bothered about one’s
caste identity. Yet, he expresses his uneasiness, “Several events, of the sort I had never heard of or seen before took place” (Siddalingaiah 23).

The *Outcaste* too explores the modernity in Sharankumar Limbale’s urban life. The region of Akkalkot could hardly be called an urban area in 1970’s and 80’s. But as it is near to Sholapur, and railway connectivity, the process of urbanization paved way to Dalits’ emancipation. Limbale’s journey from Baslegaon to Latur is a result of constant struggle in life; the struggle offered both ups and downs.

Limbale’s family lived in a village that was moving towards modernity slowly. His grandfather’s porter job description pasteurizes the urban shades that came in the form of bus. The author says, “We depended on daily wages. Dada, who was a porter, was the only earning member. His earnings, though small, were all we had. If we earned any money we’d have something to eat—that was our life” (Limbale, *Outcaste* 40). But it was not a permanent solution, because everything depended on the arrival of bus and its passengers.

Real challenges of urban world are seen when Limbale gets transferred from Ahmedpur to Latur. Though Latur is a town of limited industry, it clearly demarks the caste and class identity. He says, “I went to Latur. I faced the problem of finding a house in new town and my caste followed me like an enemy. Latur was such a big place with huge buildings, houses and bungalows, but I was turned away wherever I went. They said frankly, ‘we don’t want to rent out our house to Muslims and Mahars’. Should I put this town to the torch? Such a big town—but I could not get a single room. Every town and person was caste conscious.” (Limbale, *Outcaste* 106). In order to lead life, he had to use his name and live like a Brahmin, he was a Dalit who had become a Brahmin by attitude, but high caste
Hindus did not allow him to stand at their doorsteps. Even urban world, it is his Dalit community that provides shelter to him.

A common and convenient criterion to assess the modern values of a society is to see the standards of living of an individual. A healthy society will have minimum or basic needs accomplished at the grassroots’ level. Economic condition is the most deterring factor in one’s life, economic factor of human life is as important as that of the political, religious or even social sphere in a society if only one section enjoys good standard, then it will not be called a modern society; it is an imbalance of wealth. If a person at the lowest strata of a society enjoys an equal share of any standard then the society may claim the Utopian crown. Progress in the standards of living is another important shade of modernity that shaped the Dalit experience.

With constant efforts of the governmental institutions as well as individuals, Dalits have been successfully raising their standards to place themselves equally with others in the modern world. The emancipator deeds, government policies and organizational activism since the colonial period have been fruitful. The positive outcome hasn’t been for Dalits as they have had to sacrifice a great deal; few generations have paid for this standard of living. Dalit autobiographies reveal such harsh truth of human existence.

In course of improving their sub-human standards to modern standards of living, Dalit autobiographies show the compatibility of both appraisal and downfall. The face-off of such varying experiences of Dalits can be seen since their school days. The boy who uttered, “Let it be, we are at least certain of getting daily meals. That is enough for me” (Malagatti, Government Brahmana 72,) goes up to exclaim, “Now my obsession is to ... foster and strengthen tribal movements intellectually...” (Malagatti, Government Brahmana 233) to achieve the
complacence of intellectual hunger. Raising standards at intellectual level would be the sole remedy to the sufferings of Dalits.

The government’s schemes or the promises of political leaders would be dismal. Due vote-bank tactic, politicians have been using the Dalits’ cause to reach their political goals. The reservation policy, developmental schemes or momentary subsidies subdue the thirst for liberty of Dalits. Hence, Dalits need to raise their living standards by demanding what they want, not what others provide for political gain. That’s why Gaikwad mentions his experience and says:

I feel that not a single problem of the Nomadic and Denotified Tribes has been yet been solved. Even today the attitude of political and social leaders is vitiating by double standards and prejudiced criteria only because I and my community have been branded criminals socially and legally.... With a sweet tongue they use and exploit me for their social and political ends proclaiming that a worker from a Nomadic and Denotified Tribe is working shoulder to shoulder and on an equal footing with them. This is nothing but kind of deceptive exploitation. (Gaikwad 222-23)

Therefore, modernity has not been a bed of roses; it has been harsh reality in the way of achieving equality. Modernity has been controlled by the rich and the upper caste folk who never want to give up the advantage of the novel position called ‘provider’ to the trodden. To attain a life of well-to-do is great task for Dalits even today.

Yet, these autobiographies register some incidents that have been on par with legendary stories. A person achieving little success without any good social ground would be a great leap in a subaltern history. So, Malagatti praises his father who gained little education later teaching job, thus, “Appa’s journey through education is story of valour, akin to smashing mountain to pieces! Or drinking up an entire ocean!” (Malagatti, Government Brahmana 110-111). Therefore, his
father’s attempt to climb the ladder of success has certainly paid off in the form of *Government Brahma*, where the author has set his own modern standards in Kannada literature. As a Dalit writer, Malagatti has set a standard to others, and showed modernity can be tamed and used for the upliftment of Dalits.

If one cannot raise one’s hand, one should raise one’s standards. Whenever Dalits raised their voice against unlawful actions, they were put down in various ways. As the whole social structure is defined and maintained according to the needs of upper caste people, Dalits did not have chance to fight against them; whenever they fought they were suppressed brutally. So, “Evaluation of any work of art is a subjective process. Gaikwad would like *Uchalya* to be evaluated sociologically rather than literarily” (Pathak 155). When Laxman Gaikwad gains the faith of co-workers in Mill and installs strength in them to fight for the cause of labours, he is suppressed by the management through the suspension. He endorses failure not because of his inability, but due to his social and class background, which needs to be discerned through.

He shares his one of the grievances during his changing standards of life like this, “Most of the workers knew that these were the deliberate Machiavellian tricks of the management. The management tried to rig the representatives into disrepute and let loose divisive forces among the workers. Looking for the proper opportunities they began to issue memos to the representatives. Their guns were initially trained on me” (Malagatti, *Brahmana* 163). Finally, he was made victim by dividing the union workers. He was thrown out of the Mill permanently. He sets up different stalls like grocery and tea. He never gave up the fighting spirit which he had achieved in the modern times; he is still fighting for the cause of his Uchalya community.

Change in the standards of Dalits’ lives in *The Outcaste* and *Ooru Keri* gives an interesting turn. Both Limbale and Siddalingaiah do not sustain tolerance
towards indiscipline; they adopt Ambedkar’s ideas of raising standards of life. Education and communication with other world made them conscious about their life style. They realized that they need little discipline in order to modernize themselves. Limbale says, “During my college days, whenever I visited my village during vacations, I was bored. I could not tolerate the filth in my house. I had lost interest in the dreary village. It depressed me” (Limbale, Outcaste 90). Filth was part of Dalits lives, but time has changed and pariah houses are no more disgusting. They have consciously accepted modern world.

Siddalingaiah spreads awareness of sanitation, health and education by quoting the life incidents of Ambedkar in his speeches. He teaches children in slums voluntarily though parents opposed it. Siddalingaiah had complete faith in education which would bring changes in Dalits lives.

Change in standards of one’s life is closely associated with job opportunities or economical status. But for Siddalingaiah, being a Dalit it was not easy. The fourth part “Factory Worker” emphatically spreads light on the challenges he faces. As his family size was growing and poverty was gripping their lives, he decided to work during summer holidays. He joins Dhondusa factory but fails in it. At the same time he is given the work of cleaning in a wedding ceremony. Then he says, “We were to work under the cook” (Siddalingaiah 69). Poverty compels him to work in odd situations and makes him feels shy of his own identity. So, he smudges his face with soot in order to avoid to be recognised.

In The Outcaste, incidents in Latur disturb Limbale completely. While working in telephone department, he was caught between Lingayats and Dalits. Dalits would beat for being a Lingayat during social unrest conditions, and Lingayats would beat him for hiding his identity and using a Lingayat’ surname. It shows that caste remains a paramount factor in India. As long as neighbors are not aware of a person’s caste, a Dalit is safe and things will be fine. The moment they
find out the caste particularly that of Dalithood, everything changes. Dalits are emerging as an indispensable force in India today but their problems have not changed. Regarding this, Bhagwan Das comprehends the livelihoods of Dalits today, “A professor, a lawyer, a doctor, an architect born in untouchable family is considered inefficient and inferior without even seeing his performance” (Das 58). One side the job brought him hopes, other side it brought risks of losing life. Therefore, industrial society offered modernity at the same time unseen dangers to Dalits.

Homogenization of subalterns has been the most important modern aspect in our times. Due to numerous reasons Dalits and working class people lived an unorganised life. The social forces tend towards a uniformity of cultural ideas. The governments had initiated the modernization process and created space for the emergence of Dalit subjectivity in a hitherto historically alienated mass of people. The shift is the in the hidebound socio-economic and political power structure which has enabled the Dalits to detach themselves from the traditional social relations and move along the newly opened channels of education and capitalization.

In the process of moving from old social structure of villages to new capitalist world, many educated Dalits experienced great humiliation. Education helped them in expressing those moments of humiliation posed by the modern trends. B.M. Puttaiah says, “Dalits, who were caught between Capitalist intellectuality and ferocious forces of crude, inhuman experiences, were compelled to create Dalit literature. Its basic motivation was to unite the literate as well illiterate Dalits through civic movements” (Sankramana 35). Thus, literature became a major tool in bringing the scattered poor and subalterns together under political and social roof.
The Dalits’ political mobilization and their just impetration for equal opportunities forced the state institutions to respond to the Dalits’ fair demands for material upliftment. But not in full measure, for the state began to trim its welfare expenditure on Dalits, playing down its importance. The Dalits relationship with the welfare state thus had elements of contradiction. This contradiction itself became an instrument for quickening of Dalit consciousness. The agents of these contradictions were, primarily, the ruling upper castes and landlords. Wielding power in the state for decades, their perennial endeavour to stabilize and consolidate their position.

The endeavour took two forms. First, the great majority of Dalits were forced to remain confined to the occupations traditionally enforced on them by the casteist Hindu society, like scavenging, leather work and bonded labour. Even a mild protest from the alienated Dalits met with indescribable violence from members of the upper castes. Second, the educated Dalits who had been incorporated and absorbed into the state institutions through reservation, and who could have led their Dalits brethren to autonomy, were marginalized and discriminated against, in keeping with the Hindu social order which as an inherent cast-class bias. Gaikwad was treated in a similar way, and he wrote, “I learnt that workers like me ever try to assume prominence in the political field, they are vilified, disgraced and reduced to worthless nobodies. Such workers who form the lowest rung of society are publicly denounced as evil persons and finally tied down like slaves just as cattle are tethered to pegs” (Malagatti, Government Brahmana 231). The victimizing of such individuals because of one’s caste around us ruthlessly increases bitter experience, which is affecting the health of society.

The result was that both the Dalits working inside the state apparatus and those who were merely members of the civil society developed an antagonistic relationship with the welfare state. This perspective of the Dalits towards a State
that was unsympathetic to their plight and aspirations, and which in fact endeavoured to suppress their struggle for emancipation brought about the Dalits’ collective resistance; what was called the Dalit collective consciousness. Dalits “brought alive the struggles of various castes and communities, threw into relief their resistance to the hegemonic caste system and the tremendous upheaval that was taking place as a result” (Maya Xvi); the result was the humanization of various Dalit groups and their mobilization into a humongous force.

Both *The Outcaste* and *Ooru Keri* talk about mobilization of Dalits in their own way. But *Ooru Keri* shows more concern in Dalit mobilization than *The Outcaste*. Except first and second part, remaining three parts of *Ooru Keri* deal with the various efforts by Siddalingaiah to mobilize masses. In fact, *Ooru Keri* is the story of a Dalit who organizes the whole Dalit community into one mainstream. Four things help him in this difficult task. First, his extensive reading and public debates on various issues have been complimentary to each other, and helped him to mobilize the mass. Second, his association with senior friends and professors like GSS lead him to have constant churning of thought which helped him widening his wisdom. Third, his involvement in political and socio-cultural organization like DSS, Communist Party, strengthened him to bring all Dalits under one roof. Therefore, *Ooru Keri* is a saga of Dalits mobilization.

In contrast, *The Outcaste* has little to do with the mobilization of Dalits. The narrator, Limbale, is influenced by dalit Panthers. In Latur he always maintains a safe distance from the organization. His identity and its related mental duality caused him to keep such distance. But, it did not stop him from the process of mass mobilization. Initially he focuses on his personal life. Later, he plunges into the activities of Dalit mass mobilization. Hanumanagouda comments, “It is recorded as though it is not just his pain, but it is the story of whole community’s pain, injustice and exploitation. Though Sharankumar Limbale is haunted by the
inferiority and sham of being the son of prostitute, he dares to overcome through the writing *The Outcaste*” (Malagatti, *Charitre* 859-60). He initiates to spread the Ambedkarite philosophy, and unites them to strengthen the cause of Dalit Panthers. He does this work from his house and village first, then in the whole state. Yet, *The Outcaste* is more about Dalit individual’s identity related story than a Dalit mass leader.

Perhaps even more important that this external political process in bringing about Dalit consciousness was the Dalits’ study and absorption of Ambedkar’s thought. Post-independence Dalit activity was highlighted by the Republican Party of India and massive growth of youth organizations calling themselves Ambedkar yuvajan sanghs. Gaikwad’s association with Dalit Panther and his found ‘organization’ is still a living example of Dalit organizations.

For Malagatti, the creation of the Dalit Sangarsha Samiti was a radical departure from the past and definitive shift in Dalit consciousness. The DSS acquired within itself the potentials of being a self-activating historical agency of social change and a vehicle of economical dawn. These potentials could not be seen from political spectacles; they were key issues in amassing the Dalits towards emancipation. As Malagatti himself claims, “The two factors that shaped the writing in this book are: the Dalit Sangarsha Samiti (DSS) and my anna” (Malagatti, *Brahmana* 115). DSS entered into a process of forming a collective identity and from a formative sporadic spontaneous movement transformed itself into an organization.

The emication of Dalit identity spread along with the name Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his thoughts. His thoughts inspired all Dalits to come together and proclaim their equal rights. As it is mentioned in the introduction, homogenization was not complete in every sense, differences were there on the ground that how to
counter the oppression. To mention one of the perspectives, Eva-Maria Hardtmann says:

The contemporary Dalit activists declare themselves to belong within the tradition of Ambedkar and the Dalit Panthers, but there are variations within the movement... three influential perspectives within the movement to show the heterogeneity and also the geographical spread of the movement. The three perspectives are: first, Dalit Buddhism which originated in Maharashtra in western India; second, Dalit (Christian) theology with its roots in the south of India; and finally the perspective of Dalits politics as represented by the BSP, with a stronghold in India, mainly in Uttar Pradesh. (Hardtmann 88)

Dalit consciousness in the socio-political context of our society was also moulded by the Dalits’ interaction with various political organizations and movements. Many political parties and organizations tried to defuse the movement with its political strategy of mass integration through confusing ideologies. Malagatti beautifully captures the rapture of the high sounding ideologies and comments:

Bandaya, the revolt form constituted by the Dalit and the non-Dalits, though full of contradictions, is unique. While meat eating, drinking, smoking and other such habits were seen as being progressive by non-Dalits, getting rid of such habits marked progressiveness for Dalits. In a sense, the friendship between Dalits and other Bandaya people is like that of a friendship between a tiger and an elephant.... Such relationship is unimaginable in a system like in India. That society warmed up to this adventure is unprecedented. Nurturing such bold amidst theoretical contradiction is indeed unique, but the strength of the bond is debatable. (Malagatti, Brahmana 96)
But the cause was the same; to see all Dalits unified by blurring the lines of difference. And the two autobiographies have expressed such minute details excellently.

Meanwhile, the two autobiographies do not deal with modernity or aspects of modernity in the same manner. On one hand it brought prosperity, new hope of a new world where there is less importance of caste, economical independency and political space. On other hand, they posed new challenges; challenges that were alien to Dalits who were illiterate or sometimes little learned. Though the autobiographies bewray the dualism, their approach in unveiling is different. The dualism of modernity is an outcome of free trade, capitalist as well as socialist policies of different governments. The duality resulted in disaster in the lives of Dalits who faced it after little formal education. The autobiographies “deal not only with the institution of caste as a means of oppression, but also show how economic deprivation and poverty go hand in hand with caste determination” (Paul 67).

In *The Branded*, Gaikwad explores his experience with the modern world directly by narrating incidents that brought about great changes in his life. With little education and grand dreams of liberal life, he migrates to town to see another face of oppression in disguise.

With his grown Dalit consciousness and collective responsibility towards his nomadic tribe, he carefully selects incidents and hatches his autobiography to mark his rebellious attitude towards the deceitful modernity. Gaikwad gives the crude pictures of his experience in cotton mills and bureaucratic domain, without much sophistication in his presentation. This way of narration perhaps is used deliberately to show his little formal education. He does not merely anecdotes the details that make him suffer, he sharply reacts by telling how he chooses and handles the modernity that came in his way; his association with Dalit
organizations and constant subdued fight against discrepancy. He sets an exemplary life story to other Dalits who feel unmotivated to face modern world.

Malagatti’s face off with modernity is visible in a decent or subtle way. He rather responds to it than reacting. It means, being a well educated and well nurtured Dalit individual among Communist and Bandaya scholars, he uses incidents that mark a careful observation. He never uses names of individuals to avoid head-to-head clash in order to take the clash between Dalits and modernity to an elevated level. Rehamath Tharikere looks at this aspect the *Government Brahmana* and analyses that the aim of the autobiography is neither to gain the sympathy of the readers nor to narrate his unique experiences and create distractedness and amazement. Malagatti just wants to place the “inhuman system on hot tin by telling his journey of struggle unfastened or impassively” (Malagatti, *Marga* 392).

He uses images like buffalo and dogs to indicate the intricacies of social fabric, but when it comes to modern aspects, he represents his life incidents directly, with acceptable changes, to keep the unbiased truth intact. His fight with modernity is not concrete or materialistic like that of Gaikwad’s. He disposes the underneath masks of modern ideologies that make Dalits suffer at most. The historical proclamation of governmental institutions about the emancipation of Dalits and poor is not as innocent as it is displayed to the world. *Government Brahmana* is a literary attempt to expose the modernity that has pushed Dalits into a state of confusion with little opportunities. Malagatti tries to explain that modernity is an endless cate to power holders, a morsel to Dalits. *Government Brahmana* varies in its approach in dealing with the modernity in contrast with *The Branded*. Aravind Malagatti is different from Gaikwad due to his cultural, economical and educational background. Unlike Laxman Gaikwad, Malagatti is graduated from Karnataka University, Dharwad, his father was a school
teacher, his elder brother was already a graduate, and economically he was unequal to Gaikwad. Therefore, his experience with modernity seems to be different. As it is mentioned earlier, both the autobiographies talk about human suffering, but in different style.

As a prolonged part of mobilization, the two autobiographies deal with another modern element called Dalit consciousness. The whole purpose of writing autobiography, for a Dalit, was to awaken and assert the Dalit consciousness. Again, per se, Ooru Keri excels in creating the consciousness. From the hostel days itself, Siddalingaiah undertakes the work of creating awareness among Dalits. Ooru Keri registers such aspect first in page number 43 when a Dalit student was given sacred thread and was asked to give up non-vegetarian food. But the boy denounces all rituals, and the narrator says, “A boy who had received such a thread was eating meat at military hotel. Some people objected to. “It is this thread that puts me in trouble”, he said, yanked it out angrily, and used it to stitch his tattered clothes” (Siddalingaiah 61). Meanwhile, at every stage of this task, Siddalingaiah was being encouraged by his own successful deeds. In this process, D. R. Nagarj, Sa Shi Marulaiah, G. S. Siddalingaiah, P. Lankesh and G. S. Shivarudrappa supported his cause in their own way.

The beauty of Ooru Keri is that the narrator nowhere directly talks about Dalit consciousness. Through incidents he indicates the essence of his public work. By slightly distorting the major and serious issues, he tries to overcome all these issue. It is an innovative way of presenting hunger and humiliation. Smile and laughter overshadow the sorrowful experiences. That’s the reason D. R. Nagaraj calls Ooru Keri ‘the strength of poor people’s laughter’.

Siddalingaiah offers a powerful, alternate perspective. He affirms his selfhood without a trace of resentment towards vicious social games while also
quietly doubting the value of the very things prized in those games. A philosophy for liberation of the self is present in the book in unarticulated form; it requires careful interpretation.

The autobiography is also a tacit consideration of the ethics and aesthetics of memory. It silently engages with two big questions: Why must we remember painful incidents? How should we remember them? A struggle for social justice is not complete if the hearts of the hardhearted are not changed. Always subtle, Siddalingaiah’s comments never offend. Addressing everyone as a member of a moral community, the entire autobiography is a gentle moral suasion. Siddalingaiah briefly describes events and situations, makes us see the pain in human relations and moves on without anxiety towards eliciting the “right” responses in the reader.

In case of *The Outcaste*, Limbale expresses his anxiety over is first experience when he tried to deal with Dalit consciousness. When he returns to his village where he is mocked by the villagers. Yet, he and his friend went around with great confidence. He says, ‘Those days… lot’ (*Limbale, Outcaste* 76). This unusual strength of being Dalit and claiming the identity with great pride was possible with Ambedkar’s philosophy. Limbale’s Dalit consciousness is introvert. Throughout the autobiography, the reckoning questions related to his birth propel the readers to think over the plight of Dalits. Perhaps, Limbale’s intention was more than what reader expects, it seems as though he wanted to create awareness among Dalits and non-Dalits by writing *The Outcaste*.

After few years of modernization in his life, Limbale answers all the questions that tormented his childhood. Class and caste were the main causes behind his suffering. *The Outcaste* is not the story of Limbale; his life is seen through the experience of his mother. Major portion of the autobiography is the story of Dalit women of Maharashtra. Dalit critic, Raj Kumar explains:
*The Outcaste*, Limbale… talks exclusively about how Mahar women were being sexually exploited by the upper caste Marathas. It was rather a strange social practice in Maharashtra and other parts of India that Dalit girls, just after attaining puberty, were kept by the upper caste landlords to satisfy their lust. It was almost a customary service for all Dalit families throughout Maharashtra to give their daughters to the upper caste Patils for their sexual needs. In return, these young women were given shelter with few provisions to live in. These women were simply kept as their concubines. (Kumar, *Narratives* 185)

As a result compulsive detachment from the reality and outer world, Dalit men and women had been kept away so that few numbered upper caste people can own the power in every domain. Elements of modernity were completely controlled by the people who had power. It was made easy for the upper caste people as the authority of injustice vested with them was being sanctioned by religious doctrines. Being direct victim of such heinous practice, his anger is expressed through literature. It may not be a message or warning or yearning, it is an attempt to solve various issues that troubled him. He keeps on questioning himself and the society about his birth, rights, caste, class, and injustice; some questions are answered, some remain unanswered.

The four autobiographies access space to their voice by exposing sleazy society. Though we boast of living in the post-modern era, many tribal and depressed classes live under the shadow of murky conditions. The changing time has certainly brought new rays of hope, at the same time, its challenges are strange to us, and we are not well prepared to face them. Again, to be optimistic, one can witness drastic changes among Dalits due to creeping modern elements into their life. Unfortunately, it is also visible in the four autobiographies that those elements
are confined to urbane world; villages, where depressed classes in majority, are kept out of this changing world.
References


