CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Every country has its own attributes and characteristics whose salient features are easy to recognise. These salient features, good or bad, a country gets recognition from one such aspect. In some countries, people are divided as high and low, not on the basis of the work they do, but from their birth. This common factor features in many of the countries, be it caste or race and people are branded to be of a particular caste/race from their birth itself.

In other words, in many countries people are divided into different caste or race by birth and it becomes a custom that renders people helpless as they cannot change the system easily. Even to this day, caste/race matters to a greater extent which defines a person’s identity, both during his life and also after his death. The caste/race tag lives with a person throughout and even after death. It is on this basis that a particular group of people are being humiliated and exploited even to this day in many countries.

The uniqueness of India and America exists in its caste and racial system respectively, where the Dalits and the Blacks, who acquire lower position by force, experience inhuman and a dehumanized life characterised by identity crisis and revival of their culture. The first chapter of the thesis deals with a brief history of the Dalit and the African-American origin, their Movements for freedom and identity and their history of literature. The research is a comparative study of both Dalits and African-Americans as both has similar theme of suppression and exploitation. It deals with autobiographies of eight writers where the researcher has taken four autobiographies each from Dalit Marathi writers and African-American writers. In the introduction chapter, information will be given regarding the selection of autobiographies only other than novels or fiction and also some brief introduction will be given about the authors and their autobiographies.

HISTORY OF THE CASTE SYSTEM AND UNTOUCHABILITY IN INDIA

The caste system is a unique feature of India where people are oppressed and abused because of the concept of ‘high’ and ‘low’. As they are divided into two groups – ‘Upper’ and ‘Lower’ caste – those who are in the lower strata of society
experience oppression at the hands of the upper caste who dominate them in order to have supremacy over them.

To begin with, the origin of the caste system can be found in the Vedas, which is said to be the scripture of the Aryans. The Tenth Mandala of Rig Veda, considered the oldest religious text in the world, contains the famous Purushasukta that explains the four ‘varnas’: “(Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra) were born from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet of the Primeval Being Brahma (Purusa)” (Agnihotri 115). The Brahmans occupied the predominant place followed by Kshatriyas, who were princes and warriors. The third stood Vaishyas, who were traders, while the Shudras formed the lower rung doing the menial work and serving the other three varnas. However, Dalits form the fifth varna who were also called Panchamas and remained outside the four fold caste system. In short, the earlier untouchables were called Dalits in modern days.

In the Hindu society, it is caste that acts as a powerful factor in determining a person’s identity. In other words, in India, a person’s caste is decided by his birth and once born into a particular caste, he/she cannot change it. Their profession is also decided by it. The four major castes mentioned are Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudra.

The term ‘caste’ is so unique that it has its own connotations in India that determines a person’s place in the annals of society. It is the unique feature that exists in India and in this regard Susan Bayly in her book The New Cambridge History of Caste in India defines caste: “as a system of stratified social hierarchy that distinguishes India from all other societies. Caste has achieved much the same significance in social, political and academic debt as race in the United States, Class in Britain and Faction in Italy” (Bayly 1).

The word ‘caste’ owes its origin to the Portuguese word ‘Casta’ which means race, strain or a complex of hereditary qualities. Rajendra Kumar Sharma in his book Rural Sociology quotes the words of Herbert Risley who defines caste as:

- a collection of families bears a common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling and is regarded by those who are
competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community” (Sharma 149).

S.V. Ketkar in his book *History of Caste in India* gives an explanation regarding the use of the word ‘caste’ by Indians and says:

The word “Caste”. This is of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Caste means lineage or race. It is derived from the Latin word Castus, which means pure. The Spaniards were the first to use it, but its Indian application is from the Portuguese, who had so applied it in the middle of 15thC. The current spelling of the word is after the French word “Caste”, which appears in the 1740 in the “academics,” and is hardly found before 1800…. The Spanish word “Casta” was applied to the mixed breed between Europeans, Indians (American) and negroes. But “caste” was not used in its Indian sense till the seventeenth century…. As the Indian idea of caste was but vaguely understood, this word was loosely applied to the hereditary classes of Europe resembling the Castes of India., who kept themselves socially distinct. (Ketkar 12)

Historical records regarding the origin of the caste system shows that since ancient times there exists the cruel caste system and the practice of untouchability. The Aryans who were light skinned, invaded India and found the Dravidians, who were dark-skinned, living here. The Aryans felt that they were superior and were also proud of their race, religion and language. In addition to this, they also considered Dravidians as non-humans. Instead of overthrowing Dravidians, they kept them as their servants by relegating them to a lower position. The early settlers of India, the Dravidians, were called ‘Dasas’ and the Aryans distanced themselves from these Dasas.

The *Chhandogaya* Upanishad, composed around 8th Century B.C. talks about Chandala and says: “those persons whose actions were low, will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, or a hog or a Chandala” (Michael 46). This shows that the Chandalas were relegated to the position of animals and in some cases, they were treated worse than animals and the Gautama Dharma Sutra tries to explain the origin of Chandalas for the first time. It says: “…the Chandala is the offspring of a male
Shudra and a Brahmin woman and is the most reprehensible among those born in the indirect order or pratiłoma” (Michael 46).

The Sutras were composed around 6th B.C. but “the Manusmiritis was composed sometime between the second century B.C. to A.D. second century” (Michael 70). Before Sutras, Manu in his Manusmriti made some rules that said Chandalas and Shvapakas should live outside the village. S.K.Deodhar in his book Rig Veda says:

The roots of the varna system (varna literally means colour) lie in the clash of races. Fair-complexioned Aryan hordes that started pouring into India through the north-west around 1500 B.C vanquished and subjugated the dark-complexioned earlier settlers; and thus foundations were laid for a class system based on birth.

(Deodhar 228)

It becomes clear that people were divided on the basis of colour, but gradually the caste tag was given to them which led to the emergence of the caste system in India. The Aryans, considering themselves superior just because of their fair complexion, tried to suppress and overcome the Dravidians, who were dark-skinned. This notion of superior and inferior led to the practice of untouchability since then.

Shrirama in his article “Untouchability and Stratification in Indian Civilization” published in S.M.Michael’s book Dalits in Modern India says:

In the Rig Veda, the word ‘varna’ clearly refers to the colour of skin and hair of the people of two different races, the Aryan varna and the Krshna varna. Nowhere in the Rig Veda is the word ‘Varna’ used for the fourfold stratification of society. (Michael 49)

In the same article he further says which is mentioned in the Rig Veda that:

The Brhamin has been called the mouth of the Purusha and is placed highest in society…. The second rank, Rajanya, is born of the arms of the Purusha and has the privilege of wielding arms. The thighs of the Purusha became the Vaishya…. From his feet were produced the Shudra. Just as the feet are the lowest in the body, Shudras are the lowest in society. (Michael 57)
Though the *Rig Veda* talks about the division of people into different castes and the rigidity in the caste system, the Upanishads opine differently regarding it. The *Purushasuktha* of *Rig Veda* was composed around 1200-1000 B.C. while the Upanishads were composed around 8th Century B.C. It is said that:

The Upanishadic thought is quite different in its spirit from the Vedas. As a matter of fact, there was implicit in it a revolt against the varna hierarchy. The teachings of the Upanishads are in a simple language, therefore, they earned great popularity among the people…. In the era of the Upanishads, the supremacy of the Brahmins was challenged in various overt and covert ways. (Michael 62)

If the Vedic tradition considered dark-complexioned people as subhuman and the birth of a daughter as a misfortune, the Upanishadic tradition reverses this by not considering dark complexion as bad and *Brahdaranyaka* Upanishads mentions some rituals for having a dark-complexioned son and also rituals for the birth of a daughter. The concept of rebirth was also introduced in the Upanishads for the first time. In a way, the Upanishads posed a challenge to the supremacy of Brahmins and the Varna hierarchy. It marked a revolt against the supremacy of Brahmins. Regarding Upanishads it is said that:

The Upanishads mark a new epoch in the history of Indian thought. The ideas found in the Upanishads are in marked contrast to the traditional way of thinking which always looks back to the golden past. The Upanishads are refreshingly forward looking. Instead of expecting people to stick to the beaten path of the past, they exhort them to move on. (Michael 63-64)

Unfortunately, the Upanishadic era was succeeded by Sutras which tried to bring back the supremacy and glory of priestly elites and to revive the social order where the Brahmins had an unrivalled position. The Sutras were composed around 6th Century B.C. and then came Buddhism, which also posed a great challenge to the Brahminical order in India. Though the Upanishads did not directly critique the Varna hierarchy, Buddha on the other hand was quite different in this matter. It is said that: “…Buddha openly declared the varna system unreasonable and reprehensible, as all
human beings belong to a common human species, whatever be the colour of their skin” (Michael 69). He also declared the Vedic myth of the origin of the varna hierarchy as false.

When Buddhism was gaining huge popularity, the Brahmins feared about their status and thought of reviving their earlier position. As a result, the Smritis came into existence. It was during this revivalist era that Manusmriti was composed and it is said that: “Armed with the ancient myth of creation and various sacraments, together with the doctrine of karma, Manu tried to revive the bygone golden age by re-establishing the ancient system of varna hierarchy. In this process, women and Shudras were greatest losers” (Michael 71).

According to his own criteria, Manu tried to assign each and every ethnic group a specific place in the Varna system. It was in the Smriti era that Brahmins once again ensured a supreme position for themselves and Manu declared that: “the Brahmana from the very birth is an eternal incarnation of the sacred law” (Michael 72). He also calls Brahmins as one of the great god though he/she is ignorant or a learned one.

Manusmriti consists of the codes of Hindu life based on the teachings of Vedas which Manu calls as the supreme authority. The early Vedic texts do not mention the concept of Chaturvarna that divides people into four fold caste system. Satapatha Brahmana and Taittriya Brahmana speak of the creation of only the first three varnas and they neither mention nor speak about the creation of Shudras as a separate ‘varna’. In addition, ‘Atarva Veda’ mentions only three varnas and in ‘Rig Veda’ too, Shudras are not mentioned as a separate ‘varna’. But the later Vedic texts mention this quite often and it shows that the concept of Shudra originated during the later part of the Vedic period. This means that the Shudras were created only for the prosperity of the first three varnas. A.R. Tripathi in his article “The Concept of Shudras in Manusmriti: A Reappraisal”: “A Brahmin who resorts to the best and avoids the low, reaches eminence and if he does contrary to this, he reaches the state of Shudra” (Tripathi 294).

The caste system not only divided the people as high and low, but puts forth some rules and regulations to be followed by people. The first rule is, a person is given a membership of a particular caste by birth and that person remains in that caste
even after his death and this membership does not undergo any change even if changes occur in the person’s education, wealth, occupation and status.

The second rule says that each individual’s caste has its own occupation and to support this rule, the Hindu scriptures mention the existence of a particular occupation for all the four ‘varnas’. According to Manu Shastra, the duty of the Brahmin is to study, teach and to perform religious rituals, while the function of the Kshatriya is the same like that of a Brahman with an extra duty of waging war. The third, that is the Vaishyas, were entitled to indulge in production process, trade and animal husbandry and the fourth, the Shudras, were handed over the remaining work – menial jobs and also to serve the first three varnas. This was the kind of division that was made on the basis of caste.

This apart, there existed another rule like marrying their own caste people and even to this day, the Hindu society discourages the concept of inter-caste marriages. To define the word ‘caste’, Rajendra Kumar Sharma in his book Rural Sociology quotes the words of A.W.Green:

Caste is a system of stratification in which mobility, movement up and down the status ladder, at least ideally may not occur. A person’s ascribed status is his life-time status. Birth determines occupation, place of residence, style of life, personal associates and the group among whom one must find a mate. A caste system always includes the notion that physical or even some forms of social contact with the lower caste people is degrading to higher caste persons. The caste system is also protected by law, and sanctified by religion. (Sharma 149-50)

Nobody knows exactly when this caste system took its birth, but many scholars have come up with different theories regarding its origin. According to the traditional theory, it is the Brahma who created the caste system. But going by ‘Rig Veda’, the people were divided into four divisions like Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra as mentioned earlier. However, another theory called the economic or occupational theory declares occupation as the key factor in dividing people into different castes. Nesfield says: “Function and function alone is responsible for the origin of caste system” (Sharma 152). Though some ancient Hindus support this
theory as the occupation of most of the castes in Hindu society are fixed, the theory lacks a detailed information about the hierarchy in the caste system. It also fails to explain why all farmers do not belong to a particular caste and instead belong to different caste groups.

Apart from these two theories, S.C.Roy propounds the Ethical theory regarding the origin of the caste system and says: “The Caste system originated in the class system of Indo-Aryans, the tribal system of pre-Dravidians and conflicts among various occupations” (Sharma 152). However, some scholars have propounded the Ethnic theory and regarding this Prof.G.S.Ghurye writes: “The Caste system was a clever scheme of the Brahmins to maintain their hold on Hindu society” (Sharma 153). This theory appears true to a very large extent because, going by the situation at present, the theory holds good as Brahmins, to this day, hold the highest place in the social order and the Dalits suffer from exploitation and suppression which has made them to lead an inhuman life.

In addition to the theories put forth by many scholars, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, the father of Indian Constitution and who fought for the uplift of Dalits in India, propounds his theory regarding the origin of Shudras. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar’s theory of the origin of the Shudras may be summarized as follows:

The Shudras were one of the Aryan Community of the solar race and ranked as the Kshatriya Varna in the Indo-Aryan society. There was a time, when the Aryan society recognized only the existence of three Varnas, namely Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas and the Shudras were not a separate Varna, but a part of the Kshatriya Varna. However there was a continuous dispute between the Shudra kings and the Brahmins, in which the latter were subjected to many tyrannies and indignities. As a result of the hatred which existed towards the Shudras, generated by their tyrannies and oppressions, the Brahmins refused to perform the Upanayana Ceremony to the Shudras. Owing to this denial, the Shudras became socially degraded by falling below the rank of the Vaishyas and thus came to form the fourth Varna in the Caste hierarchy. (Jatava 33-8)
According to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the Shudras were part of Vaishyas, but due to hatred between Brahmins and Shudras, the Brahmins refused to do the Upanayana ceremony and thereby Shudras were relegated to the fourth place in the annals of society. He also propounds his thesis regarding the origin of untouchability in his book *The Untouchables*, published in 1948. According to him, before the emergence of the practice of untouchability, there was a difference between the tribesmen and ‘broken men’ from alien tribes. Gradually, these broken men were treated as untouchables and Ambedkar gives two reasons for how untouchability began. They are: “i. Contempt and hatred for the broken men, as for Buddhism by the Brahmins. ii. Continuation of beef eating by the broken men after it had been given up by the others” (Michael 18).

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar also explains who were ‘broken men’ in his thesis and says: “When the primitive society began to settle down and to cultivate, certain tribes remained nomadic and warlike” (Michael 18-19). These nomadic tribes started attacking the settled tribes as the latter had more wealth and grain. Besides, the settled tribes were in need of defenders as they lost their warlike spirit at that time and so appointed the broken men, that is the defeated nomads and stray individuals, who were in need of shelter and protection. Though the settled tribes employed the ‘broken men’, to fight against their enemies and defend them, they were made to stay separately as they belonged to a different tribe. They were not treated respectfully by the settled tribes. There emerged two classes of the superior and the inferior and regarding this Dr. B. R. Ambedkar says: “…the root cause of untouchability lies in a pronounced cultural and racial difference of contempt and hatred coupled with a close economic dependence of the inferior society on the superior one” (Michael 19).

A. R. Naronkar in his book *Untouchability and Caste System in India* tries to trace the origin and history of the caste system. He mentions *Karnataka Inscription* of 1221 that talks about the existence of the untouchable community namely ‘Holeyā’ and it describes the culture and the way of life of the Holeyā community. The four-fold caste division propounded by the Purushasuktha of *Rig Veda* is treated as the main source regarding the origin of the caste system in India. It also calls the first three varnas as twice born, one birth from their mother and the second from the investiture with the sacred girdle. But the Shudras were not called twice born as Brahmins refused to conduct Upanayana for them.
S.M. Michael also gives information about who the untouchables were and how they became Untouchables according to the law of Manu. He writes in his book *Dalits in Modern India* saying:

According to Manu, the ancient India lawgiver, untouchability is the punishment for miscegenation between a member of a high caste and that of a low caste or an outcaste…. the offspring of a Brahmin father and a Shudra mother is called Nishada; the child becomes a fisherman. The offspring of a Shudra father and a Brahmin mother is called Chandala; he is the most degraded of all the mortals. (Michael 17)

Many scholars have come up with their own theories regarding the origin of the caste system in India and the emergence of untouchables. Similarly J.J. Hutton, a famous anthropologist, has put forth his theory in his famous book *Caste in India* where he writes: “The origin of the position of the exterior castes is partly racial, partly religious, and partly a matter of social custom. There can be little doubt but the idea of untouchability originates in taboo” (Hutton 207).

Apart from the theories propounded by many scholars, there exist many myths to trace the origin of the practice of untouchability in India:

According to one myth, for example, the original Untouchable was a Brahmin who came upon a cow mired in the mud. Intending to help the cow (a mysterious intent), he pulled on its tail. But the cow died and since he had been in contact with a dead cow—a polluting contact—his older brothers outcaste him and he became the first Untouchable. (Michael 32)

Going by all the theories by various scholars, it is clear that the society divided the people in the name of caste and made the first three varnas as upper caste, while calling Shudras as lower caste and placing Dalits as out-castes and untouchables. If they were just divided and not been treated as high and low, there would not have been any issues like exploitation. But things took a different turn when the upper castes began dominating the lower caste people by calling them ‘impure’. The Dalits were utilized by the upper castes for their own benefit. The irony, however, is that those who cleaned the dirt of the upper caste were called dirty and impure.
In the name of caste, the Dalits were relegated to a low position and they led an inhuman life with the practice of untouchability. This made the Dalits lead a life sans basic necessities and had no share in the public life. Moreover, they were not considered humans by the upper caste Hindus. The practice of untouchability was so severe that they were made to shout aloud while walking in streets. This was done to make the upper caste aware of their arrival so that they can protect themselves from getting polluted. Even their shadow was considered impure by the upper castes and they were segregated from the society as they were given a separate place to live. Blunt says:

At all times, the Brahmin priesthood has endeavoured to keep them segregated, not only from the society, but from the Hindu religion and the Hindu ceremonies; they were not allowed to hear, much less study the Vedas; they must not enter the temples, they must carry on all ceremonies without using mantras and no Brahmin would carry out any domestic ceremony for them. (Massey *Down Trodden* 14)

This kind of segregation was made by the upper caste Hindus in order to have supremacy over the Dalits. Also, they needed somebody to do the menial jobs due to which the upper castes tried their best to keep Dalits in the lower position denying any opportunity to come up in life. They were also denied education as the upper castes wanted them to be in ignorance as that would help them have a strong hold over Dalits. They becoming educated would mean the upper caste position would be threatened.

Although in the beginning the caste system was merely based on the division of labour aiming at assigning a particular responsibility and duty to people, but it gradually deteriorated into pathogenic affairs where the occupations changed into castes. Later, the higher castes in the society began to look down upon the Dalits, an attitude that made the caste system cruel and barbarous. Dalits tolerated unending humiliation from the upper caste Hindus. The exploitation was so severe that even to this day, in many places, Dalits experience the same kind of oppression that their ancestors had endured.
This fifth Varna was called by different names like Dalit, Untouchable, Harijan etc. In this regard James Massey in his book *Indigenous people: Dalits: Dalits Issue in Today’s theological Debate* writes:

They were ‘broken men’ and ‘Protestant Hindus’ to Dr.B.R.Ambedkar and ‘Harijan’ to Mahatma Gandhi. To the Britisher’s they were the ‘Untouchables’ and the ‘Depressed Classes’. They were [put under a schedule and] referred to as the ‘Scheduled Castes’ in the Constitution of India. ‘Dalit’ is a recent term adopted by the Dalits themselves to indicate the fact that they are the most oppressed, exploited and dehumanized section of Indian culture. (Massey *Indigenous people* 81)

The term ‘Harijan’, coined by Narasimha Mehta, was adopted and popularized by Mahatma Gandhi. During ancient times, they were called ‘mlechha’ and ‘chandala’, the reference of which is seen in Manu. This apart, they were also called ‘Panchamas’ as the untouchables were called the fifth Varna and in some cases, they were called ‘avarnas’, those outside the four varnas. In addition to this, they were also called ‘Nishada’, ‘Paulkasa’, ‘Antyaja’, ‘Atishudra’ etc. It was the Britishers, who legalized the term ‘Scheduled Caste’ and S.M.Michael, in this regard says:

The term ‘Scheduled Castes’ appeared for the first time in April 1935, when the British Government issued the Government of India (Scheduled Caste) order 1936, specifying certain castes, races and tribes as Scheduled Castes. Prior to that these population groups were generally known as ‘Depressed Classes’. The term ‘Dalit’, first used in journalistic writings as far back as 1931 to connate the Untouchables, gained currency only in the early 1970’s with the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra. (Michael 16)

The word ‘Dalit’ was first used by a Marathi social revolutionary, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, to describe the outcaste and untouchables as the oppressed and the broken victims of the caste-ridden society. It was under the leadership of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar that the term ‘Dalit’ gained greater significance and popularity. In the 1970’s, the followers of Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra gave currency to the term “Dalit” as a constant reminder of their age-old oppression to symbolize both
their condition of deprivation and the people who were oppressed. The word “Dalit” did not appear just as a mere name, but as an expression of hope. Arjun Dangle in his book *Poisoned Bread* defines the word ‘Dalit’ as: “masses exploited and oppressed economically, socially, culturally, in the name of religion and other factors” (Dangle liii). Though the names are different, the kind of exploitation they suffer was the same because of their low status. Nobody knows exactly when this kind of segregation and the practice of untouchability began, but the Dalits are suffering owing to this inhuman practice.

From generations, the Dalits are victims of the upper caste oppression and as they are denied education, they are leading a life of complete ignorance not being aware of their rights. The upper caste Hindus kept the Dalits in ignorance by using religion as a weapon and this made the latter suffer unendingly and they could not raise their voice against their exploiters. The exploitation of Dalits and their physical and mental abuse will be discussed in detail in the second chapter.

**ROLE OF PHULE AND AMBEDKAR TO REMOVE THE CASTE SYSTEM THROUGH VARIOUS DALIT MOVEMENTS**

Lack of education and knowledge about their rights, fear of God and religion and utter poverty made Dalits to develop a submissive attitude towards the upper caste Hindus and for centuries, they silently suffered from all kinds of exploitation as they lacked courage. Though they were aware of their exploitation, they were not in a position to revolt against the upper caste as they feared them. They were in need of someone to lead them to the path of progress. In other words, they needed a support system that was given by leaders like Jyotiba Phule, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, Periyar and others who fought for the cause of the Dalits in India.

The first generation leaders, who raised their voice against the caste system, were Jyotiba Phule and Narayana Guru of Kerala. Jyotiba Phule was the first to claim equality for all and it was he who encouraged education of women. Another leader, Narayana Guru, who was the Ezhava leader of Kerala, attacked the institution of caste in a regional society. After Phule and Narayana Guru, there came Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, who belonged to the second generation of Dalit leaders, to protect and safeguard Dalits. Throughout his life, he fought for the rights of the oppressed classes and argued against Hinduism that favoured the caste system and untouchability.
Ultimately he came to the conclusion that: “The only way to liberation for Dalits, therefore, was to opt out of the Hindu fold” (Michael 34) and also converted to Buddhism during his last days.

Though he converted to Buddhism, he is still called the leader of Dalits for his work for the uplift of the Dalits in India. He is worshipped as God by the Dalits as he dedicated his entire life for the cause of his people. Throughout his life, his only concern was the progress of the Dalits in every field.

He was born an untouchable on April 14 1891 at Mhow as the 14th child of Ramji Maloji Sakpal and Bhimabai Murbadkar Sakpal. He came from a Marathi background family from Maharashtra. His ancestors had worked for the army of the British East India Company and his father served in the British Indian Army at the Mhow cantonment. His Brahmin teacher, Mahadev Ambedkar, who was very fond of him, changed his surname from ‘Ambavadekar’ to Ambedkar in school records.

He took his degree in Economics and Political Science and did postgraduation in Economics in Columbia University. In October 1916, he enrolled for the Bar Course at Gray’s Inn and at the same time, enrolled at the London School of Economics, where he began working on a doctoral thesis. Initially, he started his career as an economist, lawyer and a professor, but later, he involved himself in political activities and began his campaign for India’s Independence, especially for the welfare of Dalits in India. He rose to a great position and became popular as Babasaheb. Though an untouchable, he achieved great success as he was well educated and became an economist, politician, jurist and social reformer. He was the main architect of the Indian Constitution and also Independent India’s first Law Minister.

Being an untouchable, he was subjected to social discrimination. But overcoming all kinds of exploitation and humiliation, Ambedkar became a prominent figure in the history of India. In the midst of his scholarly pursuits, he took an active part in the struggle for Dalits’ rights and advocated social freedom for them. He breathed his last on 6 December 1956 and in 1990, he was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, the India’s highest civilian award.

Though most of the social reformers like Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi condemned the practice of
untouchability, they upheld the caste system by considering it as an essential part of
the Hindu society for ensuring its smooth functioning. Their efforts did not bring any
results as they just condemned the practice of untouchability without attacking the
very root, the caste system. They did not launch any specific programme to liberate
Dalits from the clutches of the caste system. The emergence of the Christian
missionaries and western education helped Dalits on the economic front and also
made them aware of their horrible plight.

But it was Ambedkar who took up the cause of Dalits with an altogether
different perspective and believed that any effort to improve the condition of the
Dalits should be directed towards uprooting the caste system itself. He inculcated
among Dalits the value of self respect and an urge to fight for their legal rights. Being
against the inhuman practice of untouchability, he says:

Untouchability is the social practice of ostracizing a minority
group by segregating them from the mainstream by social custom
or legal mandate. The excluded group could be one that did not
accept the norms of the excluding group. A member of the
excluded group is known as an Untouchable. (Ambedkar
Annihilation of Caste: A Reply to Mahatma Gandhi 9)

Ambedkar also says that the inhuman practice of untouchability refuses to
recognize the Dalits as humans. Even to this day, in some parts of India,
untouchability is still in practice. Lokamanya Balagangadhar Tilak, while speaking at
the conference on All-India Anti-Untouchability says: “Untouchability is a disease
and it must be removed…. If god were to tolerate Untouchability, he would not
recognize him as god at all” (Keer 37).

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar had a great intention of freeing his people from the clutches
of the upper caste Hindus and wanted them to lead an independent life with an
identity of their own. But for this, he wanted to mobilise people and on 9 March 1924,
Ambedkar established a social organization for depressed classes called Bahishkrit
Hitakarini Sabha. It was the first step towards initiating mass movement for the
welfare of the depressed classes. He became the Chairman of its managing committee
with a motto “Educate, Organise and Agitate” (Jadhav Ambedkar 63). This was to
promote education among Dalits by opening hostels and libraries and to improve the economic condition of the Dalits by opening industrial and agricultural schools.

He also started a fortnightly from Mumbai called ‘Bahishkrut Bahrat’ on April 3 1927, to be a mouthpiece of his people. Besides, he led many mass movements like the ‘Chavdar lake struggle’, which he called as ‘Mahad Satyagraha’, in order to have access to public water, ‘Parvati temple Satyagraha’ on October 16 1929, and ‘Kala Ram Temple Satyagraha’ on March 1 1930. For five long years, the Dalits fought for entry into the Kala Ram temple, but in vain. On June 14 1928, a new organization called The Depressed Classes Education Society was established by dissolving the Bahiskrut Hitakarini Sabha to provide education to the depressed classes.

Ambedkar also waged a war against the cruel caste system through his writings which began with the Publication of his work *Annihilation of Caste*. The book was based on the speech of Ambedkar, which he intended to deliver at the Annual Conference of *Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal* of Lahore, but was undelivered as it was feared that the views expressed by him would not be tolerated in the conference. The *Jat-Pat-Todak-Mandal* was an organization of the “Caste Hindu Social Reformers with the one and only aim, namely, to eradicate the Caste System from amongst the Hindus” (Jadhav Ambedkar 213). In *Annihilation of Caste* Ambedkar writes:

The Caste does not have the same significance for non-Hindus as it has for Hindus. Ask a Mohammedan or a Sikh who he is. He tells you that he is a Mohammedan or a Sikh, as the case may be. He does not tell you his Caste, although he has one; and you are satisfied with his answer. But you are not satisfied if a person tells you that he is a Hindu. You feel bound to inquire into his Caste. Why? Because so essential is Caste in the case of a Hindu that without knowing it you do not feel sure what sort of a being his is. (Jadhav Ambedkar 219)

Along with his writing to give voice to his people, Ambedkar also entered into politics so that he can have power in his hands as he himself said, knowledge and political power were the two important aspects that the Dalits need in order to escape oppression. He floated his first political party called the Independent Labour Party on
August 1936 and emerged as a labour leader to encourage the depressed classes’ to air their social grievances. The party was established to emancipate Dalits from the social, political, economic and religious dominions. The absence of any political party to represent Dalits in the first election of 1937 led to the establishment of the Independent Labour Party by Ambedkar. It was established to defend the cause of Dalits and also to support the advancement of the labour and depressed classes.

In 1942, Ambedkar started another political organization called All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF), with an aim to unite all the untouchables in the battle for political power. AISCF came into existence in an All India Depressed Classes Conference held in Nagpur on July 1942. Though it was started in Bombay, it spread across India in a short period. The main aim of the AISCF was to unite Dalits all over India to fight against untouchability and the caste system.

Though Ambedkar breathed his last in 1956, his political work was continued by his followers who started the Republican Party of India on October 3, 1957 that played an important role in forming women’s, students’ and workers’ organisation. But owing to internal conflicts among its members, the party lost its significance and failed to carry forward the momentum of the Dalit movement.

The disintegration of the Republican Party of India created much annoyance among Dalit youths, particularly those who had the task of bringing Dalits onto a single platform. They decided to fight against social injustice and humiliation that gave rise to the establishment of Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra in 1970. Their manifesto stated that all those who were victims of political, social and economic suppression were their allies while their enemies were power, money and prestige. However, there was a split in the movement as it failed to provide proper leadership while its slogans and aims remained on the paper alone than in reality. The reason for the establishment of the Dalit Panther Movement and its disintegration will be discussed in detail in the fifth chapter.

In 1973, Kanshi Ram established the All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees’ Federation by gathering a few educated employees from Pune and Delhi. However, the Federation worked informally for five years and on December 6, 1978 Kanshi Ram launched the federation formally with its main
function to supply funds and dedicated workers to the Bahujan Samaj Party that was established in early 80s.

Kanshi Ram also laid the foundation for the political party called the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) on April 14, 1984 on the birth anniversary of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar. The BSP was established to fulfill the aspirations of the Dalits in India. The party adopted the ideology of Ambedkar and in a way, became the political voice of the Dalits that gave a new hope to create a strong platform in Indian politics.

Apart from these strong movements, there have been other Dalit movements all over the country like Self Respect Movement, the Dalita Sangarsha Samiti in Karnataka, Indian Dalit Federation in Kerala, Dalit Mahasabha and Dalit Sena in Andhra Pradesh etc… which played a vital role in evoking Dalits’ consciousness against exploitation and oppression. But none of these could succeed in creating a recognisable impact.

Even in the Constitution of India, certain benefits were provided for Dalits to escape oppression and to compete with the upper caste Hindus in every field. Article 17 of the Constitution abolishes untouchability by forbidding the practice in any form. Article 14 provides equality for all before law and writes: “The state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the law within the territory of India” (Singh 37). Article 15 says: “The State prohibits the discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth” (Basu 81). Article 46 says:

The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker section of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. (Singh 309)

Though Dalits were given all kinds of benefits, they were not free from the kind of exploitation they experienced at the hands of the upper castes. They remained the victims of society’s social order.
DALIT LITERATURE: ITS EMERGENCE AND HISTORY IN INDIA

Ambedkar’s aim was to eradicate the caste system and untouchability, for which he gained huge knowledge that was hard to be challenged by others. He entered politics to hold the reins of power and was on writing spree too due to which he is called the Father of Dalit Literature. Though Ambedkar did not write anything new, he was the reason behind Dalit Literature’s emergence in its new form. This was achieved by his new ideas, his attitude towards life and his struggle to reclaim self respect for his people. Arjun Dangle in his book *Poisoned Bread* explains what Dalit Literature is and who Dalit writers are saying:

Dalit Literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation. In other words, Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary. (Dangle lii)

The writings of Ambedkar from 1920, when he started his newspaper called ‘Mooknayak’, till his conversion to Buddhism in 1956 was called as the period of renaissance in Dalit Movement’s history. Along with Ambedkar, writers like Shankar Rao Kharat, Bandhumadhav, Annabhair Sathe and N.R. Shende became prominent in this renaissance phase. Vijay Sonwane talks about the primary objective of the Dalit Literature saying, the main intention of Dalits to write their own literature was to make them aware of their slavery and inhuman treatment. The writers of the Dalit Literature never expected sympathy or compassion from the non-Dalits, but wanted to project the ill-treatment and injustice through their writings to reach the masses. Through their literature, the Dalits tried their best to raise voice against exploitation and suppression.

It is said, the Dalit Literature emerged in the 1960’s in Marathi language and soon appeared in Hindi, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil through narratives like poems, short stories, and mostly autobiographies. The Dalit Literature stood out from non-
Dalit literatures for two reasons – one for the political scene at that time and the second was for the stark reality that these narratives presented about their life.

The term ‘Dalit Literature’ was first used at the first Conference of Maharashtra Dalit Literature Society in Mumbai that was attended by people including social activists like Phule and Ambedkar. Historical records of Dalit Literature consider Madara Chennaiah, 11th Century cobbler saint, as the first Dalit writer. Madara Chennaiah, who lived during the reign of Western Chalukyas, is regarded as the father of Vachana poetry by some scholars. Another poet who finds mention regarding the Dalit literature is Dohara Kakkaiah, who was a Dalit by birth and whose six confessional poems survive even to this day.

Madara Chennaiah raised his voice against the caste system through his Vachanas. It was the first sign of the struggle of Dalits against the caste tradition that dates back to the period of Chennaiah. Similarly, the 12th Century Dalit saint Kalavve challenged the upper caste through his poetry.

Dalit poet Chokamela, a 14th Century saint in Maharashtra, belongs to the Mahar caste that was considered untouchable in India. He was born at Mehunaraja, a village in Deulgaon Raja taluka of Budhana district. He lived at Mangalvedha in Maharashtra. Being the first Dalit poet in India, Chokamela had the hereditary task of removing dead animals from people’s home and farm and disposing them outside the town. They were forced to live outside the town in a separate settlement.

Along with Madara Chennaiah and Chokamela, Ravidas, a 15th Century poet, was active in his struggle against the practice of untouchability. He was not only a poet, but a socio-religious reformer, humanist and thinker. He was against the caste system and rejected the tradition of reaching the Supreme Being through a Brahmin mediator.

If one traces the history of the Dalit Literature, it is said that till the last quarter of the 19th Century, Dalits had no literary records of their own. Though there existed writers like Shambaku and Ekalavya in the ‘Ramayana’ and the ‘Mahabharatha’ respectively, the two great epics of India, Valmiki, the composer of the Ramayana, and the medieval period writers like Chokamela and Rohidas, nobody left behind any kind of literature to be referred to by their successors due to the upper caste domination.
But Dalit Literature took a new dimension with the emergence of writers like Phule and Ambedkar. Prior to them, there were writers like Baburao Bagul, Shankarrao Kharat and Bandhumadhav, who had created Dalit Literature in their own way. Baburao Bagul was the pioneer of modern literature in Marathi. His first collection of stories “When I had Concealed my Caste” created a stir in Marathi literature because of its ardent portrayal of the cruel society and the caste system. It was with the publication of his first collection of stories published in 1963 that a new momentum in the history of Dalit Literature in Marathi was brought about. Even to this day, the work is seen by many critics as an epic that depicted the life of Dalits in a realistic way.

But he registered his protest in the history of Dalit Marathi literature with the publication of his second collection of stories called “Maran Swasta Hot Ahe (Death is Getting Cheaper) published in 1969. This particular collection of stories is now regarded the important landmark in the history of Dalit writing in India. He was also a radical thinker of the Dalit movement.

The Dalit Literature emerged with the intention of voicing the experiences of the oppressed. It was Dr.B.R. Ambedkar who gave a strong support to Dalits by encouraging them to struggle for reclaiming self respect and identity. Arjun Dangle writes: “However, through his struggle against untouchability and socioeconomic inequality, he liberated the Dalits in India from mental slavery and abject wretchedness, thus giving them a new self-respect” (Dangle xxiii).

The first Dalit Literary Conference was held on March 2 1958, at Bengali High School auditorium, at Dadar after two years of Ambedkar’s demise. It was here that the Dalit writers passed a resolution saying, the cultural importance of the Dalit Literature should be acknowledged and should be given due recognition without neglecting it, like Dalits. Dalit writers took inspiration from the life and philosophy of Ambedkar to indulge in their writing.

The Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha, formed around 1950, had the aim of encouraging Dalits in writing and helps them to reclaim their identity. In the Conference of Maharashtra Bauddha Sahitya Parishad held on April 30, 1967, Dr.M.N.Wankhade, who presided over the Conference said: “Like the Blacks, Dalit writers should revolt and produce their own literature through which they could
present their problems” (Dangle xxxiii). He also writes: “Dalit literature opposes exploitation and atrocities. Dalit writers cannot accept the social values of an exploiting system, and those who accept these values cannot be their ideals” (Dangle li).

The oppressed people thought of bringing a new revolution through their writings and in a way, their aim was to reject the place that was given to them by the upper caste and find a respectable place in the society of the caste Hindus. Though they belonged to the same religion, they were treated as outsiders and were kept away from the mainstream life. For centuries, many Dalits registered their protest through writings like Madara Chennaiah, Chokamela and others, but with the emergence of Ambedkar, Dalits’ vision took a new dimension and their goal took a new turn.

He is also called the Father of Dalit Literature as he was the one who laid a strong foundation for Dalits to come up with their own writings about life experiences and to register their protest through their narratives.

The plight of Dalits resembles that of Blacks in America who experienced a similar oppression due to slavery. The history of Blacks’ exploitation in America begins with the institution of slavery, the creation of Whites to abuse the Blacks in every possible way.

HISTORY OF SLAVERY AND RACISM

If Dalits suffered due to the caste system in India, the African-Americans suffered from slavery and racism. It’s easy to draw a comparison between the two as they both are still fighting for their rights in their respective countries. If the Dalits suffer from the caste system and untouchability, the Blacks were subjected to slavery that began with the arrival of the first African slave to an English colony by a Dutch Vessel to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619.

Since 1619, Africans were captured and sold in America which laid the foundation for slavery in America. With this, Americans undertook violent armed raids on African settlements. Ironically, the Whites were assisted by some Africans in this task. The captured Africans were treated like animals and they were tortured severely.

Prior to the emergence of the institution of slavery in America, if one goes to the history of slavery it becomes clear that the institution of slavery dates its existence
back in the earlier civilizations and slavery existed in Greece in the 7th Century B.C. itself. In Spartha and Athens, which is said to be the leading states of Greece, there existed slavery. Athens depended completely on forced labour while the system of serfdom existed in Spartha. In Spartha, the helots, the conquered ones who were living on their hereditary land, were compelled to work for their Sparthan masters. They were treated as slaves and were considered as forced labourers.

The miners were the most unfortunate slaves in Athens. Though the mines were owned by the states, they were given on lease to private managers who exploited slaves. Apart from miners, there were Scythian archers who provided Athens the police force who had a higher postion than that of miners. Along with miners and Scythian archers, athe majority of Athenian slaves comprised mainly of domestic servants whose fortune depended on the kind of relationship they had with their owners.

Slavery existed in Rome from the 2nd Century B.C. and in the middle ages from 6th to 15th Century B.C. Slavery continued in the countries around the Mediterranean after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West. It is the Mediterranean which favoured the geographic and economic environment to encourage slave trade. During the eastward expansion of the Germans in the 10th Century, many slaves were captured and their racial names became the generic term for ‘slave’.

In Arabia, during the time of Muhammad in the 7th Century, slavery was an accepted part of life and even the Quran offers no arguments against it. However, with the arrival of Portuguese in the 15th Century, a new and terrible chapter in the history of slavery began. Nature provided a new connection for this human cargo. The volcanic Cape Verde Islands remained uninhabited because of their rocky and threatening coastlines. But they contained flourishing tropical valleys, which were placed well on the sea routes between West Africa, Europe and America.

In 1460 the Portuguese moved to the Cape Verde Islands and in 1466, they were granted an economic advantage which guaranteed their prosperity. Meanwhile, they were given monopoly over the new slave trade. On the coast of Guinea, the Portuguese started to set up trading stations to buy African captives. These slaves were made to work in their settler’s estate while some were sent to the Cape Verde
Islands. Others were sent North for sale in Madeira, or in Portugal and Spain—where Seville became an important market.

The work of the slaves in the Cape Verde Islands primes a profitable trade with the African region known as Portuguese Guinea or the Slave Coast. The slaves were employed in the Cape Verde plantations growing cotton and indigo in the fertile valleys. They were also employed in weaving and dyeing factories, where these commodities were transformed into clothes. The clothes in Guinea were exchanged for slaves and these slaves were sold for cash to the slaving ships which used to pay regular visit to the Cape Verde Islands.

This African trade together with the prosperity of the Cape Verde Islands expanded greatly with the development of labour-intensive plantations growing sugar, cotton and tobacco in the Caribbean and America. The Portuguese had monopoly in transporting African slaves to its own colony to Brazil, but the rise in the interest of other nations in trans-Atlantic trade made Slave Coast the favourite place to visit for many nations.

Through triangular trade, in the 18th Century, the majority of ships carrying out the appalling commerce were the British. Ships that were deporting from Liverpool or Bristol had items like firearms, alcohol, cotton goods, metal trinkets and beads that were in demand in West Africa. These goods were eagerly awaited for by traders in the port around the Gulf of Guinea. The traders had the captured slaves of Africa on offer waiting to be transported to America. With the completion of the exchange of commodities, the slaves were packed into vessels for the Atlantic crossing. It is estimated that as many as 11 million Africans were shipped to America in the course of the Atlantic slave trade and that one in six died before reaching the West Indies where the main slave markets on the American side of the ocean were located.

In general, slavery was an institution based on the ownership of one human being by another. Initially, the first slaves in Virginia colony were treated as workers rather than property, and some of them were treated like white-indentured servants. These indentured servants agreed to work on plantations and on other businesses for five to seven years on a contract basis for which they received land in return. They
returned to their homeland after their agreement was over, which forced the plantation owners look for new workers.

The plantation owners, fed up of looking for new workers, started to buy slaves to work for them on plantations instead of utilising the indentured slaves. The urge of the plantation owners to have a steady work force, one that would not require payment or training, led to the emergence of slavery in America. With the success of tobacco planting, African slavery was legalised in Virginia and Maryland laying the foundation for the southern agrarian economy.

The African-Americans were terribly exploited during this time and were completely subordinated by the Whites by diverting their language, culture, tradition and religion. Marriage among Blacks was not given any significance and women were used only as breeders. Blacks were not only physically tortured or humiliated, but were made mentally weak.

Tonya Buell in her book *Slavery in America: A Primary source* writes:

> Slavery is a shameful part of the United States’ past. The institution that allowed people to be considered little more than private property was legal and accepted by Church and State alike. Some slaves, such as Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, were able to rise above their stations and leave lasting legacies. But millions of others had no opportunities at all in the American system and lived and died without a chance to achieve their dreams. (Buell 6)

According to the writer, slavery existed in America for three reasons- one, in early America, there was an enormous need for cheap labour. Second, there existed a belief that some people should be property owners while others be workers. There was a kind of prejudice against the Blacks that helped the Whites to create a system that allowed slavery and caused early American colonists to justify it. Third, the rise of large plantations, especially in the Southern states and the invention of cotton gin, increased the need for hard workers which led slavery to flourish well.

Dorothy Schneider and Carl J.Schneider in their book *Slavery in America* write: “Africans knew slavery long before Europeans sailed to their shores. They
enslaved their enemies and criminals. Sometimes they enslaved debtors...slavery became an integral part of African’s economic organization” (Schneider 1)

Though Africans were slaves in their own land before the arrival of Europeans, they were new to the horrors that they experienced after being shipped to the New World as slaves. In Africa, the masters and slaves belonged to the same race due to which there was no inferiority complex. They both had same skin colour, looked alike, spoke similar languages, followed similar ceremonies and had common customs and traditions. Later, African slave owners sold their own slaves to White traders.

It was in the mid 15th Century that the Portuguese began transporting slaves out of Africa. European nations joined the Portuguese in slave trade later which was dominated by the Dutch and the English successively. Schneider says: “At first the Europeans raided unarmed family groups or undefended villages, until they realized that it was easier to bargain for slaves and gold with Africans in villages near the West coast” (Schneider 3). She also writes:

Beginning in 1636 Americans too sent ships to Africa, at first to transport slaves to the British colonies in North America but later more often on a triangular voyage. They sailed from, say, Rhode Island to Africa with a Cargo of rum to trade for slaves; on the next leg, the Middle Passage, they carried slaves to the Caribbean Islands and South America; finally, they returned home with molasses, with which to make more rum. (Schneider 3)

In a way, the African slaves were betrayed by their own race. Only few Africans protested against slavery, while a great number of them engaged in commerce. While being transported from Africa to Europe, the slaves had to endure the voyage of Middle Passage. The duration of the Middle Passage was six weeks and at times, it was much longer. Sometimes, the captains of the ship, appointed by the owners to transport slaves from Africa to Europe, were in the habit of cheating their owners by lying about the death of some slaves during the voyage. Later, they sold these slaves to others to make quick money. The Captains had the practice of having a doctor on the ship to separate healthy slaves from the weaker or the infected ones
before shipping them from Africa and also to preserve the health of the slaves. Dorothy Schneider writes:

The Captains of the slave ship had to face the daunting dangers of the Middle Passage: storms, insufficient water and food, epidemics, misconduct and mutinies among his crew, slave revolts and suicides, and attacks from pirates and ships of other nations, to whom he might lose his crew and his cargo, if not his vessel itself. The slave ship sailed in a miasma of fear and distrust. (Schneider 28)

The Africans were new to the New World and they were astonished to see the enormous sea and the ship that came to take them away from Africa. Meanwhile, they were afraid to look at the White people with long white hair. Initially, the Africans considered the Whites as spirits who had come to sacrifice them and asked themselves: “What did the white men want them for? Were the whites going to eat them, or grind their bones for gunpowder? (Schneider 29).

Regarding the placement of slaves in ships, slaver John Barbot says: [I]t is pitiful to see how they crowd those poor wretches, six hundred and fifty or seven hundred in a ship, the men standing in the hold ty’d to stakes, the women between decks, and those that are with child in the great cabin, and the children in the steeridge. (Schneider 30-31)

The question rises is, why the Africans were made slaves and this was because they were said to be:

remarkable for their extraordinary strength and symmetry, their distinguished appearance and proud bearing. They were blacker and taller and handsome than their fellow slaves; vigorous, muscular and agile, intelligent, fierce, ruthless in war, fanatically attached to the idea of liberty and strangers to fear. (Schneider 50)

The life of slaves in the plantation was far from imagination as they were tortured, both physically and mentally. While transporting slaves from Africa, their families were fragmented during auction causing them to be mentally weak. Besides, like Dalits in India, they were weakened mentally in the name of religion to keep
them in ignorance. Education was denied to them. If any slave was found reading, the Whites went to the extent of killing the person. Many slaves escaped from this oppression and in 1793, Fugitive Slave laws were enacted which enabled the slave owners and their agents to seize or arrest an alleged fugitive. In addition, the slaves were exploited in several other ways and the horrible treatment meted out to them will be explained in detail in the following chapters of the thesis.

**SLAVE REBELLIONS AND THEIR EMANCIPATION**

The exploitation was intolerable, but the Blacks lacked courage to go against the Whites. Gradually, they began speaking against the White’s oppression that resulted in many revolts while a few emerged successful. At that time, many slaves escaped slavery to gain freedom from barbarity. Meanwhile, the government began to respond to the exploitation of the Blacks to help them escape suppression. In 1807, the U.S. Congress joined a European movement aimed at ending the international slave trade for two reasons: the country was overstocked with slaves and many began considering slavery as a wrong practice.

In the beginning, Americans were not ready to end slavery as they feared that the Blacks would return to their respective countries. The Americans feared that there won’t be people to work hard in plantations. The Whites also feared mass migration of the Blacks from North to South, and worried how the South would get their work done. They mainly feared the Black’s war against the Whites for equal rights and status. Meanwhile, the American Anti-Slavery movement began in 1833 that sent out lecturers to expound its principles. Schneider writes:

> Theodore Weld, Angelina and Sarah Grimke, Frederick Douglass, and a host of others-black and white, female and male-ranged the northern countryside. It was uphill, hazardous work. All of them literally risked their lives, and the escaped slaves among them additionally risked their freedom, to spread the gospels of liberty. (Schneider 257)

Abolitionists published newspapers to enlighten the Blacks about their liberty and equality. The mention must be made of William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* and Frederick Douglass’s *North Star*. These newspapers carried many slave narratives that were reported by others or sometimes written by the fugitive slaves. Anti-slavery
propagandists also issued pamphlets, both in the North and the South, and started collecting thousands of signatures on petitions.

The Blacks achieved complete freedom with the declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln, who was famous for his anti-slavery views. When he was elected as the President in 1860, some Southern states were on the edge thinking that Lincoln would abolish slavery completely. In 1861, the Southern states started to withdraw from the United States as they wanted to take a decision on the issue of slavery. In 1861, the Civil War broke out and in 1863, during the American Civil War (1861-65), the President, Abraham Lincoln, issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in the Southern states at war with the North. The Emancipation Proclamation freed all the slaves who lived in the confederacy. However, a pro-slavery government controlled most of the South. Slavery would not end until the union won the war. By the spring of 1865, the main forces of the confederacy surrendered to the Union army. The Congress passed the 13th Amendment in December that year and this effected the abolition of slavery everywhere. The 14th and the 15th Amendments were added to the Constitution within five years. These amendments defined the U.S. citizenship and protected the voting right of the Black men.

Although millions of Blacks were freed, it took another Century to achieve equality and respect. During the reconstruction, the period following the American Civil War, African-Americans faced poverty, violence and discrimination. They fought for their rights well into the 20th Century. Even today, the Blacks experience racial segregation in their social, economic and political life. Like Dalits, the Blacks are given many provisions in the Constitution for their betterment and uplift which appears successful to an extent. However, they are still the victims of injustice and inequality. Due to their dark complexion, they are denied better jobs in the commercial sectors of America.

**RACISM**

After the abolition of slavery, the Blacks suffered racism. The Whites considered their fair complexion as superior by relegating Blacks to a low position. The Blacks’ colour was symbolized as evil and they were made to feel inferior though they excelled in education and in other fields. Regarding the history of racism in
America, it is said that the term ‘race’ entered English in the early 16th Century. And in the middle of 16th Century, the term ‘race’ began to gain a common meaning and thereby the term was referred to a family, a breed and a lineage. Ali Rattansi in his book *Racism* writes:

The most influential historian of art in the 18th Century, Johann Joachim Wincklemann, devised a scale of beauty that highlighted certain features of antique sculptures as the embodiment of beauty. Wincklemann regarded the depressed nose as particularly ugly. The African could not but fall foul of this European ideal of beauty and moral truth. (Rattansi 28)

It is said that the scale of beauty or the estimation of standard beauty was done by Johann Joachim Wincklemann and it was during the 19th Century that a number of theories emerged in order to explain human variations on the basis of innate racial characteristics. Robert Knox in his book *The Races of Men* published in 1850 puts forth his theory on race as: “Race is everything” (Knox 14).

The Frenchman Count Arthur de Gobineau, in his book *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* published in 1854 explains his theory of race in the following words:

1. Human kind could be divided into a limited number of distinct and permanent races, and that race was the key concept for an understanding of human variation.
2. There were distinct physical markers that characterized the different races, especially skin colour, facial features, texture of hair, and with the growing influence of phrenology, size and shape of skull.
3. Each race was innately associated with distinct social, cultural, and moral traits.
4. The races could be graded in a coherent hierarchy of talent and beauty, with whites at the top and blacks at the bottom. (Rattansi 31)

The Whites held supremacy over the Blacks and portrayed them as uncivilized, ugly and inferior. They even tried to force their ‘civilized’ habits on
Blacks, in terms of hygiene, as they considered them unhygienic and ugly. In this regard, Ali Rattansi writes:

The empire was charged with ‘the white man’s burden’ of bringing Christianity and civilized habits, especially hygiene, to God’s colored’ peoples. Particularly striking were the ubiquitous soup advertisements, which equated being ‘coloured’ with being dirty, a condition which could be metaphorically and literally cleansed away and whitened by the regular use of soap. (Rattansi 52)

British biologist Steven Rose defines racism as:

By racism is meant any claim of the natural superiority of one identifiable human population, group or race over another. By ‘scientific racism’ is meant the attempt to use the language and some of the techniques of science in support of theories or contentions that particular groups or populations are innately inferior to others in terms of intelligence, ‘civilisation’ or other socially defined attitudes. (Rattansi 94)

The Whites deliberately made the Blacks inferior on the basis of their skin colour. Even to this day, the Blacks face racism and are chained, in a way, as they have no freedom to do the job of their choice. They were compelled to take up menial jobs and the Whites always wanted the Blacks to stay under their control.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE: ITS EMERGENCE AND HISTORY

All the ill-treatment and humiliation that the Blacks had faced led them to fight against the injustice and they found writing as a powerful weapon like Dalits to voice their protest and to reclaim their identity. Gradually, the Blacks began writing down their experiences and started educating people regarding their inhuman condition. Thereby they gave a call to people to protest the injustice. Consequently, the African-American Literature gained significance.

Literature produced by those of African descent in the United States is called the African-American Literature. It is said that Lucy Terry is the author of the oldest known piece of African-American Literature. She wrote the Ballad “Bars Fight” in
1746 after an Indian attack on Deerfield and she was enslaved in Deerfield at the time of the attack. The Ballad was first published in 1854 with an additional couplet called “The Springfield Republican”.

Phillis Wheatly, the poet, published her book *Poems on Various Subjects* in 1773, three years before the American Independence. She was the first African-American to publish her book and the first to achieve an international reputation as a writer. She was born in Senegal. When she was seven years old, she was captured and sold into slavery. Brought to America, she was owned by a Boston Merchant. Though living in slavery, she mastered the English language when she was 16. Her poetry was praised by George Washington, who thanked her for a poem written in his honour. Her poetry was so refined that even the Whites found it difficult to believe that a Black and that too a woman could write poetry. This disbelief led her to defend in the court of law that she was herself who had written in English. Some critics even cite Wheatly’s successful defense in court as the first recognition of the emergence of the African-American Literature.

However, the first Black writer to publish his work in America was Jupitor Hammon. He published his poem “An Evening Thought Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries” as a broadside in early 1761. In 1778, he wrote ‘ode to Phillies Wheatly’ in which he discussed their shared humanity and common bonds. An interesting fact about Hammon was that he himself was a slave until his last breath.

Apart from poetry, the field of fiction too saw many writers trying their hand at writing even during the time of slavery. The prominent among those were William Wells Brown and Victor Sejour, who produced the earliest works of fiction. Sejour was born free in New Orleans, but when he was 19, he moved to France where he published his short story “Le Mulatre” meaning “The Mullato” in 1837. Though it was the first fiction by an African-American, it failed to make any impact on later American literature as it was written and published in English.

Brown was also a prominent abolitionist lecturer, novelist, historian and playwright in the United States. Born into slavery in South, Brown escaped from it and started working for the cause of abolition of slavery. He was considered the first African-American novelist as he published his first novel called *The President’s Daughter* in 1853.
The first African-American fiction to portray Northern racism was Frank J. Webbs’ novel *The Garies and Their Friends* published in England in 1857 that dealt with race riots resembling the Philadelphia race riots of 1834 and 1835. But the first African-American novel to be published in the United States was Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* that gave a clear picture of the difficulties that the free Blacks had undergone on the North.

In the middle of the 19th Century, a new genre was developed in the African-American Literature, the Slave narratives, those written by fugitive slaves about their life as slaves in the South. Quite often, the slave narratives were those stories written by slaves after their escape from slavery. The intention was to describe the cruelties of life under slavery. In a way, the slave narratives were an integral part of African-American Literature. It is estimated that some 6,000 former slaves from North America and the Caribbean recorded their life stories among which around 150 were published either as separate books or pamphlets. Among these narratives, two were considered as the best – Frederick Douglass’s autobiography and Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861.

Harriet Jacobs was a born slave and she has the credit of being the first woman to write a slave narrative in the United States. She did not write in her real name and had a pen name ‘Linda Brent’ and the narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* narrates her struggle for freedom, not only for herself but for her children too.

African-American Literature and art took a new shape during Harlem Renaissance between 1920 and 1940. This was the active period that saw African-American Literature, art, culture and social thought flourish. Numerous Black writers, artists, musicians and others produced works in every field – from Jazz to theatre – and the period of renaissance was best known for its literature.

Langston Hughes was the most renowned writer among those who flourished during Renaissance. He published his first work *The Brownies’ Book* in 1921, but was recognised for his work *The Book of American Negro Poetry* published in 1922. Another notable writer of the renaissance, novelist Zora Neale Hurston, the author of the classic novel *Their Eyes were Watching God*, published her work in 1937.

The Harlem Renaissance marked a turning point for African-American Literature and it was during this time that African-American Literature as well as
Black fine art and performance art began to be absorbed into mainstream American Literature. In short, the Harlem Renaissance from 1920 to 1940 brought the African-American Literature to limelight. From the 1970’s onwards, the African-American Literature entered mainstream as books by Black writers began to win best selling awards continuously.

It was during 1960’s and 1970’s that both the Dalit and African-American Literature began to flourish and created their own tradition of writing by rejecting the mainstream literature. In the struggle against exploitation and a fight to renew identity, one can see a comparison between the Dalits in India and the African-Americans in America. But to some extent, going by the history of the Dalits and African-Americans, it is clear that the Blacks were fortunate in a way as slavery was abolished while in India, the practice of untouchability still exists in many parts.

Like Dalit Literature, African-American Literature is also the outcome of the exploitation and suppression that they faced and the reason for its emergence is that they felt they alone could represent their consciousness. In this regard, S.D.Kapoor opines that: “It is true that the intensity of their personal experience cannot be felt by non-dalits and non-blacks” (Kapoor 116). Further, he says the Dalits and the Africans-Americans had the responsibility of keeping the genuine historical memory alive and also of humanising the oppressive system.

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY: ITS HISTORY, EMERGENCE AND THE REASON FOR SELECTING AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**

In terms of literature, the area of this researcher’s interest was autobiographies. Therefore, the research has been limited to the study of Dalit and African-American autobiographies, which uncovers the picture of real life sufferings and exploitation of the Dalits and the Blacks. The autobiographies deal with social reality and have nothing to do with imagination. The word autobiography is derived from Greek words ‘autos’ meaning ‘self’, ‘bios’ means ‘life’ and ‘graphein’ means to ‘write’. The reason for selecting and limiting the study to autobiographies is that they have less imagination and are close to reality, while novels are the result of one’s imagination. The writings of the Dalits and the Blacks are the real portrayal of their life and they mostly wrote autobiographies. Rajkumar in his book *Dalit Personal Narrative* defines autobiography and says:
…’autobiography’ by splitting it into its three components: auto-self, bio-life, graph-writing. Thus, while defining the genre, emphasis has been given on the problematic of all three terms by posing the following questions: What is self, in what way is the shape of a life determined and recorded, what is considered worth recording and whether this is conditioned by existing literary paradigms or social priorities? (Kumar 2)

Though autobiographies were not a form of traditional literary genre in Indian culture, many texts narrating personal lives began from 19th Century onwards. Before the emergence of Dalit autobiographies, upper caste’s autobiographies existed as they were available in English and the critics, who were working on autobiographies, naturally selected these to evaluate their lives and writings. But Dalits, after getting access to education, took to writing, and they preferred chronicling their own lives as they wanted to project reality. In the initial stages, the Dalit autobiographies were neglected as they posed a challenge to the hegemonic rule of the upper caste while simultaneously asserting their rights by reclaiming their identity in the mainstream society. Rajkumar writes:

…what is important about autobiographical writing is that it is an act of a conscious self which is documented through the active help of memory…. Thus, the emergence of a ‘self’ in autobiography is the making of the author…. Writing an autobiography is a political act because there is always an assertion of the narrative self. (Kumar 3)

The word ‘autobiography’ was first used critically by William Taylor in 1797 in the English periodical The Monthly Review, but the term was first put in circulation by Robert Southey in the Quarterly Review in 1809. Prior to 1809, many autobiographies were in market, but Southey’s term refers to the works written by people about their personal lives. Besides, Southey excluded diaries, collection of letters and journals from his definition as they all belonged to different genres of writing. Philippe Lejeune, a French critic, defines autobiography as: “Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (Kumar 10).
Banarasidas’s *Ardhakathanaka* (1641) was considered the first full-fledged Indian autobiography. Rajkumar syas: “The subjeothood of ‘self’ is the main focus in every autobiography” (Kumar 8). *Ardhakathanaka* was written in Hindi verse in the early part of the 17th Century. Regarding Dalit autobiographies, the Dalits began writing their stories only after the Independence as they were denied education before Independence. With the access to education, the Dalits became aware of their position in the society and began narrating their stories to make the masses understand their plight. It was in the late 19th Century that Indian writers began to pen autobiographies in their regional languages and even Dalit writers started narrating their lives in their mother tongue. Initially, there was some resistance against this new literary genre because: “autobiographers had to violate the code of Hindu ethics by publicizing their self; initially they had to face the wrath of their community members” (Kumar 57).

The Dalit autobiography was a new genre that differed from the theme and content of the mainstream autobiographies as they mainly dealt with Dalit consciousness, society, movement and their progress. Also, the Dalit autobiographies were different in terms of writing and the use of language. It was a kind of subjective narrative where the focus was on the social life that the writer portrayed than the writer himself. But this common social life was looked through the writer. The Dalits found autobiography as a weapon to create social change and awareness in the unequal society.

The aesthetics of the Dalits and African-Americans were unique and different from the mainstream one as they are peculiar to their communities in which they were born into. Generally, autobiographies are written at the end of one’s life, but the Dalits and African-American autobiographies were written at a very early age as both found it difficult to raise their voice against injustice and could only write to express their dissent to reach the masses. Instead of writing fiction or novels, both wrote their stories to claim their rights.

Both the Dalit and African-American autobiographies deal with the theme of exploitation and suppression. They also uncover the details of their oppression in their respective autobiographies. In terms of Dalit autobiographies, the researcher has selected the Dalit Marathi writers as Dalit literature, in the real sense, began in Maharashtra due to the efforts of Ambedkar and the availability of Dalit Marathi autobiographies in English. Among Dalit Marathi autobiographies, four have been
INTRODUCTION OF THE SELECT DALIT MARATHI WRITERS AND THEIR AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

A brief introduction about the four writers and their autobiographies will be given in this chapter and their life and achievement will be detailed in the remaining chapters. To begin with, Narendra Jadhav is a great writer, economist, educationist and a social activist. He was born on May 28, 1953 in a Dalit family. By overcoming all adversities, he rose to a high position by his efforts and hard work. Dr. Jadhav has several scholastic honours and professional distinctions to his credit. He also worked as the Vice-Chancellor of Pune University, the largest university in the world. He also served as a member of the Planning Commission of India as well as a member of the National Advisory Council since May 31, 2010. Prior to this, he also rendered meritorious service in the International Monetary Fund for four-and-a-half years and headed the economic research at the Reserve Bank of India for 31 long years.

Though a Dalit, who was exposed to the harsh realities of Dalit life, Narendra Jadhav educated himself that enabled him to earn his B.Sc. in Statistics in 1973 from Ramnarain Ruia College, Bombay University. In 1975, he completed M.A. in Economics from the same university and later received his Ph.D in Economics from Indiana University in 1986.

Apart from being a great economist and scholar, he was a popular writer. Initially, he wrote autobiographies in Marathi which were later translated into English. On the occasion of the release of seven books of Dr.Narendra Jadhav, including the autobiography which has been selected for the thesis, on November 16, 2005 in New Delhi, the then honourable Prime Minister of India Dr.Manmohan Singh, in his speech said:

Like the life of Dr.Ambedkar, or indeed the life of our beloved Rashtrapathi, the late Dr.K.R.Narayanan, the life story of Dr.Jadhav is also a story of change, of great courage, of progress
of hope…. Narendra’s autobiography must shape our social and political vision. It must shape our educational policy.

(http://pmindia.nic.in/lspeech.asp?id=227)

Narendra Jadhav has written many books – Monetary policy, Financial Stability and Central Banking in India (2005), Re-emerging India: A Global Perspective (2005) and many more. He has also written an autobiography that was published in 2005 where he chronicles his life and the life of his parents, talks about the exploitation that the Dalits faced and their struggle to break free of their suppression.

Narendra Jadhav, in his autobiography Untouchables, writes about the caste system and its origin in India and writes: “The Caste is the defining factor in determining the course of a life. The place from where he drinks water, whom he dines with, whom he marries, and whether he becomes a scholar or a scavenger—all depend on his caste” (Jadhav 4).

Another writer Laxman Gaikwad, in his autobiography The Branded, talks about the life of his community who were branded as ‘Uchalyas’ and whose profession was thieving. Laxman Gaikwad was born on July 23, 1956 at Dhanegoan, Latur District, Maharashtra. A great Marathi writer, he was awarded the Maharashtra Gourav Puraskar and the Sahitya Akademi award for his work The Branded. In Marathi literature, Laxman Gaikwad’s autobiography is considered a masterpiece which brings the problem of Dalits to the limelight. Apart from The Branded, he has written some novels like Dubang, Wadar Vedna and Samaj Sahitya Ani swathantra.

He indulged himself in social activities and has been associated with the same for a very long time. Since 1990, he has been the President of the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes Organisation that is associated with the welfare and rights of the tribes. He also took active part in the Labour Movement and worked for the welfare of farmers and other weaker sections. He has also won many awards for his meritorious work, both in the field of literature and social activity.

In The Branded, Gaikwad not just projects his struggle to reclaim an identity, but his community’s fight to escape inhuman life. It also talks about their efforts to have an identity of their own by taking up respectable jobs. They were compelled to thieving against their will. Education for Uchalya community was a dream that was
hard to realise and in the midst of this, Laxman Gaikwad emerged successfully as a writer and a social activist having an identity of his own which will be dealt with in detail in the following chapters.

If Narendra Jadhav and Laxman Gaikwad suffered due to the upper caste atrocities, Sharankumar Limbale was subjected to suffering both by the upper caste and from his own community as he was an outcaste. Sharankumar Limbale was born on June 1, 1956. It is said that he was born to a Dalit woman and an upper caste man because of which he was called Akkarmashi (Outcaste). Not just the upper caste, his own community refused to accept him into their clan as he was an illegitimate child. But he emerged a great writer and even to this day, he writes. He has more than 40 books to his credit, but became famous for his autobiography The Outcaste: Akkarmashi. At present, he is working as a Regional Director of Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University in Pune.

Vasanth Moon is another Dalit Marathi writer who gained popularity with the publication of his autobiography Growing Up Untouchable in India, the first Dalit autobiography to be published in English. In his book, he talks about his ‘Vasti’, the neighbourhood, and gives a detailed account of Ambedkar’s personal and social life. He gives an account of the life of his community which was regarded as inferior in the Hindu society and relegated to the lower strata of the society.

He worked for the welfare of his people like Ambedkar, as the latter was his inspiration since his childhood. In his autobiography, he narrates his life and of poverty in which his community people lived. And he talks about the triumph of his self respect which gave a shape to his own personality. When he was a child, he struggled hard to learn English, but later he edited seventeen volumes of Dr. Ambedkar’s Writing and Speeches in English. It was this zeal to learn that made him a Civil Servant. Even after his retirement, he has been very active in Dalit activities.

**INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN-AMERICAN WRITERS AND THEIR AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**

The Dalit Marathi autobiographies portrayed their life and struggle against the upper caste exploitation, while the African-American autobiographies had similar

Frederick Douglass was born a slave on February 1818 and the exact date of his birth is unknown due to the ignorance of the Blacks then. He was born as Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey to an African mother and a White father in Tuckahoe, Maryland, but he later changed his name as Frederick Douglass.

Frederick Douglass, in his autobiography writes: “I aim only to give the reader of a truthful impression of my slave-life, without unnecessarily affecting him with harrowing details” (Douglass 71). He excelled in his studies and was highly knowledgeable. Whenever he delivered his speech to create awareness among the Blacks about their rights, both the Whites and the Blacks were stunned and wondered whether he was a slave earlier or a freeman. He became the leader of the Abolitionist Movement and began his anti-slavery writings. He has written three autobiographies – *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881) and it’s the third one that has been selected for the research.

The autobiographies of Frederick Douglass present a vivid picture of a horrifying period of American history and its practice of slavery. Being a slave himself, Douglass experienced the effects of slavery and provides the reader with a clear and real portrayal of his exploitation. He also depicts his life after his escape from slavery. During slavery, he learnt to read and write with the help of Sophia Auld, wife of Hugh Auld, who began to teach him without her husband’s knowledge. But when Hugh found out, he ordered her to stop doing so, saying, education would make slaves unmanageable. After his escape from slavery, he used this knowledge to record his experience and thereby succeeded in becoming a great writer.

The major theme of his autobiography shows knowledge as a path to freedom and an identity for the Blacks. Douglass, as he was growing old, decided to write his final autobiography with every detail of his struggle that he had missed in his earlier autobiographies. As a slave, he suffered untold miseries. But he developed a strong
determination to have freedom and lead an independent life. With this ambition, Douglass, with the help of his fellow White children who assisted him in his task of educating himself, rose to a great position. He is remembered even to this day for his meritorious work. He was a firm believer in equality for all irrespective of their race and class. He breathed his last on February 20, 1895 due to a massive heart attack and his funeral was held at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church. This Church remembers Douglass annually on his death anniversary and in his honour, many schools are named after him. How a slave became a public figure will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Like Frederick Douglass, Booker.T.Washington was also a slave by birth, who became a prominent orator and believed that education was the key to achieve racial equality. His autobiography *Up From Slavery*, a classic work clearly depicts the tragedy and oppression that he suffered and portrays his struggle and triumph in his pursuit of learning. He was born on April 5, 1856 in Hale’s Ford, Virginia, to Jane and Washington Ferguson. He belongs to the last generation of African-American leaders who became the mouthpiece of former slaves and also their descendents. He did his schooling at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute which is now situated at Hampton University. He attended college at Wayland Seminary, now in Virginia Union University.

When Booker was 9 years old, they gained freedom with the issue of the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln which enabled him to move from slavery to his father’s place. Being born into slavery, Washington suffered all sorts of exploitation and to rise to a high position despite that is commendable. He gave utmost importance to education and he not only educated himself, but went a step ahead and founded the Tuskegee Institute at Alabama thereby encouraging other African-Americans to get educated. His institute focused on industrial and agricultural training and his story is one of empowerment to his fellow African-Americans.

Washington received an honorary master’s degree from Harvard University and also received an honorary Doctorate from Darmouth College. He became the first African-American to dine with the President at the White house. To honour his accomplishments, President Theodore Roosevelt invited Washington in 1901 to dine with him at the White house. It was considered a great achievement for a slave to become a person of recognition in the White people’s world.
If these two writers - Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington - suffered from slavery, other two writers - Richard Wright and W.E.B. Du Bois - were fortunate enough to escape slavery but had to suffer due to racism. Both have portrayed in their autobiographies the cruel world of racism which posed a challenge for the Blacks to carve out a new identity for themselves.

Richard Wright was born as Richard Nathaniel Wright on September 4, 1908 on Rucker’s plantation, a farm near Roxie, Mississippi, 22 miles east of Natchez, as the first child of Nathan Wright, an illiterate sharecropper, and Ella Wilson Wright, a school teacher. His ancestors were born into slavery, but by the time he was born, slavery was abolished in America and the Blacks were given freedom but not equality as they were discriminated on the basis of their skin colour.

He finished his education successfully despite being poor and took up writing as a career, which was his dream. He also took part in social activities which made him popular in the White world. He wrote many novels, poetry, and autobiography and in a way, he tried his hand in all the genres of literature. In 1937, Richard Wright published his poem “We of the Street” in April New Masses and the “Story” in the August number. In order to continue with his writing, he parts with the Communist Party as it was an obstacle for his freedom as a writer.

Before taking up writing as his full-time profession, Wright tried to secure a government job and he bagged the first rank in the Postal Service Examination in Chicago. But he turned down the offer of a permanent position and moved to New York City to pursue his writing career. In the same year, he also became Harlem editor of the Communist newspaper Daily Worker and wrote over 200 articles in that year. For his notable achievement, he was awarded the Spingarn Medal, given annually to Black Americans’ by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Wright married Dhima Rose Meadman in August 1939 and lived with his wife and her two-year-old son by her earlier marriage for just one year as they separated by divorce. Later, he married Ellen Poplar in Loytesville on March 12, 1941 and Julia was born on April 5, 1942. In 1943, Wright began to write his autobiography American Hunger which he finished by December 1943. His autobiography has two sections, one describing Wrights’ experience in the South and the second deals with
his life in Chicago. The Book of the Month Club told Harper that it would accept only
the first section of the *American Hunger* which was agreed to by Wright and the title
was changed to *Black Boy*. The second section was published as *American Hunger* by

By January 19, 1946 *Black Boy* had sold 195,000 copies in the Harper Trade
edition and 351,000 through the Book of Month Club, becoming the fourth largest
selling non-fiction title of 1945. Richard Wright is the author of six novels, two
collections of novellas and stories and seven books of non-fiction as well as numerous
articles, critical essays and poems. His first published book was a collection of
novellas, *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938). Two years later, he published *Native Son*, a
protest novel that became the first by an African-American to be featured as a main
selection of the Book of Month Club. He became a French citizen in 1947 and settled
in Paris where he died of a heart attack in 1960.

Like Richard Wright, Du Bois was fortunate enough to escape slavery. He was
born on February 23, 1868 on Church Street to Mary Burghardt and Alfred Du Bois.
About the history of his family, Du Bois says that the Black Burghardts belong to a
group of African Negroes descended from Tom who was born in West Africa around
1730. When he was a small child, the Dutch slave traders stole Tom and brought him
to the valley of Hudson. Though Tom was not a slave, he became one by the custom
of the day as he had only two options either to become a slave or a serf - and he had to
serve the Burghardt’s family, which was a White family of the Dutch descent. Later,
Tom and Coonraet Burghardt came East from the Hudson Valley and settled in
Berkshire County, Massachusetts. Tom died in 1787 and the Burghardts lived on the
South Egremont plain for nearly 200 years.

Du Bois received his education at Fisk University, Harvard College and the
University of Berlin from 1885 to 1894. At the age of 39, he married Nina Gomer Du
Bois and they lived together for 53 years. After the death of his first wife, he married
Shirley Graham near the end of his days, who was 40 years younger to him. Du Bois
was sincere in his writing and in a span of five years from 1935 to 1940, he wrote and
published three volumes: A study of the Negro in reconstruction; A study of the race
in history and An autobiographical sketch which deals with his concept of the
American race problem.
Du Bois wrote his autobiography *A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of its First Century* when he was in his 90s and he also took the manuscript with him to Ghana, where he went to live in 1961. This was his third autobiography and before this, he wrote two semi-autobiographies - *Dark Water*, written at the age of 50 and *Dusk of Dawn*, when he was 70.

Du Bois was not only an author, lecturer, scholar and an organiser, he was also a leader in the movement for the Black’s liberation beginning with the Niagara Movement and followed by his major role in the NAACP. He also worked as an editor of *The Crisis*. Besides, he became a founder of the Pan African Movement and joined the struggle against colonialism. He took part in the Cold War in the fight for peace at the age of 70. Though being old, he was full of fighting spirit and he fought against racism and racial oppression till the end of his life.

He died at the age of 95 on the eve of the 1963 march in Washington for jobs and freedom and he was hailed by all as the founder of the movement which led to the march. The autobiography is not just the portrayal of the life history of one of the greatest minds and personality of the 20th Century, but presents a wide view of the great revolution of his time. By his hard work and great effort, Du Bois emerged as one of America’s greatest scholars, writers and also social activists. He emerged as a dominant political figure in the African-American community and *The African Abroad* in 1913 writes:

Du Bois is one of the few men in history who was hurled on the throne of leadership by the dynamic force of the written word. He is one of the few writers who leaped to the front as a leader and became the head of a popular movement through impressing his personality upon men by means of a book. (Du Bois *The Souls viii*)

Du Bois’s work *The Souls of Black Folk* was regarded as the political Bible for the Negro race. Throughout his life, he constantly fought against racism and claimed equal status for every human being irrespective of race. Having experienced racism, he wanted his people to be educated first in order to fight against injustice. In many ways, he was compared with Ambedkar as he also fought for the sake of his people till the end of his life and both have struggled to give a respectable place to their people in the society.
THEME OF SELF AND IDENTITY

If one goes through the select eight autobiographies of Dalit and African-American writers, it’s clear that all the eight writers have dealt with a common theme in their respective autobiographies - their search for self in the world of their exploiters. All have shown concern about their identity and their constant struggle is to have an identity of their own that was lost in the midst of the dominators’ world. ‘Self’ according to the Oxford Dictionary is: “A person’s essential being that distinguishes them from others especially considered as the objects of introspection or reflexive action”.

In case of Dalits and Blacks, both have been craving to reclaim their self, to mark their individual personality in the world of their oppressors. In the thesis, the word ‘identity’ is used instead of the ‘self’, which is a synonym to the word ‘self’. According to the theorists, ‘self’ can be understood clearly with the help of theories such as Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory. Peter J. Burke in his book *Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory* says: “Social identity theory has focused more on group behavior and intergroup relations while identity theory has focused more on role performance and role relationships within groups” (Burke 3).

Some say there are differences between the two theories, but many critics have come to the conclusion that though there are differences, both are needed in order to have a comprehensible understanding of the ‘self’. Further he writes: “Social identity theory has concentrated on the causes and consequences of identifying with a social group or category. Identity theory has focused on the causes and consequences of identifying with a particular role” (Burke 3).

In this case, if we take the Dalits and the Blacks into consideration, their search for self can be studied by applying this theory as both have to fight for their individual identity and social identity. In other words, they have to fight being Dalits and Blacks and by doing things as Dalits and Blacks as “Identity theory emphasises *doing*, social identity theory emphasises *being*” (Burke 3).

Being Dalits and Blacks is their first identity and then, doing what they want, like taking up any profession, is their second identity. One is their personal self, while the other is their public self. Both their personal identity and social identity are important for the oppressed as their struggle for identity is structured on these two
concepts. In almost all the autobiographies of Dalit and African-American writers, there is not only a portrayal of their life stories, but a description of the community’s life and struggle to which they belong to. They are not writing to achieve their own self, but for their community’s recognition in the world of the oppressors.

According to Identity Theory, a person gets his identity in the initial stage by his birth to a particular caste or race, but his social identity depends on the kind of work he does and not on his birth which is propagated by the social identity theory. Earlier, both Dalits and Blacks had a particular kind of job as it was made suitable for them, but later, due to access to education, they began taking up jobs as per their ability and in a way, refused to do the traditional jobs assigned to them, in order to have an identity of their own. In their respective autobiographies, the select writers have portrayed their personal and community struggle against exploitation and thereby have achieved success in reclaiming their self. Roy F. Baumeister, in his article “The Self and Society: Changes, Problems, and Opportunities” published in a book called *Self and Identity* edited by Richard D. Ashmore and Lee Jussim says there are three roots to achieve selfhood namely reflexive consciousness, interpersonal being, and executive function. He further says: “The self is a capacity for making choices, taking responsibility and exerting self-control” (Ashmore 193).

Though Dalits and Blacks were not in a position to reclaim their self as they lacked agency to make choices, take responsibilities and exert self-control during their earlier stages owing to exploitation by their oppressors, they became aware of the importance of their self in the later part of their life that enabled them to lead a respectable life. To an extent, in the present days, the Dalits and the Blacks are triumphant in reclaiming their self and the select autobiographies of the Dalit and African-Americans exhibit their achievement portrayed through their narratives.

Freedom and identity are what the Dalits and the Blacks needed. The life of Dalits is compared with those of the Blacks as both share the same kind of exploitation and have experienced inhuman life in their respective countries. Though the kind of exploitation is different, the pain and suffering that both endured appears similar to a very large extent and the title of the thesis is “Search for the Self” because despite their suppression and abuse, both the Dalits and the Blacks are still in the process of searching their self and desire to reclaim their identity. Though many Dalits and Blacks emerged successful in their attempt to have a self and rose to a
respectable position, millions are still struggling in their pursuit to carve an identity of their own.

**OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this study are:

- The study proposes to make a comparative study of the Dalit and African-American autobiographies of select writers.
- An attempt to explore the historical background of the Dalits and the African-Americans.
- A study of the severity of caste and exploitation of people in the name of caste.
- Slavery and its profound reality.
- Problem of untouchability and racial discrimination is discussed.
- Study of Dalit and African-Americans struggle to find their self in society.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present study will adopt the explanatory method, means the researcher will attempt to study the autobiographies of Dalit Marathi writers namely Narendra Jadhav’s *Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant Journey out of the Caste System in Modern India*, Laxman Gaikwad’s *The Branded*, Sharankumar Limbale’s *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*, and Vasant Moon’s *Growing up Untouchable in India*. Dalit autobiographies are studied in comparison with African-American autobiographies namely Frederick Douglass’s *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, Booker.T.Washington’s *Up from Slavery*, W.E.B.DuBois Autobiography of W.E.B.DuBois: *A Soliloquy on viewing my life from the last decade of it’s first century*, and Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* with the intention of collecting information on the theme of exploitation and suppression experienced by the Dalits and the Blacks. This apart, relevant information is also extracted about their struggle for freedom and identity, explored in the select autobiographies of writers. One can find similarities between the exploitation of the Dalits and African-Americans, which opens the way for the present researcher to make a comparative study of the both to arrive at a value judgment regarding their mistreatment and struggle for reclaiming identity.
FRAMEWORK OF THE THESIS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with a brief history of the Dalit and African-American origin, their movements for freedom and identity and their history of literature. The research is inclined to do a comparative study of both Dalits and African-American as both deal with the theme of exploitation and suppression. The chapter also gives some brief biographical information about the eight authors and their works. In short, the introduction gives an overall design of the research.

CHAPTER II: EXPLOITATION OF DALITS: A STUDY OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF DALIT MARATHI WRITERS

The second chapter focuses on the autobiographies of popular Marathi writers, whose autobiographies unveil the suffering and exploitation of the Dalits. They expose the problems of the Dalits such as unequal treatment, practice of untouchability, denial of basic necessities, and no right to education. In other words, the autobiographies depict the exploitation of the Dalits from caste Hindus.

`Dalits have been discriminated against in various ways in different places. Some Dalits were branded as ‘criminals’ which is explored in Laxman Gaikwad’s *The Branded* while in *The Outcaste*, Limbale shows his sufferings as an ‘akkarmashi’ due to the practice of the caste system. Similarly, Narendra Jadhav and Vasant Moon explore Dalits’ discrimination in their own way and claim education as an important tool to deal with the caste system in India. In short, the second chapter deals with different kinds of exploitation of the Dalits which still exist in modern India.

CHAPTER III: THE THEME OF SUPPRESSION IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WRITERS

The third chapter deals with the autobiographies of African-American writers whose writings throw light on the hardships of the African-Americans during the time of slavery and after its abolition. Frederick Douglass and Washington, being a slave, have written about slavery and its physical and psychological effect on the Blacks. But W.E.B.Du Bois and Richard Wright, though belonging to the period after the abolition of slavery, experience racism which they record in their autobiographies. This chapter deals with two different phases, but the suppression of the African-American...
Americans is almost similar with little difference in both the phases. In order to show the suppression of the African-Americans, selection of writers belonging to two different eras have been made which makes one fact clear that even today, they suffer from racism.

CHAPTER IV: DALITS AND BLACKS IN SEARCH FOR SELF AND STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

This chapter is an attempt to explore the protests of the Dalits and African-Americans against the atrocities and to illustrate their struggle for finding new ‘self’ in the society. Both the Dalits and African-Americans have suffered due to the caste system and racism respectively. But gradually, they started protesting against suppression and demanded freedom from their oppressors. The select autobiographies of Dalit and African-American writers explore the struggle, which is one of the themes of their autobiography, and uncover their fight for reclaiming their identity. This chapter focuses on the struggle of the Dalits and African-Americans for their freedom and identity in different eras.

CHAPTER V: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DALIT AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

This particular chapter endeavours to do a comparative study of the select autobiographies of Dalits and African-Americans and points out the similarities and dissimilarities that exist between the two. Both the autobiographies deal with the theme of exploitation, suppression and atrocities and both have fought in their own way to gain freedom and individual self.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This chapter will be in the form of a conclusion. A careful study of the select autobiographies of the Dalits and African-Americans reveal their exploitation, suppression, atrocities and the problems they experienced for a long time. The last chapter briefly exposes their problems and suggests some solution to claim equal rights and freedom in the welfare society.
WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES


