Comparisons between oppressed groups are not only natural but also sometimes necessary; natural because their struggle to reclaim the human space denied them for centuries is almost similar; necessary because the group that has taken a lead in reclaiming that space influences the other group in devising their strategies, far removed from the area of their operation. (Kapoor 13)

Long years of suffering and suppression led the oppressors to voice their exploitation which led to the emergence of Dalit and African-American literature. These kinds of artistic expression gave way to the emergence of a new stream of thoughts and feelings with an aim of reaching the masses to make them aware about their exploitation. By rejecting the mainstream literary genre Dalit and African-Americans emerged with a new form of literary tradition of their own in which they started to portray the kind of life which was full of torture and ill treatment and thereby protested against the injustice done to them through their writing.

In other words, Dalits and African-Americans tried their hands at all forms of literature like poetry, drama, novel, autobiographies etc… but while dealing with all these forms they represented the subjects that were experienced only by those who are born into it and made it very interesting by giving a new dimension to it. Most of the stories dealt in different forms of literature focus in one or other way with their own life and in a way one can call it as an autobiographical work. The reason for this kind of writing was, they knew very well that their experiences and exploitation cannot be experienced by others who are born to other castes or races and therefore the only way to portray their inhuman life was through writing their own life stories. Such kind of writing makes others realize the experience and feelings expressed in Dalit and African-American autobiographies as unique and strange which makes it difficult to accept the traditional form of autobiography.
In an article titled “African American and Dalit Autobiography” by Shivaji D.Sagar, the view of critics regarding the traditional autobiography has been mentioned saying:

When the author has lived most of his life and reached at such point of his life that there is very little possibility of happening something dramatic in his life. On the contrary, Dalit self-narratives are being written at the middle or early middle-age of the author. At this point, his life is not like a pond but a overpouring stream that flows on and on and goes on affecting his present in the context of past and future. (Sagar 1)

The words of Shivaji D.Sagar appear true because the autobiographies of Dalit and African-Americans were written when they were young in order to raise their voice against the inhuman treatment through their writing. For instance, Limbale wrote his autobiography when he was just 25 years old and this was done in order to make the people aware about their oppression and also to support his people in claiming equal rights. For the Dalits and the Blacks, it is only through literature that they can successfully come to the limelight and reveal their problems in front of the people and the government with the hope of getting equal rights like the non-dalit and the Whites in India and America. For this task they discarded the traditional form of writing and thereby created their own form of literature with new themes and argument.

The history of Marathi literary tradition is very old dating back to about nine hundred years, while the history of Marathi Dalit literature goes back to sixty or seventy years. The Dalit literature is of new tradition because earlier due to ignorance and non availability of educational facilities they just concentrated about earning sufficient money for their daily needs. But once they got the benefit of education they gradually became aware about the kind of misuse which the upper caste Hindus have meted out in terms of Dalits life and rights and started raising their voice through their writing. However they did not just raise their voice against humiliation but also became the mouthpiece of their whole community who claimed equal rights and dignity for the entire community. Arjun Dangle says:
When the machine age reached India, it was accompanied by new knowledge, science, revolutionary philosophy which led to the struggle for equality. The Dalits realised that they too had their traditions when their ‘self’ was awakened during some such movements. They began an attempt to accept new timeless values of life, society and culture. (Dangle I)

Dalit literature, in a way had cut itself from the traditional Marathi literature and took a new path by claiming equality for them in all spheres of life. The main theme of Dalit literature is its oppression, exploitation and atrocities by the upper caste Hindus. Dalit writers refused to accept the social values of the system of abuse and they also rejected such exploitative systems as their ideals and therefore they created their own path and wrote their own life stories in order to claim equality and to protest against the inhuman life which they were made to lead by the upper caste Hindus. Arjun Dangle writes: “On the other hand Dalit literature looks at reality with open eyes. It views history objectively and from a sociological point of view. It is more parallel to life, and this poses a number of problems and the question of ‘myths’…” (Dangle II).

Similarly the African-Americans followed their own tradition of writing in which they depicted their life of slavery and the need of freedom and literacy for them in the White society. A majority of the literary traditions were in the form of autobiographies in which the Blacks depicted their life during the time of slavery and also after its abolition with the problem of racism which made the Blacks to voice their protest against this. After the abolition of slavery, the freed Blacks were left with two options: either to leave America and return to Africa, their homeland, or to stay in America with the Whites by following the White culture and tradition.

The Blacks were forcibly taken from Africa to America and if they desired they would have left America but during this time many refused to go back so they were left with only one option which was to accept the language, culture, tradition and religion of the Whites. But though the Blacks accepted everything which was American, they could not claim an equal share in the spheres of life in the White world.
Moreover, though the Blacks were financially well off and educationally more literate than the Whites, the Whites were not ready to accept them as their equal counterparts and treated the Blacks as unequal and inferior. Revolting against this kind of treatment the Blacks decided to claim equality in the White world and started portraying the nature of protest in their writings in order to voice their injustice and also with the intention of reaching the masses to declare themselves that even they too have the right to lead a life of equality and freedom with an identity of their own.

On the one hand, compared to the life of the Blacks the position of Indian Dalits was different. Like Blacks they were not brought from another country but they were exploited in their own homeland by their own people who followed the same religion with a different caste. In terms of religion, the Dalits belonged to the same Hindu religion but if castes are taken into consideration the Dalits belonged to the fifth varna that is Panchamas, while the ‘Brahmins’, ‘Kshtriyas’, ‘Vaishyas’ and ‘Shudras’ belong to the four-fold varna hierarchy.

The Blacks are racially different from the Whites and regionally also the Blacks belong to Africa while the Whites belong to America and even the language, culture, tradition and history of both are completely different. But in the case of Dalits it is not like that because Dalits are not racially different from upper caste Hindus and even in terms of culture and religion both are same. But the division of the Dalits is made on the basis of caste which is the main characteristic of Indian Society. Janardan Waghmare, in this regard writes:

For centuries he could not get an equal share in the development and progress of his culture, religion and social life. Despite being an heir of this country he had not acquired legacy rights. Unlike the Black the question of leaving his country never confronted him. He is of this country but this country could never be his. (Dangle 313)

If Blacks suffered from slavery and racism, the Dalits endured the problem of untouchability and the inhuman caste system. Both the Blacks and the Dalits were degraded and thrown to the lower strata of society by denying their rights and necessities to them. Dalits, who form the majority in India compared to non-dalits, were degraded and because of the selfish nature of the upper caste Hindus, Dalits were denied basic rights and were made to serve the upper caste with great honesty.
They wanted Dalits to remain in the Hindu religion only for the sake of displaying to others that the Hindus are in majority but in the real sense the Dalits were treated worse than animals. But in the case of the Blacks it is different because the Whites never forced the Blacks to remain in their religion but because of lack of their cultural roots and fragmented family which happened due to slavery the Blacks were left with no other option but to remain in the White world. However whatever may be the situation both the Dalits and the Blacks tried to come out of their victimized life through writing. Regarding the life of imprisonment of the Dalits and the Blacks Waghmare writes:

The American Black and the Indian Dalit are members of a ‘closed’ society in their respective countries. Both have been victims of a peculiar class structure; the Black of a racial type and the Dalit, of untouchability. Race is nature-made while caste is man-made…. Man alone is responsible for this unholy distinction based on colour and caste…. There is no difference whatsoever between the position of the Blacks in America and that of the untouchables in India…. Both were kept behind the bars of fatalism. In order to perpetuate this imprisonment the Whites resorted to some myths and symbols from the Bible, and the high class Hindus, to the Vedas and the Manusmriti. (Dangle 314)

The history of both the Blacks and the Dalits in their respective countries appear same which is filled with physical and mental torture and humiliation. The Blacks were brought and sold in the open market like animals but in India though the Dalits belonged to the same religion of the upper castes they were treated worse than animals and were relegated to the lower strata of society with no basic necessities and rights of their own. Though slavery was abolished legally the illegal system of racism continues even to this day by treating Blacks as victims. Similarly the Dalits faced the same situation with the following of the practice of untouchability though it was abolished by the Constitution. In legal terms both the practice of untouchability and racism is illegal but in the real sense there exist the practices with no hesitation even to this day.

The life of the Blacks is also depicted by the Whites but in a perverted manner but the real experiences of the Blacks is portrayed by the writers belonging to the
Black race than the Whites. Writers like Eugene O’Neill and William Faulkner stand prominent among those who handled the Blacks themes ably than others during the 20th Century. But to some extent the feeling and experiences of the Blacks are successfully portrayed by the Black writers that too through their autobiographies. Similarly in India the life of the Dalits and their stories are not depicted to a large extent by the non-dalit writers but nobody took an effort to display the life of Dalits in literature.

Even in the field of literature the Dalit was a rejected man because of the disinterest by non-dalit writers to deal with Dalit themes and experience. In other words one thing is true that a White or non-dalit is in a highly impossible position to deal with the themes of the Blacks and the Dalits and therefore both took pen in their hand to voice their injustice and struggle against inhuman treatment meted out to them. Gradually they became writers and created their own form by rejecting the traditional form of literature.

The life of the Dalits and the Blacks depicted by the Savarnas and the Whites is not acceptable because of its unreal nature. Limbale in his book *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* says:

> A realistic and accurate representation of African Americans cannot to be found in the American literature up to the Civil war. Marathi writers have not portrayed Dalits accurately either. Middle-class writers wrote novels about the lives of Dalits, based on their own imagination. Due to the absence of the authentic experience of Dalit life, these works are lifeless, shallow and distorted. (Limbale 92)

The White and non-Dalit writers in America and India have written about the life of the Blacks and the Dalits on the basis of imagination without any real expression of their pain and exploitation. Gwendolyn Brooks, an African-American poet expressed her view in a book entitled *The Longman Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry* edited by Stuart Freibert and David Young saying: “I write about people and about circumstances that have been influenced by horrible happenings in our society” (Freibert 52).
If a person is hurt others can just see the wound but cannot feel the pain for themselves. In other words, only a wounded person can feel the pain while others can just imagine the kind of pain a person is experiencing. Similarly it is true in the case of the Dalits and the Blacks because a person who is experiencing humiliation and oppression can only feel the pain rather than others and the literature which others have written about the Dalits and the Blacks is just an imaginary work and not real.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and his writings and works are the basis of Dalit literature. It took a revolutionary turn because of Ambedkar’s thoughts and expressions regarding the cruel caste system. It is written that: “… Dalit literature begins right from this revolutionary horizon. What is the secret? The secret lies in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s thoughts, leadership and liberation struggle for the untouchables” (Dangle 319).

“Dalit literature first and foremost advocates the significance of humanity and liberation and it is a historical necessity too” (Dangle 320), says Janardan Waghmare in his article published in Arjun Dangle’s *Poisoned Bread*. He also mentions some of the similarities between Black literature and Dalit literature and they are as follows:

1. Both Black and Dalit writers are in search of their respective identities.
2. Experience in both literatures has suffered from social life based on inequality.
3. The literature of both is life-oriented. Both Black and Dalit writers write from the awareness of social commitment.
4. The literary language of both is the language of cultural revolt.
5. In both literatures the aim is to find new cultural values. (Dangle 321)

These are the similarities of which the Dalit and the African-Americans share though they live in different places and have different culture, tradition, language and religion. But to a very large extent they share a common experience of oppression and abuse, on the basis of which comparison can be made.

But according to Gangadhar Pantawane, the comparison between Dalit and African-American literature cannot be done and in one of the seminars on Dalit literature in Kirti College, Mumbai, on 6 February 1977, Pantawane said: “African
American literature is referred to in the context of Dalit literature. But the Blacks are not untouchable. Untouchability is a denial of humanity. This makes a big difference between these two literatures” (Limbale 101). Though the Blacks do not have the problem of untouchability it does not mean that they led an equal and respectable life with the Whites. Even the Blacks were dehumanized and relegated to a very low position and the Whites did not treat them as human beings.

Both the Blacks and the Dalits were given a separate place and both led the life of slavery in their respective places. Their life is comparable to some extent but while going through the degree of exploitation they have experienced one can easily go with the words of Pantawane that Dalits have undergone an inhuman life with the problem of untouchability which means the denial of humanity. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar expresses the same view while comparing the life of the Dalits and the Blacks in an article entitled “Slaves and Untouchables” where he writes:

Slavery was never obligatory. But untouchability is obligatory. The law of slavery permitted emancipation. Once a slave always a slave was not the fate of the slave. In untouchability there is no escape. Once an Untouchable always an Untouchable. The other difference is that untouchability is an indirect form of slavery. (Kapoor 208)

The words of Ambedkar clearly explain that the fate of the Dalit in India is worse than the Blacks because of the inhuman practice of untouchability. But the suffering is same and the pain and agony they experienced can be compared by taking into consideration their exploitation by the Whites and the upper castes. Both started revolting against this injustice through literature by creating their own form and moreover the Dalit writers were largely influenced and inspired by African-American writers and the works of Langston Hughes and James Baldwin were translated into Marathi language through which Dalit writers came to know how to voice their struggle and began writing. However, in terms of literature, autobiographies played an important role in portraying the realities of the Dalit and the Black’s life and also analyzed the situation which relegated the Blacks and the Dalits to a very low position in the annals of society. S.D.Kapoor writes:
In America the Black race was painted as inherently inferior—pseudo scientific myths were invented to show the superiority of the white race. In India the Untouchables were painted as inferior on the basis of their birth in an avarna caste—an intricate web of karmic laws was created to permanently condemn them to a lowly position in society. (Kapoor 17)

When one takes the history of Blacks in America there are hundreds of revolts by slaves against the White masters and in many cases the slaves even went to the extent of killing their White masters by taking revenge against the exploitation meted out to them. But compared to the Blacks the Dalits in India did not have this kind of rebellious nature and there are no extant records of any revolts from the side of the Dalits against the upper castes. But Arjun Dangle opines differently saying: “Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism, since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group of people who, as Untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality” (Limbale 1). Similarly Marcus Garvey in his article “An Appeal to the Conscience of the Black Race to See Itself” published in a book entitled Afro-American Writing: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry edited by Richard A.Long and Eugenia W.Collier gives a call to the Blacks saying: “Hold fast to the ideal of a dignified Negro race. Let us work together as one people, whether we are octoroons, quadroons, mulattoes or blacks, for the making of a nation of our own, for in that alone lies our racial salvation” (Garvey 371).

Garvey even says that the African-Americans have ridiculed the word ‘Negro’ and have called themselves as ‘Blacks’. In the same way Dalits have also mocked the term ‘Harijan’ by naming themselves as ‘Dalit’. The reason behind referring to themselves as Blacks was that the African-Americans were called Negroes by their masters during the time of slavery and this name symbolized the cruel slavery, therefore they called themselves as Blacks and thereby wanted to create their own identity in the world of the Whites. The African-Americans even went to the extent of converting their religion to escape from slavery. Similarly, the Dalits too did the same like the Blacks and abandoned the names given by Hindu religion, as not civilized and auspicious and called themselves as Dalits. They took refuge by converting to other religions in order to escape from the practice of untouchability.
The Whites in America and the upper castes in India have snatched away everything from the Blacks and the Dalits by compelling them to lead an inhuman life by relegating them to a very low position. Limbale says:

The African American was brought and sold, and some of them paid their masters to buy their own freedom. However, in the Indian social system, freedom from untouchability cannot be bought, as it is imposed from birth. The African American slave could live in the master’s house. White children could feed at a Black woman’s breast. But even the touch and shadow of the Dalits were considered untouchable by the touchables. The irony here is worth noting: while the Blacks and Whites belong to different racial groups, the untouchable and savarnas do not. (Limbale 85-86)

During the initial stages, both the African-American and Dalit literature were spiritual in form and gave importance to folk theatre and literature. But the later stages were preoccupied with revolutionary ideas and thoughts and then they started their fight and protest against their exploiters through literature. It was during the Harlem Renaissance that there began a Renaissance movement and Harlem became the centre for African-American economy, cultural and intellectual centre in 1920. It was here that a new identity for the Blacks began to be formed and a Black person became a new man with an identity of his own. Similarly like the Harlem Renaissance, the emergence of the Ambedkarite Movement changed the phase of Dalit literature and gradually the Dalit became conscious about their place in the upper caste society.

This realization among the Blacks and the Dalits about their exploitation led to the emergence of the Black Panthers in 1966 and the Dalit Panthers Movement in 1972. The Black Panthers Movement which came into existence in 1966 celebrated Black identity and Black consciousness saying ‘I am black. Black is beautiful’ (Limbale 90). The Whites dehumanized the Blacks and their dark colour was symbolized as evil by referring black colour as ugly and bad. So the Black Panthers, in order to challenge their notion called themselves as beautiful and defended their dark colour as their identity without having any inferiority complex just because of their skin colour.
Similarly the Dalit Panthers Movement in India tried to bring the life of Dalits to the mainstream life by overcoming suppression and abuse. Prior to the emergence of Dalit Panthers Movement it was Ambedkar who struggled very hard for the betterment of Dalits life but after his death there was no one to take his place in order to lead the Dalits to the roads of freedom and equality. Ambedkar had given a call to the Dalits to become strong in politics and to have political power in their hand and he wanted to start the Republican Party of India as a Dalit’s political organization. But the death of Ambedkar left this dream unfulfilled and there was a need of some leader to fulfill his dream of building a Republic Party of India for the sake of Dalit welfare.

Hence, the followers of Ambedkar decided to come together wholly to execute Ambedkar’s dream. But unfortunately their leadership failed to work together and split into two where one group joined the Congress party while the other remained Republican. Meanwhile people started feeling that the leaders were not working for the sake of the uplift of the Dalits but working for their own betterment. They remained stable without doing anything and also never fought against the injustice done to the Dalits. However, Ambedkar’s dream also remained unfulfilled because of the selfish nature and self-centered attitude of the leaders. Enraged by this kind of behaviour from the side of their leaders, young dalit students of 1956, who completed their studies in 1960, felt the need of some strong organization to lead the Dalit in society.

These youth had witnessed the death of Ambedkar and also the developments that followed after his death. This was what led to the youths creating an organization in order to give direction to the Dalits and also to encourage them to fight against inhuman exploitation and injustice by strongly supporting the Dalits. In the meantime the Dalits were not happy with the resolutions introduced for the welfare of the Dalits after independence because their life remained the same without any changes and they were leading the life of slavery under the domination and dictatorship of the upper castes. Meanwhile they also witnessed the success of Black Panthers Movement in America which came as an inspiration to the Dalit youth who were already enraged by the move of the government which introduced resolutions that were not supportive to Dalits. This was the reason behind the foundation of an organization called Dalit Panthers Movement on July 9, 1972 to fight against the upper caste oppression and suppression.
The Dalit Panthers Movement initially launched huge movements but later on they too joined the Republican Party which was Ambedkar’s dream party and started to work with them for the uplift of Dalit life in India. In this regard Limbale says: “African American and Dalit movements have proceeded along different paths and taken different turnings. But both movements are struggles for human rights and against exploitation. African American and Dalits experienced inhuman degradation; their struggle is against it” (Limbale 86).

African-American literature took a new turn during the Harlem Renaissance while Dalit literature became militant with the emergence of Ambedkar during 1930’s and this literature acquired force during 1950’s and 1960’s. The Dalit and the African-American writers manifested consciousness and its awareness in their respective literature. S.D.Kapoor says: “Consciousness, like experience and feeling, is a flexible term and its meaning ought to be delimited in the context of Dalit and African American experience” (Kapoor 116).

David W.Blight in his book *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* quotes the words of Ralph Ellison who said that:

Negro American consciousness is not a product (as so often seems true of so many American groups) of a will to historical forgetfulness. It is a product of our memory, sustained and constantly reinforced by events, by our watchful waiting, and by our hopeful suspension of final judgment as to the meaning of their grievances. (Blight 304)

According to S.D.Kapoor, consciousness operates at three levels in literature: “First, it is historical consciousness in the form of collective experience; second, it is actual consciousness which includes emerging and residual consciousness; and third, possible consciousness” (Kapoor 118). Many thinkers felt that the consciousness of Dalits cannot be represented clearly by non-Dalit writers. It is said that before Dalit started their own literature Prem Chand, writer in Hindi was the first to represent Dalit consciousness in Hindi literature. But it is said that only the Dalits and the Blacks can give justice to their literature if they express their consciousness in their own words. S.D.Kapoor says: “Dalits and African Americans have the responsibility of keeping
the genuine historical memory alive and also of humanizing the oppressive system” (Kapoor 141).

Further he says the Dalits and the Blacks struggle to acquire a human status had to go through three stages: “One, the consciousness that they were victims of a calculated inhuman design; two, the questioning of the right of the oppressors to have complete control over their lives; and three, the rejection of the definition of their existence and an effort to redefine it” (Kapoor 193-94). These three stages are reflected in Dalit and African-American literature. Though the struggle of the Dalits and the Blacks were painful and agonizing they continued to reclaim human space for themselves and their community which was denied to them by the Whites and the ‘savarnas’. Kapoor writes: “The struggle of both these groups has been to expose the lies on which the entire citadel of racism and casteism was raised and to reject the devices which gave validity to the lies so that the consequences of such lies could be contained, if not completely eliminated” (Kapoor 195).

K.P.Singh in his article “Liberation Movements in Comparative Perspective: Dalit Indians and Black Americans” published in a book entitled Dalits in Modern India by S.M.Michael writes about his view regarding the Dalits in India and the Blacks in America. According to him there are two ideologies namely acquiescent ideology and protest ideology which describes the theoretical framework in which both the Dalits and the Blacks have to go through to carve their social identity. He explains the first one that is ‘acquiescent ideology’ as one in which one accepts their low status submissively without any confrontation with the upper caste/class but with a request to allow them to have access to education, employment etc, that too to serve the oppressor group in a better way. The oppressed on the other hand not ask for all these facilities for their own growth and benefit but for the betterment of their exploiters. This is one kind of social identity which is submissive in nature and accepts their low position in the society which K.P.Singh calls as acquiescent ideology.

However he also puts forward another theory called ‘protest ideology’ where one can see the deprived section of society in an organized form who have come together to resist all types of inhuman exploitation and suppression by the dominant section of society. Earlier if one goes through the history of the Blacks and the Dalits, it is said that for many years both have submitted themselves to the rules of the
dominant group and also lived as per the rules and regulations of them without any revolt from their side. But gradually they also started raising their voice and with the emergence of the Dalit leader Ambedkar to the forefront in India and with the Harlem Renaissance in America the Blacks gained enough courage to pen their pain and suffering through literature by adopting the protest ideology.

Very late they both realized that their submissive nature and their request for rights will not do anything for them except humiliation and cruel treatment. All the patience and the peaceful nature which the Dalits and the Blacks had were vanished and were replaced by protest and revolt in order to get their rights and identity. K.P.Singh, in this regard says:

Both the Indian Dalits and American Blacks have organised assertive efforts for their respective societies. Their protest ideology involves resistance, opposition, confrontation and conflict with the dominant groups (oppressors). Dalits and blacks alike have adapted these to achieve their desired goals of social equality, social dignity and de-stigmatized social identity. (Michael 166)

Booker.T.Washington, in America followed the acquiescent ideology who gave a call to his followers to accept their unequal status submissively without any protest but to achieve education in the business-oriented field with the intention of becoming masters in their own way. But this ideology of Washington was not accepted by many thinkers because of the fact that Washington did not fight for complete equality as his main and ultimate goal. But the protest movements of the Dalits and the Blacks were to assert and demand social dignity, equality, identity and self-respect in their respective societies in a complete manner without any kind of submission to the dominant group.

Both the Dalits and the Blacks know that if they continue to accept the domination of their oppressors then they will no longer achieve an identity of their own and due to this they adopted the protest ideology to fulfill their dream of having a complete identity in the society of dominant groups. In addition to this many leaders in India and America adopted the ideology of rejection of faith and embracement of another faith or religion.
In India the main pioneers of this ideology were E.V.Ramaswami Naicker Periyar who established the Self-Respect Movement in 1930, Jyothiba Phule’s Satya Shodak Samaj in 1873 and Dr.B.R.Ambedkar’s Religious Conversion Movement which was established in 1956 who not only rejected the so-called superior Brahminical order of the Hindu caste system but also advocated his followers and supporters to embrace a new social order which promised and promotes liberty, equality and fraternity as their main goal. Since time immemorial the upper caste Hindus have tortured the Dalits but were not ready to separate them from the fold of Hinduism and held them in the cruel caste system with the aid of religion by instilling fear in the minds of the Dalits. But with the emergence of many social thinkers and their work, the Dalits began to realize their inhuman kind of exploitation and the misuse of their ignorance by the upper caste Hindus with the help of religion. Regarding this D.C.Ahir in his book The Legacy of Dr.Ambedkar records Dr.B.R.Ambedkar’s words who said: “To the untouchables, Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors. The iron law of caste, the heartless law of karma and senseless law of status by birth are veritable instruments of torture which Hinduism has forged against the untouchable” (Ahir 293).

Consequently Ambedkar converted to Buddhism on October 1956 by rejecting Hinduism which refused to give equal status to the Dalits. According to Ambedkar, Buddhism was the religion which advocated and proposed equality for all and treated all human beings equally without any kinds of discrimination and it is a religion which recognized the three fundamental principles of social life that is Liberty, Equality and Fraternity as their main goal. Due to Ambedkar, thousands of Dalits converted to Buddhism in order to lead a dignified life with an identity. Regarding conversion to other religions Eleanor Zelliott writes: “Conversion as a way out of the Untouchables’ status was not new in India. Islam, and more especially Christianity, drew large numbers of their converts from the lower castes, and Sikhism in the twentieth century actively encouraged untouchables’ conversion” (Zelliott 191).

Similarly the Blacks in America also followed the same principle of conversion in order to put an end to exploitation. The emergence of many social and rational thinkers led the Blacks to reject the faith which had exploited them inhumanly and embraced a new faith which propagated equality for all. Though Christianity advocated equality and liberty for all, the situation was not true to the
principles which the religion had and the frustrated Blacks identified Christianity only with the Whites and many of the Blacks embraced Islam as their protest against White domination. Elijah Muhammad was the first to launch the Black Protest Movement by rejecting Christianity and by embracing Islam. He also started the Black Muslim Protest Movement in the U.S which ran parallel to the Civil Rights Movement in 1960. During this time another Black leader Malcolm X was involved actively in the Black Muslim Protest Movement. K.P.Singh, regarding the involvement of Malcolm X writes: “He linked the Black Muslim ideology with African nationalism and black African civilization and insisted on the rejection of the white Western civilization. A new identity was formed on the basis of claims to an African heritage and civilization” (Michael 171).

The same ideology of African heritage was also adopted by social activists and writers like Marcus Garvey and Du Bois who emphasized the superiority of the Black race and culture against the White race and culture. In 1950 a new chapter in the history of the Black Protest Movement was added by Dr.Martin Luther king Jr, who fought for the rights of the Blacks by adopting the ideology of the Civil Rights Movement. He also organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and adopted non-violent direct action like Mahatma Gandhi in his fight for the Black’s rights. He was against racial segregation and White domination which compelled the Blacks to face multiple deprivations.

One of the important differences between the Dalits and the Blacks is that one cannot easily identify a Dalit unless he himself reveals his/her caste. But in the case of the Blacks it is evident because one can easily identify the Blacks due to their racial identity. But both the Dalits and the Blacks were regarded as marginalized groups and R.Bhongle in the beginning of his article “Dalit Literature and African American Literature: A Comparative Study” explains the meaning of marginality in the following words:

The term applies to those areas of human interactions and activities which had only peripheral values, which were relegated to and looked upon as irrelevant and insignificant to the mainstream interest, and which appeared occasionally either to entertain or as an object of pity and sympathy in the so-called mainstream literature. (Aston 24)
In other words, it can be said that the Dalit and the Blacks rejected mainstream literature and wrote their own literature with stories of their pain and suffering by rejecting the tradition followed by ‘savarnas’ and the White writers. One can compare the Blacks and the Dalits in every field like their struggle against poverty and hunger, their fight for education, their fight to reclaim their lost roots, their effort to regain their lost culture, tradition and language and finally their struggle to regain their self and their fight to have an identity of their own. In almost all the autobiographies of the Dalits and the African-Americans, one can see the constant battle to create an image of self in their struggle against oppressive conditions.

In the Dalit and the African-American autobiographies, the writer is portraying not only his struggle to gain his individual self but also his social self. In other words for a Dalit or a Black, individual ‘self’ along with the social self that is social identity is of the utmost importance in the world of the oppressors. Take for instance any autobiography by a Dalit or African-American, there is a search for self which is not only individual but also social. For very long years the Dalits and the Blacks were compelled to live as their puppets without giving much thought to their identity as they were treated only as servants and not as human beings. Even in social life they were neglected without giving any valuable position to them and thereby denied their growth in the social field. Therefore the Dalits and the Blacks craved to create an image of the individual and social self and in this regard Toni Morrison says:

Autobiographical form is classic in Black American or Afro-American literature because it provided an instance in which a writer could be representative, could say, ‘my single solitary and individual life is like the lives of the tribe; it differs in these specific ways, but it is a balanced life because it is both solitary and representative. (Morrison 327)

In the autobiographies of the Dalit and the African-American writers, the writers were not writing for their own identity but for their community’s identity because it is equally important to them in addition to their individual identity. The writers portray not only their individual life story but also chronicle the life and struggle of their whole community. Laxman Gaikwad’s The Branded depicts the life of the community called ‘Uchalya’ who were branded as thieves and were excluded
from the mainstream society. Though they were educated and wanted to take up a decent jobs the society was not ready to accept them and treat them with respect. Though they did not steal anything, the Uchalyas became victims in the hands of police and whenever something was missing the first suspicion was on the Uchalya community. Gaikwad not only fought for his individual right and identity but his protest was for both individual identity and the identity of his community.

Apart from *The Branded*, other writers like Narendra Jadhav, Limbale and Vasanth Moon also portrayed their life along with the life of their community. In other words one can view the life of Dalits in the autobiographies which tells the story of the whole community and their struggle. In comparing the life of the Dalits and the African-Americans it can be said that both have struggled to have an access to education. Both were denied the right to education for a very long time. Since time immemorial the Dalits were denied educational rights and with the intention of keeping them in ignorance the upper caste Hindus never allowed the Dalits to educate themselves. But if one goes through the autobiographies of Narendra Jadhav, Laxman Gaikwad, Sharankumar Limbale, and Vasanth Moon it can be easily understood that all have struggled a lot to gain education. Though the government encouraged Dalits’ education through reservations and scholarships, the upper caste Hindus tried their best to keep Dalits away from education with the help of religion.

The same situation was faced by the Blacks in America who faced obstacles and had to cross hurdles in order to educate themselves. Comparing the Blacks’ situation with the Dalits’ it can be said that the Dalits were fortunate that they had schools and access was given to them to attend schools though the teachers and students of the upper castes followed the caste system in schools. But the Blacks were not fortunate like the Dalits because the Whites had a rule that the Blacks should not study and the schools were not open to them. The Blacks were not allowed to study in company with the Whites because the Whites considered them as slaves and were not ready to treat them as their fellow human beings. Like the Savarnas in India, the Whites in America had the same fear of protest and revolt from the side of the Blacks for their rights if Blacks were to get education and knowledge. The Whites always wanted the Blacks to remain in ignorance.

Gradually with effort from various social thinkers in America the Blacks got access to education and the public schools was opened to the Blacks. During the time
of slavery if a Black man was caught reading, he or she had to face harsh consequences and the Whites punished them brutally. The Blacks always studied during night time and that too secretly without the Whites knowing about it. But with the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights Movement, the Blacks began to revolt against the White exploitation and they asked for basic rights like right to education, voting rights, and right to live without any racial discrimination.

Like the Dalits, the Blacks also felt that education is the key to wipe out all their pain and sufferings. Many educated Blacks also became writers and have written many autobiographies which the thesis deals with portray the life of the Blacks who suffered slavery and racism which was full of exploitation. If the first part of the autobiography deals with the life of their constant struggle over slavery, poverty, hunger and the Whites exploitation, the second part of their autobiography deals with a different kind of life, where the authors got educated and became a person of value with an identity of their own in the White society. Though the Blacks have gained freedom from the Whites and got access to education they still face the problem of racism even to this day. Similar to the Dalits, the Black’s life in the White world is still filled with some suffering and oppression because even in the 21st Century they are victims of cruel racism.

In addition to their problem of reclaiming their self they also had the problem of identity crisis, as they had the pressure of carrying a double identity. Both the Dalits and the Blacks have faced the problem of double identity and double consciousness as said by Du Bois in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*. Both were in confusion wondering whether to remain in their roots or to follow their oppressed groups. In other words to explain in detail, the Dalits were not brought from another place but belong to the same religion ‘Hinduism’. But due to the domination of the upper castes since time immemorial the Dalits were deprived of all their cultural roots and the upper castes compelled the Dalits to follow their customs and traditions and the lower caste people followed it silently without any protest from their side.

For many centuries Dalits were made to follow the rules and traditions of the upper castes which made the lower castes to give up their tradition and culture and in a way became the followers of the upper caste tradition. In spite of all this, the upper caste Hindus were not ready to treat the Dalits equally which made them revolt against such practice. Though they gave up their cultural roots and tradition, the upper
caste Hindus treated the Dalits worse than animals. They neither got their cultural roots back nor an equal share in Hindu society either by following the upper caste traditions. At some point of time this realization struck in the mind of the Dalits and then they were neither able to reclaim their lost cultural roots nor give up the traditions of the upper castes as they were practicing it from a very long time.

Feeling disgusted with the kind of religion which had exploited them from many centuries, efforts were made by many social thinkers like Ambedkar to save the Dalits from such inhuman religion but the Dalits were confused regarding changing their religion. Though thousands of Dalits converted to Buddhism with Ambedkar, the majority of them remained in the Hindu religion not because of love towards it but because of their unwillingness to change their religion. Many thought of fighting against the upper caste Hindus by staying in the same religion and gaining equal rights not by converting to other religions but by embracing Hindu religion itself.

With regard to religion and culture, the Blacks have nearly a similar situation like that of the Dalits but with a different background because the Blacks were the inhabitants of the White land but were brought from Africa for the purpose of extracting work from them. In other words they were bought initially for an economic purpose but gradually the greedy nature of the Whites refused them to send the Blacks back to their country but made them permanent servants and applied their own culture and traditions on the Blacks.

Once for all the Blacks were deprived of their own cultural roots and they became alien in the White world. The White Church did not allow the Blacks and they were discriminated against and not treated equally in America. When slavery was abolished and the Blacks were given freedom, they were left with two options either to go back to their country or to remain in the oppressed place. Many Blacks went to Africa to regain their lost cultural roots but the majority of them remained in America and decided to fight against the Whites in their place. Gradually the Blacks fought against the injustice done to them by the Whites and gained a respectable position in the White world in every field.

Regarding the comparison between the Dalits in India and the Blacks in America D.Gnaniah in his book *Obamas of America and Dalits of India-Saga of two Black People* says:
There are ample grounds to compare and contrast the brief history of the blacks in USA and the age long ancient history of misery of Dalits in India. There are numerous similarities of both these black peoples especially in their sufferings and miseries, legal and illegal violence, segregations and ghettoes, whippings and punishments, destitution and hunger, brainwashing and punishment, livelihood, employment, education and culture, denial of entry into churches and temples, un-touchability and apartheid, hosing and civic facilities, suppression and oppression, above all total exclusion from the social order. (Gnaniah 3)

The Blacks and the Dalits experienced a life of exclusion from the mainstream life and their abuse knew no limitations till the emergence of social thinkers in India and America. In India the upper caste Hindus instilled fear in the minds of the Dalits saying that if they performed their work and served them honestly then they would be blessed with a better life in their next birth. For a very long time the Dalits submitted themselves to the domination of the upper castes but after the emergence of many Dalit thinkers like Phule and Ambedkar, the Dalits became conscious about their life and started revolting against ‘Savarnas’ domination. Almost all thinkers concentrated mainly on the Dalits’ education because they all knew that only through education the Dalit can achieve their goal of gaining their ‘self’ in the Savarna dominated society. But now times have changed and the Dalit have become educated like the Savarnas and thereby giving healthy competition to the upper caste Hindus. The Dalits can be seen in all the fields and they are growing considerably with an identity of their own.

Though the caste system and the problem of untouchability in India and slavery and the problem of racism in America was abolished by law, the Dalits and the Blacks still face these problems and even to this day they are victims in the hands of the Savarnas and the Whites in India and America respectively. Regarding this, one can compare the life of the Dalits with the Blacks and in a way they are sailing on the same boat when one takes their life and exploitation into consideration.

Apart from all the problems which the Dalits and the Blacks faced in their life, the main problems which they encountered were the problem of untouchability and the problem of racism. The Dalits were very unfortunate to experience untouchability as human beings of the same flesh and blood treated their fellow human beings very
cruelly and inhumanly. Nobody knows when exactly this barbarous system started but the upper caste Hindus pointed their fingers towards their religious scripts and the ignorant Dalit believed it for a very long time.

But after independence the practice of untouchability was abolished and the Constitution granted equal rights and freedom for all human beings irrespective of their caste and creed. But even to this day one can witness the practice of the caste system and also the cruel practice of untouchability in some places of India. Now, though the country has developed so much and people have acquired much knowledge about everything, still India is identified with the caste system and Dalits are still suffering from the problem of caste system and untouchability and the protests and revolts to end exploitation of Dalits on the basis of caste continues even today.

Similarly, the Blacks in America were exposed to the cruel system of slavery and racism. The Whites made the Black slaves and it was the Whites again who popularized the concept of the superiority of the White race and treated the Blacks as inferior just because of their dark colour. The slaves tolerated inhuman exploitation from the hands of the Whites during the time of slavery and they had no basic rights of their own. Meanwhile they also faced the problem of fragmented family because of selling of slaves to others without considering any importance to the families of the Blacks.

During the time of slavery, the slaves were auctioned and in many cases parents were sold to one master while their children, to another. In some instances the children of slaves were sold to other plantations to make money. If the male slaves suffered from one kind of exploitation the female slaves were meted out with other kinds of torture wherein the White master treated the female slaves as sexual objects and in some cases the White masters kept female slaves as prostitutes.

Such maltreatment is also found in the case of the Dalits as the upper caste Hindus used the Dalit women to satisfy their sexual urge but the children born to them were not accepted by the upper castes as their own. In every field the upper caste followed the practice of untouchability and kept away Dalits from mainstream life but when it came to sexual pleasure they made no discrimination on caste basis but had sexual contact with the Dalit women. Sharankumar Limbale, in his autobiography
Outcaste: Akkarmashi portrays the same situation, where Limbale was called as an outcaste because he was born out of a sexual relationship between his mother who was a Dalit and the village patil who was a man from the upper caste. When Limbale asked the patil to claim him as his son he refused and he became an illegitimate son, an ‘akkarmashi’ that is a half-caste. Not only the upper castes but the people of his own caste too refused to accept him into the community because of his illegitimacy.

The upper castes modified rules and regulations as per their necessities and exploited the Dalits in every field for many centuries. Like the half Castes, even among the Blacks the children born by a sexual relationship between a Black woman and a Whites were called mullatoes and they also were refused to be claimed by their White fathers. The whole responsibility of bringing up the child fell upon the mothers in both the Dalits and the Blacks life. But the Dalits were fortunate to some extent because they did not have the problem of fragmentation of family. Though the upper castes exploited the Dalits they did not separate the family members though the Dalits were given a separate place to live from the upper castes. In comparing this it is said that the Dalits were fortunate in having their family members with them and this strong bonding made them mentally strong to fight against the injustice.

Compared to the Dalits, the Blacks suffered both mentally and physically because the families were separated which affected the Blacks mentally and the torture of the Blacks during slavery made them physically weak. Strong family bonding always plays an important role but this bonding was missing among the Blacks and this made them mentally weak and incapable of fighting back.

The constant battle which both the Dalits and the Blacks fought was against hunger and they always suffered from poverty. In spite of their hard work the return payment they got was very less, which was not enough for them to meet their daily needs and expenses. The Dalits were fortunate that they were getting something in return for their work but the Blacks did not get any money for slogging instead were given low quality facilities which were inhumanly unfit for living.

After the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation by the American President Abraham Lincoln, slavery was legally abolished and slaves were given freedom and civil rights. But that did not mean that the Blacks were completely free and were treated equally by the Whites. But, a different situation surfaced and the
Whites claimed themselves superior and regarded the Blacks as inferior because of their dark colour. Though the Blacks achieved progress in every field and gained respectable status the Blacks were treated badly due to their skin colour. Even in the 21st century, the Blacks in America face the problem of racism as the Whites are not willing to treat the Blacks as their fellow human beings.

Both the Dalits and the Blacks tolerated exploitation and humiliation for a very long time because of fear but gradually due to access to education they became aware about their low and degraded position. Very soon they both realized that it was a great trick played by the upper caste Hindus and the Whites to utilize the Dalits and the Blacks for their own benefit and with the emergence of many social thinkers in their respective countries the oppressors got enough courage to revolt against their injustice.

If one goes through the history of the Dalits and the African-Americans, one can witness their exploited life as well as their life of protest and in this, both have revolted in their own manner to occupy an equal status in the exploiters’ world. Several kinds of resistance are found in the slave narratives of the African-American writers and this clearly portrays that the Blacks resisted considerably for their rights. Similarly the Dalits also revolted against ‘Savarnas’ in order to claim their rights as human beings and Narendra Jadhav in his autobiography Untouchables talks about the story of his father Damu who resists doing the work assigned to him and in revolt against the upper caste Hindus he leaves his village and goes to Mumbai. He also goes against the rules put forth by the upper caste not to educate Dalits and encouraged his children in the field of education which gave the best result and now all his children are in highly respectable positions in India.

With the help of education the Dalits and the Blacks gradually became aware about the tricks played by Savarnas and the Whites and this awareness made them to stage protests against them. They also started writing and portrayed their exploitation and sufferings in their respective literatures and thereby gave voice to their writings. While writing their stories they did not use the language of mainstream society instead made use of their own language which became a distinctive aspect of both the Dalit and the African-American autobiographies. Both wanted to create their own identity and they decided to do this through their own language and tradition and in their writings. They used their own language with the intention of realizing their
people and masses easily by their uniqueness in writings. Rejection of the standard language and use of their own language is one of the important characteristics of Dalit and African-American literature. In other words, Dalit and the Black writers created their own aesthetics in revolt against the aesthetics of mainstream writers.

When drawing comparisons between the life of the Dalits in India and the Blacks in America, one can see many similarities and dissimilarities too between them. In other words, there are more similarities than dissimilarities and both have suffered a lot due to the caste system and slavery. Though slavery was abolished, the Blacks face the problem of racism in America. In India the case of the Dalits is quite different because though the problem of untouchability was made illegal by law the Dalits are still the victims of the caste system and untouchability and still hoping for better days in their social life. The life of the Dalits has been subjected to cruelty and was barbarous because of untouchability, but the Blacks also suffered from racism and in a way both are sailing in the same boat as far as their lives are concerned in the annals of society.

The practice of untouchability was not only cruel but also inhuman and the Blacks were not subjected to such kind of practice though they experienced racism in America. Still the comparison between the life of the Dalits and the Blacks is necessary and concerning this Limbale writes:

The plight of African Americans and Dalits can be compared in a number of ways. While the African Americans were slaves, they could buy their freedom with money. Though Dalits were technically not slaves, they could not even pay to rent a house. The White master was responsible for looking after the Black slave. Since untouchables were not slaves, the savarnas had no concern for them. Untouchables are societal slaves. The cause of the African American’s slavery was economic. The cause of the Dalit’s untouchability is social. African Americans perform labour, but their labour is not considered undignified. Dalits do the lowest types of work, and their work is considered undignified. While African Americans cannot hide the colour of their skin, untouchables can hide their caste. African Americans were brought from Africa to America, Dalits belong to India. (Limbale 86)
Both gave voice to their people through their writing which emerged as a strong weapon in their hand to reach the masses. Their main intention was to come out of their humiliation and through writing they created their own world which was criticized by other non-dalit and White writers. Dalit and African-American criticism viewed literature as one of the forms of movements to achieve social liberation.

Though the Dalits and the Blacks achieved their rights politically they were not free and have been denied equal status in their social life. While making comparisons between their lives one can easily say that both have experienced the same kind of humiliation and torture by leading inhuman life. But if one goes into the details of their suffering it is not easy to come to a conclusion and decide whether untouchability is cruel or racism is. Both have their own way of exploiting people and one can agree with the words of Ambedkar who called the practice of untouchability as more cruel and inhuman than racism because of the dehumanization of a particular group of people by calling them as impure and unclean.

Though time has gone by and years have passed the situation still remains the same in the case of the Dalits and the Blacks and even in 21st century they have not escaped from the problem of caste system, untouchability and racism from the hands of the so-called knowledgeable people. Even to this day the civilized people of India and America have continued their treatment of the Dalits and the Blacks in uncivilized ways which have the oppressors to hope for better days to come in the future.

But whatever may be the situation, compared to the earlier life of the Dalits and the Blacks both have succeeded in their effort to educate themselves and by utilizing the support of the government both have come up in their life by having an identity of their own in the world of the oppressors. To some extent both have crossed the hurdles and emerged triumphant in their effort to have a ‘self’ of their own which was not an easy task for them. Even to this day the Dalits and the Blacks are in the hope of being treated as equals by non-dalits and the Whites and the same hope continues till the achievement of equality, fraternity and identity in the world of upper caste Hindus and the Whites.
WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES


