Chapter – IV

Change in the Life-styles of Dalits

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

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

Ambedkar’s speech at Mahad Satyagraha brought about a revolution among the untouchables. Their thoughts and behaviour began to change. They began to take part in meetings and conferences in large numbers. Dalit
organizations were formed. Dalits began to speak with vigour at meetings and conferences. They went on processions and became active in the movement. We cannot forget that Ambedkar’s liberal voices on Dalits were a motivating force behind this transformation of untouchables. (Pawar and Moon: 158).

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was a big school. The children living in the hostel wore the same uniform. They wore smart clothes and possessed all sorts of finery like jewels and wrist-watches. She thought they were probably from upper caste families. She painfully recalls the news commenting on the Dalit Children thus “Look at the Cheri children. When they stay here, they eat their fill and look as round as
potatoes. But look at the state in which they came back from home-just skin and bone” (Karukku: 17-18).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bama realized that she would not live a life of duplicity. Having realized that there was no connection between the ‘Convent’s God’ and the suffering poor, Bama’s mind was tormented. Completely alienated from her environment, Bama decided to leave the order. But “how long can one play-act this way? Any way it
was not possible for me. I had to leave the order come into the world” (Karukku: 93). Bama thus “leaves one community (or religious women) in order to join another (as a Dalit Women)”. (Holmstrom 2000: IX). Having come out of the religious order, Bama felt a sense of fulfillment belonging to the community of Dalit women.

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

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

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

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

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

Now the educated Dalits are behaving exactly as the upper-caste villagers used to behave then. The educated Dalits occupy top positions in the Government. Their children enjoy the good life. They are not bothered about what’s happening to poor people. Whatever they do, they do only for themselves. The poor Dalits are left where they were. At least that’s what I feel (Kamble: 124).
Kamble’s contribution to the Ambedkarite Movement cannot be sidelined. Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon appreciated the outstanding work done by Dalit women for the growth of the Ambedkarite movements. They interviewed all the Dalit women who were instrumental in the movement. Urmila Pawar’s *Amhihi Itihas Ghadawala* focuses on the involvement of women in various Dalit struggles from the early twentieth century drawing on diverse sources. This book also throws light on how the social change took place in society with the entry of Dalit women in the fold. This book takes about the participation and contribution of Dalit women in various Dalit struggles from the early twentieth century.

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

In Narendra Jadhav’s *Outcaste* (2002), he describes various life situations in different places. From village Ozar to Bombay in his village, he grew as a Mahar who challenged the daily indignities inflicted on him. His forefathers performed the Annual Yeskar duties such as announcing deaths, tending to
carcasses of cattle in the village, running as a human pilot forming at the mouth ahead of the carriages of Government officials, singing their praises, in return for being allowed to beg from house to house, careful not to touch the hand that gave alms. In his village, he was discriminated by caste system. He was persecuted by a revenue officer. He refused to perform Yeskar duty and he escaped from a small village at Ozar in Maharastra to the city of Mumbai to escape persecution as a participant in Baba Saheb Ambedkar’s social movements. He was reluctant to perform Yeskar duties. He was inspired by speeches of Ambedkar. His speeches changed Damu’s life styles. He stressed more on moral education and self-dignity in his speeches. Ambedkar’s slogan ‘Educate, Organize and Agitate’ reached most of the Dalits.

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

Once again, I began going to the station, doing all sorts of odd jobs. Slowly, people started recognizing me and got to know me better. A man
named Gangaram hired me to sell news papers. I earned 5 annas the first day, and thus began a new phase in my life (Outcaste: 91).

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

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

I want my children to grow up and have a dignified life, I want them be respected and I am sending them to school just as Baba Saheb had said….. and if they remain Hindus, they will never have a respectable place in society. I will see to it that my children don’t have to suffer like we have. (Outcaste: 174)
So we would give his children an education with the inspiration of Baba Saheb’s teaching. Then Baba Saheb’s called the Dalits to renounce Hinduism because it does not allow the untouchables to enter temples. All the Dalit Community had to embrace Buddhism. “Buddhism has no priestly class and certainly nobody is considered untouchables. There are no rituals or rites. You only focus your heart and your devotion”.

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

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

Damu’s youngest son Janu describes his experiences during his school days, when he went to Marathi medium school. The English language was offered
only at middle school level. When he was in primary school, his elder siblings used to practice English at home. His brother Janu taught him English alphabets. It was a big challenge for him to decipher the words by reading them letter by letter.

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

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

In 1955, the port trust offered Damu new Quarters in another part of Wadala. The new house was larger and it was connected with electricity. So the children could study. The colony had a self sufficient community and cultural
centre and this also provided a study room. They lived comfortably like they did at Juna Wadala along with other people. With the help of education, they changed their poor living conditions to comfortable and dignified life style.

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

Another autobiography is Vasanth Moon’s *Growing up Untouchables in India* (2002) which discusses the various stages of the writer’s personal life. The nature of social protest has been examined in its various dimensions through this research work. Dalits fight against such caste discrimination, poverty, and illiteracy. During my research, I have tried to trace the social transformation that occurred with the help of education. They have shown tremendous strength and potential in fighting against the harsh patriarchal norms from upper caste. Dalits are inspired by revolutionary Ambedkarite movements and social movements in India. Dalits have received educational avenues created by Indian constitution. Dalits educated themselves and changed their life styles and reformed their community with their writings. Vasanth Moon’s autobiography presents us with a
collective memory of caste oppression and struggle in India. Moon’s autobiography reveals about his life experience in his village professions and increased mobility. Through the educational opportunities, Moon eloquently describes growing up in his Vasti (neighbourhood), a Dalit slum, in the city of Nagpur in Central Maharastra. Moon recalls his childhood days when he registered in the first grade at Sitabandi Normal School. His grandfather taught him the English alphabet in the first year. A government school student went there to get training as teacher. In the second grade, Mr. Dhole taught him to write the multiplication tables. He studied up to fourth grade in that school. At that time, the Mahar leaders of Vidarbha came to visit Maharwada. Among them were Laxmana Rao Ogale and Dasharath Patil who were the leaders of Vidharba.

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

In 1935, Ambedkar called for conversion from Hinduism. Some Dalit activists in the community read the Janatha, Ambedkar’s newspaper. All news
papers would come to the Dalit organizations. The Samata Sainik Dal people would gather in the evening and discuss renouncing of the Hinduism.

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

When Moon started going to the Ambedkarite movements and social reform movements, Dalit organization such as Samata Sainik Dal held its meetings in the fields in front of Maharpura. This branch was established around 1938 by Asaram Paithankar, Sadanand Dongare. The whole community gathered every evening on the field. Panduranga Varade had a flag and a bamboo stick. The Dal Soldiers would take this and go to the Dal field. They would use an iron pole. The bamboo was raised up on the pole, and they would put a rope through a hook on its end to raise the flag. All the soldiers of the Dal would stand in ranks before the flag. They would do it every day in the community. From school children to young man, everybody would come to the Dal. There was also strict discipline, the flag symbolized Dalits’ pride.
Wamanrao Godbole had established Dal branches throughout northern and western Nagpur in 1942. The Dalit community established scheduled caste federation. It held meeting in that year. Wamanrao Godbole made a flag with his own hands in the Ambedakrite movements. The songs written by poets about the blue flag were famous:

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

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

The scheduled caste federation’s conferences were held on 17th July 1942. A large number of youths came to the Dal Meetings. Wamanrao Godbole took double responsibility for organizing meetings for the conferences and the protection of Baba Saheb. Wamanrao’s organizational skills were marvelous. He assigned tasks to young activists of the Dal dividing responsibility for the neighbourhoods among them, and he himself traveled everywhere to organize the youths. Branches of the Dal were established in all the neighbourhoods. The Samata Sainik Dal organized meetings and conferences to change the Dalits’ mentality. Importantly, Moon narrative does bring to light the various organic working class leaders that the Dalit movements produced. Among them, Babu
Hardas was renewed as the youngest and most determined of the activists of the time. He founded the organization of bidi workers in the central provinces and Beror before 1930. He was the secretary of the union. Radha Bai Kamble, a mill worker and the first woman union leader in the Dalit community, became known as a vociferous organizer of woman textile workers. Previously, she had been a member of the Congress INTUC Union, but when the Independent Labour Party was established, she began to organize under Revaran Kavade. Mahars made up 40 to 45 per cent of Nagpur’s mill workers, and 30 percent of these were women. All these came together under Radhabai’s leadership. She began to handle all their problems.

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

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

Ganga - “To remove your Hair.”
Yami - “Who told you to do that?”
Ganga - “Your father sent me.”
Yami - “I will not be shaved. I tell you truly, I am determined” (Growing up Untouchables in India:109)

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

Then Ganga and Yami join together and run away to the city and get married. The comedy conversion is also very effective. One village watch man, an untouchable, continuously cries out: “Give me Water, give me water, I am dying of thirst”. When he tries to drink the water from a nearby well two Brahmans come and beat him. His wife goes to perform prayers in a temple and the priest there tries to rape her. Then he begins to think of suicide. However, he learns Baba Saheb’s conversion call and becomes determined to change his religion. The stories which ordinary people can understand were shown on the stage, and the teaching of social reforms came to the lanes and footpaths. The players
dramatized many stories on education and giving up begging and superstitions. At the time of his childhood days, a Brahmin named Anant Ramachandra Kulkarni, propagated Buddhism. His intention was not to convert people to the religion, rather to give Hindus the ideas of the Buddhism.

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

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

Dalit community had a supervision committee for the Vithal-Rukmini temple. The temple was in such a bad condition that repairing it would be difficult. The organizers of the Dal wanted to change the temple committee.
Finally, all the Dalit youth gathered and held the meeting. They decided to give the work of the temple committee to a new group.

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

When Moon was the first executive committee of the temple trust, he gave his resignation because he did not agree with method of working of the others. When he got employment, he used to send contribution for news papers.
subscriptions to the temple trust committee. He continued sending these subscriptions for many days. Then he became Deputy Country Commissioner in 1955. It was very useful to the Dalit community.

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

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

Sita Bardi Sports Club was formed in 1953. The young people from the community began a program of distributing free milk to children in the community. The students from the community started writing magazines and held the meetings on behalf the temple trust. The inauguration of the magazine was
done by a Brahman Marathi Professor A. N. Deshpande. His speech was awakening about the creation of literature for Harijan brothers and sisters.

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

A Christian used to visit our neighbourhood. His name was Sewak Ram Masihi. He would sit with the Children of the Chuhras around him. He used to teach them reading and writing. The government schools did not allow these children to enroll. My family sent only myself to Sewak Ram Masihi. My brothers were all working. There was no question of sending our sister to school. I learnt my alphabet in Master Sewak Ram Masihi’s open-air school, a school without mats and rooms. One day, Sewak Ram Masihi and my father had an argument. My father took me to the Basic Primary School. There my father begged Master Har Phool Singh; “Masterji, I will be forever in your debt if you teach this child of mine a letter or two (Valmiki: 2).
Every parent thought that his children live in the society equally on all grounds and there would be no caste discrimination. They want to study their children like others. Before independent movements, Valmiki faced lots of caste discrimination, poverty, inferiority complex, and so on:

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

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

He spent many days to read Ambedkar’s books. Suddenly, his silence began to melt. The reading of these books awakened his consciousness. These
books gave voice to his muteness. At that time in his life, an anti-establishment consciousness became strong in him. After reading these books, he realized that by naming the untouchables Harijan’s by Gandhi:

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

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

Valmiki’s father was very happy on hearing his son’s decision that he abandoned college education. He joined the Ordinance Factory in Dehradun as an apprentice. His technical education enabled him to be self-reliant as he received a monthly stipend of one hundred and seven rupees per month during his apprenticeship. After one year training at the Ordinance Factory in Dehradun, he appeared in a competitive examination and was selected. He wanted to go for further training. He spent two years at the Ordinance Factory training institute, Khamaria. This experience opened new doors for his future progress. When he reached Jabalpur station on the evening of 1st July 1968, his friend Vijaya
Bahadur and he were received by the students of the ordinance factory training institute. The senior students welcomed them with open arms and brought them to the residence. He was allotted room no. 3 in hostel number-1. He was introduced to a new world after entering the training institute’s residence. There he found lot of new things. He did not worry about boarding and lodging. There were about two hundred students in the hostel. It was a lovely place. In the hostel, many cultural activities would go on, like singing, music, sports, laughter, etc.

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

Jabalpur changed me. My speech patterns changed. My manners also changed. I made many friends who were deeply interested in contemporary issues and constantly argued about them. I took part in seminars and cultural functions. I became involved in Jabalpur’s literary life. I also began to develop my own views on literature. I was more attracted to social realism than to aestheticist and formalist types of writings. (Valmiki: 85).
He spent two years training at Jabalpur. Then he received a call for applications for draftsman training to the Ordinance Factory training institute Bombay. Most of the students of the institute applied for it. The candidates were to be chosen through a nation-wide competition. He was selected in the written examination and attended the oral test. With the help of his friend, he appeared for the interview. Later, he received a call from Bombay to do another two and half years further training in Bombay. He joined the Bombay Ordinance Factory Training Institute. The hostel was at a scenic spot, at the foot of Ambernath Hill. Among the ordinance factories, this institute and its hostel held a special place. The evenings were lively in the hostel along with gymnastic and indoor games facilities. The hostel also had a swimming pool and library. He was greatly excited when he saw the library and utilized it:

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

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

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

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

Vasanth Moon’s *Growing up Untouchables in India* (2002) discusses the various stages of the writer’s personal life. The nature of social protest has been examined in its various dimensions through this research work. Moon’s autobiography presents us with a collective memory of caste oppression and struggle in India as well as his life experience in his village. Another autobiography is Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* (2003), where he describes how he was emancipated and rescued himself for oppression. He discusses his life journey and expresses how he got educated “to improve his caste”. The change in attitude of the Dalits towards their
living condition changed their life styles. They became educated and they felt the need of living like other human beings. They changed their caste structures and established separate community organizations which played an important role for reforming their life styles.
Works Cited


