CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

We live in a society that has still not freed itself of the mindset that condones brutal oppression and still believes that some races or castes are more equal than others. (Kapoor 27)

This question rises in the minds of the Dalits and the Blacks because of the oppression and exploitation they still face in their respective countries. To take the case of the Dalits, they faced casteism earlier though now, they are in a better position compared with that of their past. But though they have political rights and freedom, they are denied social liberty and equality even to this day. The Government of India, in order to support the cause of the Dalits, undertook various measures for their uplift and in a way the Dalits also utilized the progressive measures of the government to construct a respectable life for themselves in the society.

However, after receiving education and achieving an honourable position, if the Dalits are denied social equality and freedom, then how can they have a respectable and dignified life in the society? Notwithstanding various protests and revolutionary movements led by leaders like Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, Khanshi Ram and others, the Dalits still face caste discrimination and untouchability that are proving hard to be uprooted. Narendra Jadhav, in his autobiography Untouchables writes:

The movement spearheaded by Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar continues, decades later, to gather momentum. His message to Dalits to “educate, organize, and agitate” has been reaching far and wide. Dalits, once rendered untouchables, are finding their voice. Indeed, they are mounting a slow but steady rebellion. (Jadhav Untouchables 9-10)

It was to find their voice that the Dalits began narrating their stories through autobiographies and thereby decided to reach the masses, particularly to make them aware of the abuse and suppression that they face. Though writing an autobiography is a personal act, it differs in case of the Dalits as it transforms into a social act due to situating their individual ‘self’ in the commercial ‘self’. In other words, writing an autobiography helps a person judge his place in a community while compared with others. The Dalits have tried to have an individual identity through writing
autobiographies which stands against the view of the upper caste Hindus. According to them, no person has his/her individual self and they all are part of the universal soul that’s personified by God. But the Dalits went against this world view of the upper caste Hindus by creating their own identity through their writing.

In this regard Rajkumar in his book *Dalit Personal Narratives* says:

Autobiographical narratives constitute a significant segment of Dalit literature. The Dalit writers termed these narratives as ‘self-stories’ (Atmakatha) or ‘self-reportings’ (Atma vritta)…. On the face of several oppressive social forces, these writers, with their growing perceptions and mature imagination, capture the tensions which grow out of a continuous battle between ‘loss of identity’ and ‘asserting of self’. Thus, the very process of writing autobiography by the Dalits is a form of resistance against various forms of oppression. (Kumar 150)

Dalit writers wrote autobiographies not for their identity alone, but for their community’s recognition as well. If their only concern was their individual identity, they would not mention anything about their community and their life in detail in their work. In all the autobiographies, they claim equality for themselves as well as for their community people. Writers like Narendra Jadhav, Laxman Gaikwad, Sharankumar Limbale and Vasanth Moon received education and achieved a respectable place in the society. But they were not satisfied just by what they got as they wanted their fellow community members to grow. That defines the Dalit writers who not just were worried about finding a place for themselves, but were concerned about their people too. Regarding this Rajkumar writes:

The fact that all of them fall back upon their communities to have their social identities suggests that they are deeply rooted in the culture of their community and want to use them for Dalit solidarity and self-assertion. It is for this reason that every Dalit autobiography reads like an ethnographic account of a community rather than a narrative account of a personalized self- and this is what marks out Dalit autobiographies as different from other autobiographies. (Kumar 208)
In a way, through their autobiographies, the Dalits tried to get back their identity which was stolen from them by the upper caste Hindus. Besides, a basic right of living equally with their fellow humans with dignity was snatched away from them. They were exploited socially, mentally and physically. Though India is politically free with its own Constitution that advocates liberty, equality and fraternity propagated by Dr. Ambedkar, who himself a Dalit, the ground reality is different as the situation still remains, more or less, the same. The Dalits and other depressed classes have to struggle to live peacefully in the society without facing any kind of exploitation. Mini Babu in his article “The Dalit Vision and Voice: A Study of Sharankumar Limbale’s Akkarashi” writes:

Dalit intellectuals operate their modes of resistance creatively in Dalit literature, the most powerful being Dalit autobiographies. Dalit literature is an arduous endeavour from the canonical to the marginal, from mega-narratives to micro-narratives, from the virtual to the real, and from self-emulation to self-affirmation. (Babu 6)

According to Dr. Ambedkar, an ideal society should be based on the concept of liberty, equality, and fraternity without which one cannot conceive a democratic way of life. But the upper caste Hindu society denied these ideal concepts to the Dalits by relegating them to a low position. In order to attain equal status and to escape oppression, Dr. Ambedkar gave a call to the Dalits to educate themselves at any cost and to gain political power. But ironically, he had both education and political power, but couldn’t succeed in coming out of exploitation from the upper castes.

Dr. Ambedkar had higher education and no one can excel in education like Ambedkar because he was one of the highly educated persons in the world at that time. Though he had good education and knowledge, he thought of having political power as a supporting weapon to tackle caste discrimination, but it did not yield that many positive results. Being a Dalit, he advocated inter-dining and inter-caste marriage as a solution to eradicate the caste system. But they failed to bring any expected result, as Dalits suffer caste discrimination and oppression of different kinds even to this day.
Another solution given was the replacement of Dalits with machines to do all kinds of menial jobs. In the earlier times, all the menial jobs were done by the Dalits that was considered impure by the upper caste Hindus, who defended their practice of untouchability by giving the above reason. But later, many leaders advised the Dalits not to do menial jobs, but to educate themselves so that they can lead a ‘purified’ life like the non-Dalits. After some time, machines were used in place of labourers for cleaning dirt. Nowadays, 90 per cent of the dirt is being cleaned by machines, and on the other hand, Dalits are receiving the education that they fought for. They are more qualified and highly educated than those from the upper castes, but the caste system and untouchability still persist in India even in the 21st Century.

Fed up of protests and struggles which the Dalits undertook, especially Dr. Ambedkar, to eradicate the caste system, he decided to leave Hinduism and convert to Buddhism. This act shows his complete disillusionment with Hinduism and its caste system that made him embrace Buddhism on October 14, 1956 at Nagpur. Throughout his life, he fought against the caste system and he says:

There is no doubt in my opinion, that unless you change your social order, you can achieve little by way of progress. You cannot mobilize the community either for defense or for offence. You cannot build anything on the foundation of caste. You cannot build up a nation. You cannot build up a morality. Anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole. (Shahare 114)

It was the idea of equality for all in Buddhism that attracted Dr. Ambedkar towards it and in a way, it was an escape from the clutches of Hinduism. He tried his best to bring about reformation in Hinduism, but owing to his failure, he not just embraced Buddhism but recommended conversion to other religion as the only solution left for Dalits to escape from untouchability and the caste system. Ambedkar, in his book Why to go for Conversion? writes:

To reform the Hindu society is neither our aim nor our field of action. Our aim is to gain social freedom…. If we can gain our freedom by conversion, why should we shoulder the responsibility of reforming the Hindu religion? …. None should misunderstand
the object of our movement as being Hindu social reform. The object of our movement is to achieve social freedom for the Untouchables. It is equally true that the freedom cannot be secured without conversion. (Ambedkar Why to go for Conversion 5)

Though Dr. Ambedkar considered conversion as the only solution left for the Dalits, many found themselves in dilemma on whether to leave Hinduism and embrace another religion or live in the same religion. Hinduism was so deeply rooted in Dalits that even after converting to other religion, they celebrated the festivals of ‘Hindus’. But what we need today is not conversion or inter-dining or inter-caste marriage to eradicate the caste system, but a change in the mindset of people and how they treat Dalits and other depressed classes. They should be treated as equal by the upper caste Hindus because even in inter-caste marriage, the caste tag does not vanish. It makes its presence in the children who are born to the couple of different castes in the form of names they are given and caste mentioned in the records.

In this backdrop, inter-caste marriages cannot be looked at as a solution to caste discrimination as inter-caste marriages have been witnessed in the past, but it had no telling impact on how the upper caste Hindus treat the Daits. If the concept of inter-caste marriages had worked well, then India would not have been recognised through its rigid caste system even today. In the present days, caste dominates the individual person’s identity and his/her work. Dr. Ambedkar writes: “Hindu society gives more importance to the division of people and not the work. In other words, there is no place for the individual in the Hindu society.” (Ambedkar Why to go for Conversion 16)

Dalits can achieve freedom when the upper caste Hindus embrace them broadmindedly. They can achieve their own identity when a person’s caste gets replaced by his/her work. With this, a change in the mindset of non-Dalits and to cultivate broadmindedness to treat everyone equally can bring change in the life of the Dalits in India. But the Hindu society is stubborn about their treatment of the Dalits and Keer Dhananjaya describes the condition of a Dalit in his book Dr.Ambedkar: Life and Mission by saying: “Hindu society was just like a tower which had several storeys without a ladder or an entrance. One was to die in the storey in which one was born” (Keer 41).
If this is the case of the Dalits, the life of the Blacks does not seem much different, but there might be a slight difference. The Dalits belonged to the same religion as that of the upper caste Hindus, but in case of the Blacks, they neither belong to the same religion nor have the same place. The birth of plantations led to the emergence of slaves which later became an inhuman and barbarous institution. The Africans were chained, literally and mentally denying their basic human rights.

The condition of Blacks was so miserable that Kapoor says: “For the Whites, Blacks did not exist, were invisible. At best they were part of a landscape” (Kapoor 32). Like the upper caste Hindus, the Whites used religion to make the Blacks puppets in their hands. The institution of slavery was not only cruel, but inhuman which made it impossible for the Blacks to think about their freedom and equality. The institution of slavery that began in 1619 ruled the Blacks for 244 long years until its abolition in 1863 by Abraham Lincoln with the issue of the Emancipation Proclamation. During these years, many slaves lost their lives, families as well as their culture, tradition and language. But the two most important aspects that every Black person lost, as slaves, was freedom and equality.

Many slaves escaped from slavery and indulged themselves in social activities to bring a change in the life of slaves. One such slave was Frederick Douglass, who was determinant and strong in his decision to escape from slavery and after achieving that, he indulged himself in his writing giving courage to other slaves to fight for their rights. In spite of the hardships and obstacles he faced, he gained what he desired for and became a greatest person in the history of America. In his autobiography *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, he writes:

> It will be seen in these pages that I have lived several lives in one. First, the life of slavery; secondly, the life of a fugitive from slavery; thirdly, the life of comparative freedom; fourthly, the life of conflict and battle; and, fifthly, the life of victory, if not complete, at least assured. (Douglass 281)

As far as his life is concerned, he achieved what he wanted, but not satisfied with that he desired for Blacks’ complete freedom and equality. Though slavery was abolished and every person, irrespective of his/her race or religion, was given equality, the Whites began treating the Blacks as inferior due to their dark complexion.
as it considered ugly and evil. Racism replaced slavery and the Blacks were again treated badly. In other words, the Whites were not ready to accept their one time slaves as their fellow human beings and therefore, began racism.

But gradually, due to the efforts of many social activists like Martin Luther King Jr, Booker.T.Washington, W.E.B.Du Bois and others, Blacks were motivated enough to fight against racism. When compared to the earlier times, the situation of the Blacks in America is not bad, but also not something to be proud of. Though the Blacks are educated and financially well off, the Whites are somewhat hesitant to accept them into their fold and treat them respectfully. Frederick Douglass writes:

…neither we, nor any other people, will ever be respected till we respect ourselves, and we will never respect ourselves till we have the means to live respectfully. An exceptionally poor and dependent people will be despised by the opulent and despise themselves. (Douglass 298)

In spite of many revolts and movements from the Blacks, they still are not able to gain complete respect from the Whites and even to this day, Blacks are craving for a better life with respect and honour. Though Barak Obama became the President of the United States being a Black, that does not mean that the Blacks in America enjoy equal freedom like Whites and there is no discrimination. Till today, they face harassment, abuse and discrimination on the basis of their skin colour and racism predominates in America.

Like Dalits, the Blacks also thought of converting to other religion to escape racism, and many embraced it. In reality, people have to fight for their rights by being in the religion that they are born into, instead of escaping. In case of the Blacks, the situation is different as they do not belong to the same religion of the Whites, but were forcibly brought to America. Therefore, Blacks have to fight in America for their rights instead of going back to their native places. Both the Dalits and the Blacks are fighting for their rights even today by being part of the religion that they were born into and not by embracing other religions.

S.D.Kapoor opines that the life of the Dalits has not changed even today compared to the life of the Blacks in America. Though there exist racism even to this day, the Blacks are fortunate to some extent to enjoy freedom and equal status and he
considers the problem of untouchability as more severe than that of racism. He writes: “The U.S.A. took four hundred years to realize the simple fact that a human being (in this case, Blacks) is a human being. In India we took a millennium and a half to realize this simple fact (or have we)” (Kapoor 29).

Taking both the cases into consideration, it becomes clear that what the Dalits and Blacks are fighting for is freedom, equality and identity. To be more specific, liberty, equality and fraternity were the motto of the French Revolution and in the same way, freedom, equality and identity are the motto of the Dalits and the Blacks. They want freedom from their oppressors, equality for all human beings irrespective of their caste or race and identity, not on the basis of caste, but on the basis of the work done by them.

For centuries, the Dalits and the Blacks have been fighting for these, but are still unsuccessful in achieving it completely. Now the situation has reached such a position that it’s impossible to imagine India and America without the caste system and racism. To come out of this and to have an identity for themselves, the Dalits and Blacks have to continue their fight till they succeed in changing the mindset of their exploiters. Though the writers, who have been selected for the research, have emerged triumphant in their attempt to have an identity of their own, there are still millions of Dalits and Blacks who are facing the caste system, untouchability and racism in their respective places.

In conclusion, it can be said that all humans are social animals who are interrelated and interdependent by nature. It is in the human society that one can develop his/her personality. This development needs recognition in the society itself. But the caste system and racism fails to provide an atmosphere and a required space for a person to grow and form his/her self. If the caste system and racism continues to discriminate human beings on various grounds, growth in society, in true sense, cannot be witnessed. A true human development can only be achieved in a society which does not discriminate its people on the basis of caste or colour.
WORKS CITED


