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

I do not ask
for the sun and moon from your sky
your farm, your land,
your high houses or your mansions
I do not ask for gods or rituals,
castes or sects
Or even for your mother, sisters, daughters.
I ask for
my rights as a man.
…I want my rights, give me my rights.
…I want my rights, give me my rights.
Will you deny this sunrise?. (Dangle 74-75)

The above words of Sharankumar Limbale translated by Priya Adarkar which was published in a book entitled The Poisoned Bread edited by Arjun Dangle clearly shows what the Dalits and African-Americans wanted and for what they have been craving for since centuries. From a very long time both the Dalits and the Blacks have tolerated all kinds of atrocities and suppression silently, but gradually they also started protesting against injustice and tried very hard to achieve their ‘self’. The task of achieving their ‘self’ was not an easy one as others thought but included all kinds of exploitation and oppression which the Dalits and the Blacks have gone through. They had to endure humiliation and disgrace from all corners of society and fought for having even their basic necessities of life. In the midst of a situation like this under the dominance of the upper castes in India and the Whites in America, the Blacks and Dalits have suffered a lot with the purpose of reclaiming their identity. Both Dalits and African-Americans never wanted their identification through their caste. However they wanted to be considered as human beings by others first and later be identified by the work done by them and not simply because of their caste or colour.

Long years of abuse and dishonour led Dalits to stage protests which took the form of Dalit Movements in India. D.R.Nagaraj in his book The Flaming Feet defines the Dalit movement and says: “The Dalit movement is the politico-cultural expression
of a newly self-organized community, signifying strategies of radical negotiation and protest with both the state and upper-caste civil society” (Nagaraj 94-95). The Dalit Panthers Movement was established in 1972 in Maharashtra and before this Dr.B.R.Ambedkar was active in mobilizing untouchables since 1920’s by taking active part in articulating the demands of the Dalits.

It was Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, who instigated the fighting spirit in the minds of the Dalits who feared to come to the lime light and it was because of Ambedkar that the Dalits got enough courage and support to demand human rights. Prior to Ambedkar there were many social activists who fought for the sake of Dalit rights and mention must be made of Jyothiba Phule who was the first to use the word “Dalit” but the word acquired new connotation in the 1970’s by the Dalit writers. S.M.Michael in his book Dalits in Modern India defines the term ‘Dalit’ and writes:

The word ‘Dalit’ in Sanskrit means ‘broken’ and ‘downtrodden’….The Dalits are socially weak, economically needy and politically powerless, despite the protective policies followed by the government under the provisions of Constitution….The term ‘Dalit’ thus describes a condition of being underprivileged and deprived of basic rights and refers to people who are suppressed on the ground of their lovely birth. The word ‘Dalit’ is a descriptive word evocative of bondage and agony, the anguish and frustrated aspirations of a vast victimized section of the Indian population right down the ages. (Michael 108)

The word ‘Dalit’ got importance during the time of the Dalit Panthers Movement which gave currency to the word in order to highlight the sufferings and struggles of the oppressed groups. Later on the movement was also extended by including all the oppressed groups such as Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, small farmers and landless laborers. It was Jyothiba Phule, a shudra, who first stood up in raising a banner of protest against the caste system and with his strong revolt he also shook the very foundation of caste structure. He stood for the uplift of the Dalits and he not only questioned the code of conduct the upper caste Hindus prescribed for the Dalits but also fought for the cause of women. He encouraged education of women along with his struggle for Dalit’s rights.
Another great revolutionary figure who worked effectively for the removal of social evils like the caste system and untouchability was E.V.Ramaswami Naicker, also known as Periyar who was an atheist. He was born in 1879 in Erode into a respectable middle-class family of artisans. Though he married at the age of thirteen he became a ‘sanyasi’ after six years of married life and travelled all over India as a religious mendicant. During his travel he gained complete knowledge about the evils of Hinduism and became aware of the exploitation of the masses by the Brahmin priests. He challenged the rigid caste system by including all the non-brahmins, Christians and Muslims and thereby changed the scope of his struggle. He was the founder of Self-Respect Movement in 1925 which emerged as a powerful social movement and contributed a lot to the destruction of the inhuman caste system in Tamilnadu.

S.M. Michael says: “Hinduism had neither morality, nor revolutionary force, nor social utility; instead, it promoted the interests of a particular class” (Michael 120). To fight against untouchability firstly the leaders had to lift their brothers and sisters from their ignorance and had to bring them to the mainstream. In addition to this the leaders had to motivate Dalits to agitate against all kinds of injustice by organizing them. After this they had to face the caste Hindus without any fear and lastly the leaders had to convince the government to accept their demands for equal rights and facilities.

To fight for the rights of Dalits, several movements came up in different parts of India like Dalit Sangarsh Samiti in Karnataka, the Dalit Maha Sabha in Andhra Pradesh, The Indian Dalit Federation in Kerala, The BSP in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other Northern states, which questioned the monopoly of Brahmins and urged for equal rights for all human beings irrespective of caste, creed, religion etc. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his book *Who Were the Sudras?* says: “The removal of untouchability and all disabilities from which the depressed classes suffered, formed an important item in the programmes of all social and religious reform movements that sprang up in India during the British Rule” (Ambedkar 204).

Among the several Dalit castes, the Mahar Community is the single largest Dalit caste in Maharashtra which accounted for 10% of the total population in that particular state. It was during the time of British rule that the Mahars were given entry to the British Indian Army and this act paved the way for Dalits to get access to
education and thereby they gained social recognition in the world of the upper caste Hindus. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar records the Mahar’s social incarnation and admits:

The education received by untouchables in the army gave them a new vision and a new value. They became conscious that the low esteem in which they were held was not an inescapable destiny but was a stigma imposed on their personality by the cunning contrivances of the priests. They felt the shame of it as they never did before and were determined to get rid of it. (Agarwal 38)

From the very beginning Ambedkar was against the denial of basic necessities to his people and he continued the work of Phule which was left behind by his death and in a way he became a pioneer who took the task of continuing the struggle which was started by Phule. He demanded equal rights and gradually started his struggle to get access to public wells, schools, temples etc. First and foremost before indulging himself in struggles and revolts he educated himself to the extent that by witnessing his knowledge he was handed over the work of drafting India’s Constitution.

However Ambedkar did not had any favourable situation as far as his education was concerned. In other words, Babasaheb’s effort to gain education was filled with immense hardship and he struggled a lot to gain education in the midst of utter poverty. Along with education he also started participating in conferences of untouchables and also took the lead role in many protests and his only intention was to bring the Dalits to the limelight by destroying both the caste system and untouchability. According to him the only way to remove the caste system was to strike a strong blow at the very root of it. He was against the very idea of caste and throughout his life he fought for the cause of Dalits and their rights.

Once there was a conference of untouchables at Mangaon near Kolhapur which was held on March 21, 1920 and was presided over by Ambedkar where he delivered a speech which was heard by Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur who also attended the conference. Impressed by Dr. Ambedkar’s speech Shahu Maharaj announced: “You have found your saviour in Ambedkar. I am confident that he will break your shackles. Not only that, a time will come when, so whispers my conscience, Ambedkar will shine as a front-rank leader of all-India fame and appeal” (Jadhav, Ambedkar 47).
The words of Shahu Maharaj came true and Ambedkar succeeded in bringing about a change in the life of the Dalits and he was successful to a great extent as far as the lives of Dalits are concerned. In 1926 the Government of Bombay Province adopted a resolution which abolished the discrimination of Dalits and meanwhile the Municipality of Mahad passed a resolution which allowed the untouchables to have complete access to all public places like waterfronts and reservoirs. In the meantime Ambedkar also decided to attack Chavdar Lake in order to successfully implement the resolution of Mahad Municipality. It was Ambedkar who took lead in the procession which consisted of 10,000 people who marched to Chavdar Lake by shouting slogans like “Educate, Unite, and Agitate!” (Jadhav Ambedkar 81).

After reaching Chavdar Lake Ambedkar walked down the steps of the Lake and in front of thousands of followers he calmly drank the water from it which led to the emergence of social rebellion. While addressing the crowd Ambedkar said:

…the Untouchables were asserting their rights as human beings. They were making history. Indeed they had defied the arrogance of the tyrants who boasted that their religion treated even animals with forbearance, while in reality treated Untouchables worse than cats and dogs. (Jadhav, Ambedkar 82)

Though the march towards Chavdar Lake followed by a fight between untouchables and savarnas who spared no one for polluting their lake Ambedkar appealed for peace and tolerated everything. Whatever may be the consequences, the “Mahad March” emerged as a momentous event as far as depressed classes were concerned who made history by rebelling against the age old customs and traditions of the caste Hindus. Gail Omvedt calls this Mahad Satyagraha as the first “untouchable liberation movement” (Omvedt 49) and says though the movement did not succeed in having access to public water for Dalits, Ambedkar took a bold step during this time and he also went to the extent of burning ‘Manusmriti’ as a protest against the Hindu Religion and their codes.

According to Ambedkar there are two ways by which the problem of untouchability can be removed. Along with education his second method to eradicate untouchability is to have political power in the hands of Dalits. In another speech
which he delivered in the conference of Swabhimaan Samrakshak Parishad, held at Chittegoan District, Nashik on June 21, 1929, Ambedkar said:

A strong movement alone will create proper understanding about the discrimination between the Untouchables and other communities. There is no time to debate about the emancipation of Untouchability. The time has come for the awakening about the self-respect…. The Untouchables should awaken their self-respect and launch a sustained movement for their human rights. (Jadhav Ambedkar 117)

In addition to the movement which he led towards Chavdar Lake to gain their human rights, Ambedkar led another mass movement to the Kala Ram Temple at Nashik by issuing a call to the untouchables all over Maharashtra on March 1, 1930. By explaining the purpose of struggle Ambedkar said: “We will not die if we are not allowed in the Temple, nor are we going to be immortalized by gaining entry. We are fighting for equal rights as human beings, and we are not going to accept anything less” (Jadhav Ambedkar 120). The Kala Ram Satyagraha went on for several days and though the Satyagraha continued for five years there was no futile outcome from it.

Ambedkar strived very hard to eradicate the caste system completely by striking a strong blow at its roots. But it was not an easy task and because of this he comes up with a solution and that is inter-caste marriage. Regarding this he writes:

How to bring about the reform of the Hindu Social order? How to abolish caste?.... There is a view that in the reform of Caste, the first step to take is to abolish sub-Castes.... The real remedy for breaking Caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste. (Jadhav Ambedkar 220)

Both inter-dining and inter-caste marriages are prescribed by Ambedkar as a solution to the problem of cruel caste system. In addition to this he says: “The real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras” (Jadhav Ambedkar 220). His intention was to put an end to Brahminism and says: “Brahminism is the poison which has spoiled Hinduism. You will succeed in saving Hinduism if you will kill Brahminism” (Jadhav Ambedkar 223-24).
Though the upper class and the lower class exist in almost all the countries of the world, they did not have the practice of untouchability which is really cruel and inhuman. It is only in India that the lower caste people were made to experience the barbarous system of untouchability and although it was abolished by the government of India in legal terms the practice of untouchability shows its existence illegally in some parts of India even to this day. In other words even in present days there are instances of Dalit exploitation and suffering and they face the problem of banishment from village if they fail to follow the rules prescribed by the upper caste Hindus in India.

Ambedkar, in his effort to gain equal rights for Dalits, also came in conflict with Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation, because of Gandhi’s strong belief in the caste system of the Hindu religion. He entered into a confrontation with Gandhi who denied his demand for Separate Electorate for Dalits. This was the famous Poona Pact, where, in order to save the life of Gandhi who had undertaken fast unto death in Yeravada prison, Ambedkar signed the Poona Pact. After signing the Poona pact Ambedkar said: “No man was ever placed in such a dilemma as he was. There was the life of the greatest man of India to be saved, and on the other side the interests of the downtrodden community were to be safeguarded” (Jadhav Ambedkar 178).

It was because of Gandhiji’s fast unto to death that the Dalits were deprived of Separate Electorate which was proposed by Ambedkar for the uplift of the Dalits. Regarding Gandhiji’s fasting, which was a weapon in his hand to struggle peacefully for the welfare of the people, Ambedkar says: “…there have been altogether 21 fasts to the credit of Mr.Gandhi…. In these 21 fasts there is not one undertaken for the removal of Untouchability” (Jadhav Ambedkar 369). Gandhiji even started the Harijan Sevak Sangh to fight for the cause of untouchables but ironically, the Sangh which was established for the service of untouchables did not had any untouchable as its member. In other words the untouchables were excluded from the management of the Sangh which was established for the service of untouchables.

Gandhi was always in favour of the caste system and he even said: “I believe that if Hindu Society has been able to stand, it is because it is founded on the Caste System” (Jadhav Ambedkar 383). He was an upholder of the Varna System. Ambedkar was against the view of Gandhiji and he wanted to eradicate the caste system from its roots. With the intention of doing something for his people,
Ambedkar demanded a Separate Electorate which failed to produce any paramount effect. Though depressed for having failed in his effort Ambedkar did not lose courage and continued his struggle and was accredited as the leader of the Depressed Classes all over India after the incident of the Poona Pact. The Dalit Movement demanded equal space for all human beings and equal entry to all the public places without any prohibition from anyone. Earlier it was believed that the caste system existed only in villages but when Dalits started migrating to cities after getting education they were not free from the exploitation on the basis of their caste and this caste discrimination and oppression is present even in this 21st century. In this regard Daya Pawar in his poem “The City” covers the reality of Dalits in an ironical sense and writes:

Here’s an interesting inscription:
‘This water tap is open to all caste and religions.’
What could it have meant
That this society was divided?
That some were high while others were low?
Well, all right, then this city deserved burying-
Why did they call it the machine age?
Seems like the stone age in the twentieth Century. (Nagaraj 108)

The Marathi Dalit writers and the African-American writers who are selected for this research have chronicled their sufferings which have been discussed in the second and third chapter separately. In this particular chapter an attempt has been made to explore their protests against the atrocities and illustrates their struggle for gaining their ‘self’ in the society. Fed up by the upper castes and the Whites exploitation, they gradually started protesting against their inhuman life and demanded freedom from their oppressors.

In other words, the select autobiographies of Dalit and African-American writers explore clearly the struggle which is also one of the themes of their autobiographies and thereby uncovers their fight for identity. This particular chapter focuses on the struggle of the Dalits and the African-Americans for their freedom and identity in their respective places but almost in the same period. This will be discussed by taking into account all the select autobiographies by going through each one in detail. With regard to this the autobiography of Narendra Jadhav namely
Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Journey out of the Caste system in Modern India stands first in discussing the struggles where Jadhav chronicles his parents protest and revolts against the upper caste injustice.

Narendra Jadhav’s parents, being born in an untouchable caste were not free from exploitation and suppression. But, how long does a person endure humiliation from their fellow human beings? There is a limit for everything and in the same way Dalits started putting an end to upper caste exploitation through protests and revolts. If the upper caste Hindus were not ready to put an end or limit their atrocities, then it becomes the duty of an untouchable to put a full stop to the endless trauma by revolting against them. This is what was done by the parents of Narendra Jadhav which has been portrayed in his autobiography. When the upper castes had no inclination of ending their exploitation, the untouchables themselves thought of achieving their self through protest and revolt. They decided to reclaim their identity and wanted to show the people of the upper castes that they too are human beings like them with the same flesh and blood.

The Dalits wanted the upper caste Hindus to realize the fact that they too are human beings and they will no longer yield themselves to be ruled by them. This needed more courage and the exploitation of the upper caste Hindus was such that the Dalits gradually developed the attitude of courage and thereby started protesting against their injustice. Narendra Jadhav chronicles many such protesting incidents in his autobiography which will be discussed in detail.

Since time immemorial both the upper caste Hindus in India and the Whites in America denied educational rights to the Dalits and the Blacks respectively. This was a very brilliant idea of those upper class people in order to keep the lower class people in ignorance. The upper class people, in order to safeguard their supreme position denied the right to education to the lower class people. They knew well that they simply could not deny education, so they took the religion and thereby said that religion prohibited any kind of education to the lower class people and their only duty which would get the blessings of God was by serving the upper class people.

The upper class people, by gaining knowledge and by denying rights to read any of their scriptures imbibed the lower class people with religious matters by making them highly religious and thereby made them follow the upper class without
any protest. No knowledge about religious scriptures and no education along with the fear of god made the lower class people to abide by the rules put forth by them. Though the upper class continued this kind of domination for many years, they were not capable of maintaining their supreme position because education emerged as a threat to their position and the lower class people like the Dalits and the Blacks gradually started gaining education to reclaim their identity.

Education was a tool for the Dalits and the Blacks, with the help of which they can achieve self empowerment and self respect in the society. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, in his speech at Nagpur on 20th July, 1942 said: “Educate, Organise and Agitate” (Shahare 75). These are the final and inspiring words of Ambedkar who claimed education as an important tool to fight against the caste system and racism by Dalits and Blacks.

Though Ambedkar struggled a lot throughout his life, he was not completely successful in eradicating caste system with its roots because the cruel caste system still exists. Because of this he urged Dalits to educate themselves which could make them to become aware of their rights to fight for. According to Ambedkar, education acts as a way for the Dalits to claim their rights which was prohibited for them since time immemorial. Ambedkar, who was better educated than other Dalits during his time took up the job of uplifting his fellow people who were living in a very inhuman condition and thereby gave a call to the Dalits to educate themselves first and then to fight for their rights in the Hindu society.

According to Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, the upper castes of the Hindu religion have made Dalits incapable of doing anything. He says: “By considering ourselves to be incapable and impure for so many generations, we have lost our inner strength and self-esteem, which are the two pillars of upliftment” (Jadhav, Ambedkar 46). This self esteem can be achieved through education and he strongly advised the Dalits to give importance to education as much as they can. Further he says: “Today we are lying in open, unprotected, burning under the hot sun…. I strongly advise you that you should give special attention to the best quality education” (Jadhav, Ambedkar 80).

Dalits have struggled a lot to gain education in the midst of caste system but the way they followed was not a bed of roses, instead have fought severely to have access to education. According to Ambedkar it is education along with political
power, through which Dalits can achieve success in reclaiming their identity. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar says:

Several great persons, from time to time, tried to convince the Touchables to remove the curse of Untouchability. But they are so prejudiced that they are not prepared to budge even slightly…. Our earlier generations were not educated enough and they could not do much. But we have the benefit of education. And still we do not strive for removal of the curse of Untouchability then we cannot be called worthy heirs. (Jadhav Ambedkar 90)

Ambedkar had many followers all over the country and they started following the words of Ambedkar strongly and sincerely. Meanwhile the Dalits also started raising their voice against any act of injustice, exploitation, suppression, and humiliation and predominantly they also started to know the value of education in their struggle. Though they were not educated they began enrolling their children to school with the intention of giving better education to their next generation. Narendra Jadhav’s father Damu was one such follower of Ambedkar who was inspired by his words and gave education to his children as a result of which his younger son Narendra Jadhav rose to an honourable position and also became a writer.

Narendra Jadhav in his famous autobiography Untouchables chronicles the life of three generations namely his parents, himself and the life of his children. The life of his parents was full of hard work and struggle and they fought hard to escape from their humiliating life. Regarding their struggle Jadhav says: “We are struggling against caste discrimination, illiteracy, and poverty; our weapons are education, self-empowerment, and democracy” (Jadhav 1). In the name of religion and tradition the upper caste Hindus suppressed Dalits’ voice and made them to follow the rules and regulations put forth by them though willingly or unwillingly, the failure of which made the Dalits to face very harsh consequences.

In his autobiography, Jadhav gives an account of his father’s life and about the traditional yeskar duty which was disliked by his father but was compelled to do so as per the tradition of the village. Unlike other Dalits, Damu was not a person to suffer dumbly, instead raised his voice when his self-respect was damaged while performing his yeskar duty sincerely. Damu was asked to guard a dead body till the fauzdar and
police came for the inspection and Damu did the same for the whole night even without having his meal. But when Namya, his cousin brings food and asks him to eat by hiding behind him he refuses and says: “Why should I hide? Am I any less human than they are?” (Jadhav 20). After the arrival of the fauzdar, Damu was asked to get the body out, for which Damu refused even when the police threatened him of severely beating. This was the first kind of refusal recorded by a mahar like Damu who was silently doing the work given to him even though he did not like the yeskar duty. This kind of resistance was new to the upper caste people because Dalits always stayed like puppets which are lifeless in the hands of the upper caste Hindus. Damu uttered these words in protest and said: “I will die but I will not bow down before you. Come on, beat me all you can and kill me. Let the world know that a helpless Mahar was killed doing his duty. See, the entire village is witnessing your atrocities” (Jadhav 23). Such kind of attitude against the upper caste people was unexpected and Ambedkar really wanted Dalits to say ‘no’ to their exploitation and even wanted them to protest against any kind of oppression.

Damu’s duty was to guard the village and in return for his work he was made to go begging from house to house asking for food. He rebelled against this village tradition and says:

What kind of a tradition is this that treats Mahars worse than cats and dogs?…. I spit on these inhuman traditions. I am not going to abide by such traditions. I am a man of dignity and I will not go from house to house begging for baluta. What will you do? Kill me?. (Jadhav 24)

Damu talks like this with his cousin Raghoji who persuades Damu to follow village traditions and asks him to do yeskar duty without any protest. But Damu was not like his fellow mahars who were living the life of humiliation and demanded a dignified life with an identity of his own. His negation to carry out the yeskar duty was not tolerated by his cousins but Damu not only rejected the duty but also decided to leave the village and accompanied by his wife Sonu started going towards Mumbai and the author calls this decision as:”Together, they started walking toward freedom” (Jadhav 25).
Though he was not willing to do the yeskar duty, he was compelled to do it and the humiliating thing for him was begging food for his hard work. Dalits were deprived of any rights but Damu always wanted human rights and being a human like the upper castes he wanted to lead a life of dignity with respectable identity. While talking with Sonu regarding his begging for baluta he says: “I can’t take it anymore, Soney… I can’t take it… We must have self-respect. We must have dignity. How can I take to begging from door to door? Baluta is our right, they proudly claim!... I don’t want rights as a dog. I want my human rights” (Jadhav 33).

Damu was frustrated by the kind of life he was made to live. His anger and helplessness was all due to the yeskar duty which was a duty of humiliation according to him. Though Damu was given yeskar duty only for few months his wife Soney says: “…it was not a question of a few months; it was a question of his identity- our identity” (Jadhav 33).

Damu was fighting not only for his rights but his struggle was for the entire community which was oppressed and carried the burden of untouchability on their shoulders. It was because of the teachings of Ambedkar that Damu got enough courage to resist from following the words of Patil and the Fauzdar. According to him if the Dalits followed the words of the upper caste Hindus then they will continue their exploitation without any fear of others. But once the Dalits protest then they will budge an inch from their treatment and start treating them as human beings. However to achieve this, Dalits have to educate themselves so that they can protest with the help of knowledge on their side and along with education if they had political power in their hands then nobody can even think of exploiting them.

Damu, after protesting and raising his voice against the Fauzdar, wonders whether it was he who had done that. He even says: “Was that really I who challenged the fauzdar? …. My actions were true to the teachings of Babasaheb” (Jadhav 35). By doing this Damu wonders whether he had committed any wrong in revolting against the Fauzdar but later on he says: “No, I had not done anything wrong. Perhaps I should not have waited so long to do the right” (Jadhav 35). This right thing which the Dalits thought might be seem by the upper caste Hindus as wrong because if the Dalits follow them silently without any rebellion then their supreme power will be safe and secure. But if the things went against them then they will be afraid of losing their supreme position over Dalits.
Damu was an ardent follower of Ambedkar and it was because of his teachings that he started influencing others by popularizing his thoughts and principles. He says according to Ambedkar: “We will achieve self-elevation only if we learn self-help, regain our self-respect, and gain our self-knowledge” (Jadhav 37). He tried to awaken fellow Dalits and asked them to come out of their ignorant life. In addition to this he also urged them to give better education to their children though they themselves were not educated. In this regard he says: “There will be no difference between parents and animals if they do not desire to see their children in a better position than their own” (Jadhav 38). According to Damu, nobody fought for their rights except the Dalits and it is in their hands to reclaim their own lost identity.

In other words, Damu while talking to Sonu says that they were not untouchables by birth but they were made so by the society for their benefit. It is the society which is responsible for the inhuman life of Dalits with exploitation and oppression. Therefore he decided to change his fate which was in his hands and according to him the responsibility of carving an identity is up to the Dalits and they have to do it honestly by giving education to their next generation. Damu also went to Mumbai to lead a respectable and dignified life and regarding his decision he says to his wife that: “We will go to Mumbai and I will get a job. We will have a life of dignity, earning a respectable bhakri” (Jadhav 63).

His life in the village was very miserable and the treatment of the Dalits in the village was highly barbarous. Damu says: “Did you see how they treated us in the village? We are not called by our names but simply as untouchables, the outcastes, and the lowly people who do not matter at all” (Jadhav 63-64). In villages the untouchables were considered good for doing only menial work but nobody cared to give a better life for them. Though they had names they were not called by their names which clearly show the denial of their identity. A person’s identity is mentioned first by his name and then by the kind of work he does. But for Dalits such kind of identification was not there and though they were capable of handling works other than menial jobs, they were fixed to do just the menial works by calling them as untouchables and Outcastes. Damu was against this kind of oppression and he wanted his people to come out of their pre-conceived notion about the life and wanted to gain an identity of their own through their efforts.
Though Damu had never been to a real school in Ozar, he started going to school with Missybaba while working with a Saheb. Actually Damu was appointed by the Saheb to take care of his daughter and to play with her. But later on the Saheb thought of admitting Damu also to school and it was Missybaba who taught him the basics of English beginning with alphabets. Though Damu was not able to read and write his own mother tongue Marathi, he started learning English with the help of his friend Missybaba. This was a foundation laid down by the Saheb which helped him to gain education. Damu was provided with books and new clothes and started going to school with Missybaba.

Damu’s first day at school was full of fear and confusion. On one hand he was happy going to school but on the other he was afraid because of the treatment of the untouchables in school which he had witnessed in his village. But all his happiness and excitement vanished within a short period of time, because he writes: “For some incomprehensible reason, I was not enrolled in the school” (Jadhav 120). After this incident Damu became more aware about himself and his rights. He thought that from then onwards he had to decide what was right for him and started feeling strong and powerful.

Later on in Mumbai, Damu got work in the railway department and on November 1, 1924 he became a regular worker of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway. After some time he became a permanent employee and as a regular worker he started receiving twenty rupees and eight annas per month. Damu was very honest and obedient in learning the work as fast as he could and very soon he was transferred to the main railway station called Victoria Terminus and his payment was increased to twenty seven rupees per month. Damu was very sincere in his work and he was working with great honesty and effort in order to have an identity of his own, apart from his identity as an untouchable.

Damu’s honesty and sincerity led him to get the post of electric motor mechanic and eventually his payment was raised to forty two rupees per month with a transfer to the Kurla train shed where he had the work overnight, inspecting trains that were in the station. Damu’s growth in his job earned him respect from others who were working in other departments and in a way he achieved his aim of gaining a respectable life for himself. But Damu was not satisfied by the life he gained and wanted to complete his aim by giving education to his children. He says:
As devout followers of Babasaheb, Sonu and I strove to educate our family. Babasaheb had inculcated in us the belief that education was the solution to all our ills…. I vowed that giving my children the highest possible education would be the mission of my life. (Jadhav 231)

On July 1948 after one year of India’s Independence, Damu made up his mind to admit his children to a well known school in Mumbai and with this thought in his mind he entered a school where he was welcomed with refusal to admit his son because of ‘no vacancy’. Annoyed by this, Damu protested against the headmaster and finally he admitted his son to school and stepped one step forward in fulfilling his aim. By inculcating the spirit of excellence in his children he helped them to attain educational heights and to achieve their goal. Damu had six children and among them Janu was the eldest followed by Sudha, Dina, Leela, Trusha and Jadhav the youngest. Damu admitted Janu to Chhabildas School in Dadar while the rest were admitted to Local Port Trust School.

Damu did not discriminate on the basis of gender and gave equal education to all his children. In 1956 Janu, Jadhav’s elder brother passed matriculation examination and decided to go to Elphinstone College. But unfortunately Janu was not happy at Elphinstone College because of caste discrimination and even the students followed the policy of negligence in that college. Therefore he took admission in the Siddharth College which was run by the government and he was also given a government scholarship to continue his studies.

It was in the Siddharth College that Janu’s life took a new direction and he started participating in debates and also became a member of the mock parliament. Finally he was selected to join the prestigious Indian Administrative Service in 1963. Following the footsteps of his elder brother Jadhav also passed the matriculation examination in 1969 and Jadhav’s father was overjoyed by this and felt very happy with the marks he scored in Sanskrit which was the ‘language of gods’ as said by the upper caste Hindus. In the meantime he got married to Vasundhara who belonged to a higher caste, in 1979. Vasundhara was teaching in Siddhartha College which was established by Ambedkar.
In 1981, the Government of India awarded a National scholarship to Jadhav to do his Ph.D in Economics in the United States. After getting his Ph.D in Economics he moved to Ethiopia in 1988 and the Reserve Bank appointed Narendra Jadhav as the financial adviser to the Ethiopian government.

When Janu was selected for the IAS, Damu was still working as a class IV employee in the Mumbai Port Trust and Janu was the first among the employee’s son to be selected for the IAS. Regarding this Mr.Nandakarni, Chairman of Mumbai Port Trust said: “You encouraged your son to study, molded him. You have played a major role in his success” (Jadhav 263). Though an Untouchable, Janu achieved success in life and became a public figure which happened because of his access to education.

Like his elder brother, in spite of the hardships, Jadhav fulfilled the dream of his father who wanted his children to be in a higher position. When Jadhav was in the United States doing his Ph.D, Damu’s health worsened and Jadhav came to visit him but Damu strongly said: “Why did you come back? …I am not going to die till you come back with your degree. Go, finish your studies” (Jadhav 276). Damu was so strong and determinant that at any cost he wanted his children to complete their education without any hindrance from anyone.

If Ambedkar was an inspiring person behind Damu, it was Damu who was an inspiring spirit behind Jadhav and his elder brother Janu who achieved success in their life. Damu’s motivating spirit led Jadhav to complete his degree and get a Ph.D in Economics from Indiana University. Damu felt happy seeing Jadhav’s growth but unfortunately, due to his bad health he breathed his last on January 14, 1989 in St.George’s hospital. Like his fellow Dalits, Damu did not die an ordinary death but a memorable one because it was he who acted as a guiding spirit behind his children’s success and when one goes through the life of Damu’s children the image of Damu, his humiliation, his struggle, his protest, his strong determination towards education, all these appear before the eyes of the readers.

Damu had sincerely followed the words of Ambedkar because once Ambedkar said to Damu: “Give your sons a good education” (Jadhav 263). According to Ambedkar it is through education one can attain self-empowerment in the midst of caste ridden society. Education gave a new identity to Jahdav apart from his identity as a Mahar and this was proved when he visited the shrine of Vithoba in Pandharpur.
Earlier Dalits were not allowed to enter the temple thinking that their temple would get polluted by their entry. Even Ambedkar had fought for temple entry not with the intention of worshipping god but with the sole intention of claiming their political rights which was denied to the Dalits by the upper caste Hindus since time immemorial.

When Jadhav visited Vithoba temple, the Chairman of the Trust and the head priest welcomed him and he was a VIP in the temple performing the ritual worship. Remembering this incident Jadhav writes:

I was after all an untouchable-I belonged to a caste that was denied entry into the temple. Even the shadow of an untouchable was not supposed to fall on any temple. And that day, there I was being escorted with honor into the Temple of Vithoba-the ultimate seat of Hindu temporal power. (Jadhav 287)

These drastic changes, from the denial of entry to temples for untouchables to the worship of Vithoba as a VIP happened because of the education which his father Damu had given him. By fulfilling Damu’s dream Jadhav was successful in achieving an identity of his own and thereby proved his father as a model for the other Dalits and entrusted them to follow the words of Ambedkar who gave utmost importance to education.

Narendra Jadhav asserts that to abolish the pain of untouchability, it is necessary to inculcate confidence in the minds of the Dalits by acknowledging both their identity and humanity. He also traces the importance of the teachings of Ambedkar which served as a helpful tool to recognize and reorganize the identity of the Dalit Community which was neglected and suppressed from a very long time.

In an addendum written at the end of Jadhav’s autobiography by his daughter Apoorva, a short history of her life has been given herself that throws light on the efforts of her grandfather Damu and her father Jadhav in fighting for gaining education. Apoorva discovered that she was a Dalit when she was just 12 years old, and at that age she was unaware about what Dalit meant because she had not experienced any kind of exploitation like the earlier generations. When she was studying in 6th grade a teacher asked her whether she was the daughter of Dr.Narendra Jadhav and the teacher praised her father as a great Dalit scholar. Apporva felt proud
about her father but at the same time she was shocked to see the caste behind his achievement. She says: “I was proud of my father, but completely bewildered as to why he had to have that title attached to him. Why couldn’t she just call him a scholar? Why add the Dalit tag?” (Jadhav 292).

Even to this day whatever may be the achievements of Dalits they are identified by their caste first and then by their achievements. But whatever may be the situation the Dalits were free from the kind of exploitation which was there earlier but it does not mean that there is no more exploitation and oppression. However now Dalits are educated and they can fight for justice in the right way like Damu who according to Apoorva was the first person to stand against caste discrimination. She says: “Who was the first person to stand up against Caste discrimination in our family? The answer is simple: my grandfather” (Jadhav 295). Further she says:

He refused to let circumstances dictated by the upper castes shape his life; instead, he decided to shape his own destiny. He accomplished this by enrolling his children in the best possible schools he could. His children, however, lead double lives of sorts. (Jadhav 295)

Jadhav’s daughter is free from all the oppression and humiliation which had been experienced by their ancestors. She says: “My ancestors worked hard to make my life just like that of any other girl in the world. I have the torch they lit for me and nothing can stop me now” (Jadhav 295). In short one can say that the ancestors of the Dalits have struggled a lot in every aspect of their life to have better living conditions for the next generations. That is why the Dalits at present do not have the problem of untouchability to a very large extent though in some places there is existence of it. But compared to earlier times the Dalits are now free to take water from public places and can enter temples freely without any prohibition. Their ancestors tolerated all the hardships for themselves and have showed the path of progress to the next generation which was achieved through education.

Apart from Narendra Jadhav, another Dalit writer who rose from a very low position to the status of a writer was Laxman Gaikwad who struggled very hard to get education by casting aside his ancestor’s occupation of thieving. In his autobiography *The Branded*, being branded as ‘Uchalyas’ meaning thieves, the communities
struggled a lot for a decent and dignified life which comprised of humiliation and disgrace. Like Narendra Jadhav’s father Damu, the father of Laxman Gaikwad also decided to enroll his son to school instead of making him indulge in their profession of thieving. Gaikwad says:

Father, as a result of his service with Chamle, had begun to grasp the state of affairs a little better. He understood that a child must learn to read and write. Instead of a Bharat blade, he put in my hand a slate and pencil and enrolled my name in a primary class for children. (Gaikwad 16)

By his father’s effort Gaikwad joined school but because he belonged to an Uchalya community he was not welcomed by his classmates. Some even went to the extent of throwing stones at him for daring to come to school. But by putting aside all such humiliation Laxman Gaikwad continued to attend the school because he knew very well the value of education for his community to achieve progress in their life. Not only did his classmates dislike his entry to school but his neighbours too accused his father for enrolling him to school by giving up their profession of thieving. The community people even claimed Gaikwad’s father responsible when the village people were affected by some diseases. They blamed him saying that they were affected by these diseases because of goddess Ellamma’s furiousness on them which happened because of not following the rules of the community by him.

The neighbours not only criticized Gaikwad’s father for sending his son to school but also warned him that if he continued to go to school then they would call the Panchayat and ostracize them. This shows how the upper caste Hindus brainwashed the untouchables by using religion as a tool in their hand and imprinted in the minds of the untouchables that if they failed to follow the rules prescribed for them, then they would be punished by God for their act. They knew very well that if they simply put forth some rules to their fellow human beings, they wouldn’t follow them, so they hit upon the idea to utilize religion as a better weapon to keep the Dalits under their control. It was this that kept the Dalits in ignorance without giving any education and asked the Dalits to serve them sincerely to have a better life in their next generation.
Gradually the Dalits began to become aware of the kind of injustice done to them by the upper castes and started to protest by educating themselves. Gaikwad father’s constant advice to his son was: “Take a good education, rise high in life” (Gaikwad 90). While studying in school at Babhalgoan he was staying in a boarding house and Laxman was treated with love and affection without any kind of discrimination on the basis of caste. Laxman, belonging to a Pathrut Community was the first person to attend school and get education by not subscribing to his ancestral occupation of thieving. But poverty led Laxman to discontinue his studies and search for any work available for him and finally got a job in a spinning mill and his salary was paid after 125 days of training. Though he got a job, his mind was always filled with dreams which his father had about his education. But poverty stood as a hindrance to fulfill his father’s dream.

Gaikwad’s mind started to be troubled by these thoughts and fortunately a time keeper in the spinning mill suggested him to continue his studies as he was still young. Inspired by these words Gaikwad wasted no more time and decided to work and also to study and thereby joined Shivaji High School in Latur. This shows his interest in studies and he continued to earn by working in the night shift and started going to school in the morning. Because of learning and earning at the same time Gaikwad was held in esteem and both his friends and family members started giving respect to him. Earlier he was called as Lakshya or Pathrut but in Latur everyone started addressing him as Laxman Gaikwad and even the Maratha boys, who were calling him by the name of his caste, started addressing him by his name. This was really an achievement as far as Laxman was concerned and because of his education he successfully gained an identity and a respectable life in society.

Gaikwad was not only interested in carving a better life for himself but also fought for his people in the community and in a way he became a social activist. While working in the Spinning wheel mill, the owner followed the policy of unequal wages to the workers and they were made to labour for very less wages. This was not tolerated by the workers and finally they decided to do fast unto death. Laxman Gaikwad was educated, so he was able to go through the laws and took part in workers struggle.

The worker’s struggle ended and they were provided with increase in their wages and other facilities and they also founded the Workers Union Office in the mill
compound. In the meanwhile Laxman also started an organization called District Pathrut Samaj Sanghatana, which was a community organization started with the intention of doing something for the people of his community. He also started travelling around but because of this task he completely neglected his family and once again his family was in utter poverty. His situation was so bad that he did not have any money in his pocket when his father died and with the help of a marwadi woman who gave rupees 100 to Laxman he finally did his father’s funeral rights.

Later on he became very serious about his people’s future life and decided to do something for them. Once he had been to Kawatha and met Prof. B.L. Gaikwad and his brother-in-law D.S. Gaikwad where he had a discussion about his community’s growth and identity. He writes: “We had a discussion on the dire necessity of bringing together the people of our community into an organization and sending our children to schools instead of teaching them to pick pockets and steal” (Gaikwad 178).

Gaikwad not only fulfilled his father’s dream by educating himself but decided to bring his whole community who were branded as Uchalyas into the mainstream. He wanted his people to give up their thieving work and urged them to enroll their children in schools. With this intention, in order to inspire his community the first gathering of the Nomadic and Denotified Tribes was organized in 1978 which was presided over by Shri Padmasinh Patil who was the Minister for Social Welfare. Later on he also thought of starting a residential school in order to give education to his community. He says: “If I am so ignorant, I thought, what must be the condition of the entire community” (Gaikwad 178-79). It was because of his father that he got education and now it was his sole responsibility to take up the task of improving his community’s life condition. He writes:

I was obsessed with the idea of improving the lot of these people and making them change to respectable ways of living. I thought if the children of these people could be sent to school, the next generation of our community would come into the respectable mainstream of society. (Gaikwad 179)

Apart from this Gaikwad also started taking part in agitations and satyagrahas in order to fight for his people. One such satyagraha was held in order to rename the Maratwada University as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University. During this satyagraha
he was also arrested and put into jail. For the first time he was arrested and he was in jail for fourteen days and he utilized this opportunity for meeting several political and social workers. As per the words of Ambedkar, ‘Education and Political power’ is needed in order to gain a respectable life and identity for the Dalits. Keeping these words in mind Laxman Gaikwad, after gaining education began to take some power in his hands and because of this he started an organization and also took part in many agitations.

The Uchalyas were denotified after independence by Pandit Nehru who declared saying: “No community or tribe could ever be thieves by nature and birth, and these tribes, which were regarded as criminal, were denotified. In a way they were set free from such social and legal stigma and branding” (Gaikwad 200). But this declaration remained only on paper and in reality people suffered from discrimination and humiliation and were regarded as thieves by birth. The society was such that it did not allow a person to be honest and as far as Uchalyas were concerned, the society denied them a respectable life but through constant efforts and struggle they gained an identity of their own. Gradually Laxman became an active worker of the Nomadic and Denotified Tribes’ Organization and his community people started seeking his help against any kind of injustice. He made up his mind to work for the cause of his community people and at the end of his autobiography he writes:

Now my obsession is to seek various ways in which to foster and strengthen tribal movements intellectually so that a complete transformation can be achieved of the Nomadic, and Denotified Tribes, the Scheduled Castes, and the exploited and downtrodden underdogs. (Gaikwad 233)

Laxman Gaikwad, being born in a community which was branded as Uchalyas rose to a great position by becoming a social worker and writer which was achieved through education and also the power which he got with the help of education. Even to this day he is very active in his social work and through his writings he voices against injustice of his community’s and inspires his people to get education and to achieve progress in their life. Elizabeth Susan Paul in her article writes: “Education makes Laxman conscious of his rights and this leads to an upward mobility in the socio-economic ladder. From a starving boy, humiliated and insulted in his village, he acquires dignity and self-respect” (Paul 6). His community can gain influence by
looking at the life of Gaikwad and can achieve something in their life in order to come out of their humiliating life. Similarly another person who achieved success in his life by being an outcaste was Sharankumar Limbale who also struggled very hard to shape an identity of his own in the cruel society of the upper caste Hindus.

Sharankumar Limbale, in his autobiography *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*, not only chronicles the kind of exploitation he meted out but also portrays his steady battle against hunger and poverty and his struggle to gain a respectable life with an identity through education which will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

Limbale was suffering from double oppression, one as an untouchable who was oppressed by the upper caste Hindus and the other as an outcaste by his own people because of his birth out of a sexual relationship between his mother and an upper caste patil. The village Patil refused to claim Limbale as his son while the people of his own community ostracized him by calling him an ‘Akkarmashi’ meaning half-caste as he belonged to both the untouchable and the upper caste Hindus. In spite of being an outcaste Limbale succeeded in his attempt of having his own identity and now everyone recognizes him as a great writer, editor, critic and also Dalit activist by giving respect to his knowledge.

Limbale says; “My schooling started in the real sense from the third form onward” (Limbale 5). Utter poverty and hunger made Limbale’s family to work in order to fill their stomach and they were least bothered about education. But Limbale silently continued his studies without anyone’s help and his interest was not at all shaken by poverty which they were steeped in. Limbale completed his high school education at Chungi and Chapalgoan. Later on he was shifted to a boarding school at Chapalgoan which put an end to bunking and playing truant at school which he was doing in the company of others.

At Chapalgoan he was not able to skip school and he was made to study all the time because he had nothing to do there except study. It was here that his English improved and he became one of the intelligent boys in his class. As he started getting education he became aware of the problem of caste and the idea of untouchability. He says: “We hated the very idea of untouchability. With our education, there grew in us a sense of pride. Casteism made us bitter” (Limbale 76). While studying at Chapalgoan, Limbale visited his village during weekends and he was upset by the
kind of treatment the Mahars received there. There was a tea shop in the village and the Mahars were given tea from a distance and even the money was not taken directly from the upper castes. Fed up with this kind of behaviour which Limbale had witnessed by birth he became violent against such practices.

Thinking of rebelling against such inhuman practices, Limbale and his friend Parshya decided to lodge a complaint against Shivram who was running the tea shop in the village. But the police also talked in favour of Shivram and the complaint was an invaluable thing to them. However both Limbale and Parshya at least dared to stand against the inhuman practices of upper caste which was not done by any other Mahar in the village.

From the very beginning Limbale had the nature to rebel and he wanted to go against the age old tradition of caste discrimination. In addition to the atrocities faced by the Mahars they were not allowed to enter the temples but Limbale and Parshya once entered the temple of Ithoba secretly and also prostrated before the god. The upper caste Hindus did not know this incident and they continued their poojas as usual. But if they had known this they would have created a big scene and purifying rituals would be undertaken in order to maintain the sanctity of the temple. However this particular incident shows that the upper castes maintained their supremacy by keeping Dalits in ignorance and fear.

Limbale was fed up with the kind of exploitation he was suffering from and therefore he says: “I wanted to rebel against such humiliation” (Limbale 82). But in the midst of this he continued his studies and after passing his school education with first class marks by gaining second position in his class he came to Sholapur to join college and got admission in Dayanand College. Regarding his college education he writes:

While studying in college I was mentally aflame. I was growing amidst a conflagration. The roots of the Movement were settling more firmly. Injustice towards us was assuming a new meaning. We were awakening under a new consciousness which was becoming more pervasive day by day. (Limbale 83)

While studying in college he was made to continue his studies in utter poverty. But though he was suffering from severe poverty his mind was filled with the thought
of carving a respectable life for himself and also for his people. Whenever he heard of any atrocities against Dalits he became very rebellious. Limbale was also greatly influenced by Ambedkar and in due respect he stopped saying namaskar to others, instead started saying Jai Bhim.

Though the government gave reservations with the intention of educating Dalits, the upper castes were against such kind of facilities. They were feared by the fact that if Dalits get education then they will become aware about their low status and they will come out of their low standard of life. Many times the upper castes even protested against reservation policy and in this regard Limbale writes:

Whenever I heard that reservation facilities for Dalits were about
to be cancelled it used to scare me. If these facilities are cancelled,
give us our own Dalitsthan. We are educated only because these
facilities exist; they were like a father to us…. (Limbale 89)

It was with the help of reservation and scholarship that Limbale graduated in 1978 while other boys of his age in his community were busy hard at toil in farms as labourers. This is the difference between Limbale and other boys of his own community which has been achieved with the help of education. According to him, he could complete his education because of reservation and scholarship because in the midst of utter poverty education was far from his choice. For those who are against reservation Limbale says: “Those who say that facilities must be cancelled should first face casteism themselves. They must share the life of the untouchables. Let them live outside the village, ostracized like us” (Limbale 89-90).

These words of Limbale clearly show that, only those who have gone through casteism can really feel the pain of it. Others who are outside it can only see their pain from far but cannot experience it personally. After completing his education he got a job as a telephone operator at Ahmedpur. Though he wanted to go for higher education his poverty made him to discontinue his dream and finally took up a job as telephone operator. Gradually he also started taking part in Dalit movements and inspired people to go against the caste system and untouchability.

The progress in Dalits life was seen as a threat to their supreme position which the upper castes have maintained from a very long time. Gradually Dalits also became conscious about being neat and clean and started changing their attitude towards
themselves. Earlier they thought they were inferior but later on with the help of education they also became aware of their condition and tried to gain progress in their life. Limbale, after getting education and a job was living like the upper caste and says:

I used clean clothes, bathed every day and washed myself clean with soap, and brushed my teeth with toothpaste. There was nothing unclean about me. Then in what sense was I untouchable? A high caste who is dirty was still considered as touchable!.

(Limbale 107)

Limbale’s words show that the upper caste Hindus criticized the Dalits for being untidy and because of that they have been treated low. But in reality it was not true because the upper castes from the beginning utilized the Dalits for their own benefit and in order to have a higher position they claimed that the Dalits were dirty and continued to hold their supremacy over them. Their intention was, by hook or crook they wanted to have a supreme position for themselves and in order to achieve it they relegated the Dalits to a very low status in the annals of society.

In the midst of all these atrocities and suppression, Limbale gained success in his life and became a great writer and also an activist in order to fight for the rights of his people. According to him it was the policy of reservation which enabled him to gain educational qualification with the help of which he carved a respectable life for himself by becoming a role model to people of his community. His search for self was followed by inhuman experiences and exploitations which he took up as a challenge and finally succeeded in gaining an identity of his own. Being born as an outcaste in the Mahar community he was recognized by his works and achievement rather than by his caste to which he was born into.

Limbale’s life portrays that being born in a particular caste is not enough but achieving something despite exploitation and oppression is commendable and his life is really an inspiration for others to follow his footsteps. Similarly, like Limbale one more writer who became a role model to his people was Vasanth Moon, whose autobiography Growing Up Untouchable in India will be discussed in this chapter. Vasanth Moon has the credit of publishing the first Dalit autobiography in English and
the title itself clearly portrays the struggles of a Dalit to come out of their victimization by shedding the shame of inferiority.

Vasanth Moon was not only a great writer but also highly educated and had sacrificed his life for the sake of Dalit upliftment by taking part in Dalit movements. He is also the editor of seventeen volumes of Dr. Ambedkar’s* Writings and Speeches* in English and in his autobiography he constantly mentions about Ambedkar and his struggles which clearly shows how much Moon was influenced by him. In almost all the autobiographies of Dalit writers the common theme is their exploitation and their struggle to gain a foothold. Similarly in the autobiography of Moon, one can go through his inhuman life and his struggle to gain education which he utilized to fight against exploitation in the later part of his life. In the introduction of his autobiography written by Eleanor Zelliott, she writes: “In Moon’s world, Dalits are not all unhappy victims, not marginalized people to be pitied, not a people without hope. Prejudice, violence, crime are not absent from the story of his early life, but they do not dominate, do not destroy his spirit” (Moon Xi).

Being a Mahar, Moon was also greatly influenced by his mother Purnabai and his grandfather Sadashiv Lohkare. As far as his mother was concerned, Moon says that during the time when education was not at all meant for girls his mother studied up to third grade which was a great thing in the community because in those days education up to fourth grade was considered a big thing. Though she was educated her life was full of misery because of a drunken husband whose absence led Purnabai to bear her family’s responsibility on her shoulder.

In spite of utter poverty Purnabai and her father did not compromise in giving good education to their children and Vasanth Moon was the only boy from his Mahar community who attended school. Others were all Brahmins and to his great wonder there was no casteism in school which happened due to the effort of the teachers. Though the Brahmin students were rich they did not discriminate Moon who was financially very poor and developed a bond of friendship which remained unbroken.

After finishing his fourth grade Moon stayed at home without knowing what to do next and it was his mother who went to the patil (headman of the village) and begged him to help her to continue his son’s schooling as she had not a penny with her at that time. But her begging did not produce any positive result and it was his
uncle Hari who admitted Moon to Patwardhan High School by going through his marks secured in the fourth grade. During those days, in Nagpur, Patwardhan High School was of the highest standard and the students were given seats in accordance with their merit and there was no question of any reserved seats for untouchables.

From the very beginning Moon was very arrogant and was against the atrocities of upper caste Hindus. Even to this day the Dalits are given scholarships from the government in order to encourage them to study and for their uplift. Similarly when he was studying in school a scholarship from Harijan Sevak Sangh was announced and the teacher asked the Dalit students to give their names for the scholarship. But suddenly one of the students rose up promptly and said: “Sir, we are not ‘Harijans’, and we don’t want the scholarship of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. None of us like to be called Harijans” (Moon 37). Vasanth Moon, like Ambedkar refused to be called as Harijans and he and his friends decided not to take the scholarship but to study like other non dalit students and thereby thought of giving equal competition to them in every field.

Along with education, Moon also took active participation in the Samatha Sainik Dal which established its branch in Maharpura around 1938 by Asaram Paithankar, Sadanand Dongare, and others. At a very young age when he was just in the third standard he started going to the Dal. The Dal had their own flag which symbolized pride and by 1941 Wamanrao Godbole who entered the Dal started establishing its branches throughout northern and western Nagpur. It was Wamanrao Godbole who brought silk cloth for a blue flag and made a flag with his own hands after the historic first Scheduled Caste Federation Conference concluded successfully. Everyday the flag hoisted with a song sung by Bhanudas Varade who, at the end of the song sang the following inspiring words:

Let us free everyone now
The wind of freedom is let loose!
We have fierce heroic fighting leaders
Let us all go forward.
Our aim is to achieve power
Let us give our lives on the battlefield!. (Moon 67)

Growing up in the midst of an atmosphere like this, Moon gradually became mentally strong and he was filled with the thoughts of fighting for their legal rights.
By the time he reached his matric he was sure about his duties towards his people.

After completing his B.A. Moon got employment in the office of the Deputy Accountant General Post and Telegraph but in 1955 he left his job in order to register to do his M.A. Because of some reasons he was not able to continue his studies and after a gap of three years he took his second year M.A. examination. Moon wanted to become a professor and it was his dream but the third rank which he got in his M.A. vanquished his dream of becoming a professor completely and because of this the country got a great writer who is still remembered by his wonderful writings and works.

After his matric Moon took up several jobs but finally he got selected as a Deputy Country Commissioner when he was just twenty three years old. At that age he was unaware about his position and was in a dilemma whether to take up this job or not. But the advice of wise people made him accept this position and he was assigned a town called Saunsar in Chhindwara district next to Nagpur and it was the first time in his life that he wore a hat and coat. His position was such that even the elderly person in that place greeted Moon with much deference and Moon said: “I like it very much. I was enjoying the new experience of “sahebness”” (Moon 158). Moon’s grandfather wanted to see him as a Saheb and by becoming Deputy Country Commissioner he fulfilled his grandfather’s dream and thereby succeeded in achieving an identity of his own apart from his identity as a Mahar.

Education brought a change in his life and from the inhuman life as a Mahar he rose to an honourable position where he was respectfully greeted by the members of the upper caste Hindus too. He was not only a civil servant but also a Dalit activist and writer. It was he who edited seventeen volumes of Ambedkar’s Writings and Speeches. Regarding this he writes:

See how strange is the course of life! The English language, which gave me so much trouble in high school, was the language of the writings of Babasaheb Ambedkar, which I was given the opportunity to edit, and I successfully did so. I always had doubts lurking in the corner of my mind that I might have made some mistakes in English, but I am no longer afraid of that. (Moon 38)
Vasanth Moon, in his autobiography portrays his life which was full of struggle against poverty and also his protest to gain education. Though there was utter poverty he emerged as a great writer, civil servant and became active in Dalit movements and in a way emerged successful in searching his ‘self’ and thereby achieved an identity of his own in the midst of a casteist society. Vasanth Moon is a self made man who became the leader of the Dalit Community to fight for their rights.

In all the four autobiographies the only picture which one can witness is their exploitation and also their struggle to come out of their suppression. In other words the writers express their dislike against the practice of untouchability and urge Dalits to claim their identity as their right. The autobiography which is also a part of Dalit literature gives a realistic portrayal of Dalits’ life which is full of protest against upper caste humiliation.

In almost all the autobiographies of Dalit writes, the most common theme which the writers concentrate is on their commitment to establish an identity of their own in the midst of the upper caste Hindu world. They give utmost importance to education and at the same time urge their fellow Dalits to struggle for their ‘self’ when one goes through the autobiographies of Dalit Writers. To give some instance from the autobiographies other than the four autobiographies discussed here mention must be made of Hazari’s autobiography Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste, where he portrays his struggle to get education. In order to materialize his dream of becoming educated he worked hard and bore all insults which came in his way as obstacles. He was determined to get educated at any cost once he became aware about the value of education for Dalits.

In order to get access to education and to have social liberation Hazari changed his religion from Hinduism to Islam. His change of religion made him to lose his identity as an untouchable and he also got an opportunity to fulfill his dream of becoming educated. Similarly another writer namely Laxman Mane in his autobiography Upara talks about his dream of getting educated to secure a government job. He was the first person from the Kaikadi’s Community to obtain a graduate degree but his goal of achieving a government job did not materialize. Generally the Kaikadi Community regarded education as an abomination and they also endorsed a social boycott against the family of Laxman Mane. But Mane
completed his education by overcoming all these obstacles and he failed in securing a government job just because of caste prejudice.

Like Laxman Mane, Om Prakash Valmiki has also fought very hard to get education and to fulfill his dream he even went to the extent of breaking Community’s rule and attended school. In his autobiography Joothan: A Dalit’s Life he chronicles his life and the obstacles he crossed over in order to carve an identity of his own. Meanwhile Joothan is the only Hindi Dalit autobiography which has been translated into English so far. He writes that the major issue which the autobiography deals with is the issue of ‘identity’ concerning caste. At the end of his autobiography he writes:

Why is my Caste my only identity? Many friends hint at the loudness and arrogance of my writings. They insinuate that I have imprisoned myself in a narrow circle. They say that literary expression should be focused on the universal; a writer ought not to limit himself to a narrow, confined terrain of life. That is my being Dalit and arriving at a point of view according to my environment and my socio-economic situation is being arrogant. Because in their eyes, I am only an SC, the one who stands outside the door. (Valmiki 134)

In India Dalits face a different problem of identity and culture and though they have fought immensely for their freedom and identity they still have the problem of caste discrimination and untouchability. Unlike Blacks, Dalits have no option to go back to a separate ethnic group because Dalits are linked to the same ethnic group of Hindus but in reality they have been kept out of Hindu religious fold. The Dalits are questioning the ‘savarna’ version of human reality in their own way and it was after the establishment of the Dalit Panther Movement that the literature of Dalits in Maharashtra secured a militant tone.

Freedom and identity are the two powerful concepts for both the Dalits and the Blacks and they needed freedom from the bondage of physical and psychological aspects. In Dalit Literature, freedom is the central motif ever since Chokamela raised his voice against social inequality and injustice. But in America this quest for freedom and struggle to gain identity began with the emergence of slave narratives which eventually became a powerful form of self expression for them.
The struggle to gain education and to acquire identity of their own becomes more delicate and the problem of identity also raises the issues of tradition, culture, history, religion and all other practices which contribute on a large scale to the wholeness of life. The victims have to make themselves visible and their voice audible to their oppressors which is said to be the first expression which the victims have to register. Later on their voice gets transformed into anger and gradually they indulge in protest which makes the masters to feel their presence and also about their unsatisfactory nature.

Both the Dalits and the Blacks have written their literature with the intention of portraying their exploitation publicly and also to register their struggle through their writings. S.D.Kapoor in his book *Dalits and African Americans: A Study in Comparison* says:

> What particularly interests me is their journey towards a human terrain—both in life and literature…. This journey involves two basic issues which are central to their existence: identity and freedom: to relate themselves to a complex of relationships and to move untiringly towards complete manhood. (Kapoor 9)

Similarly like the Dalits, the Blacks in America began to write their own literature in order to portray their inhuman kind of life which the Whites have compelled them to lead. Gradually they also started the Black Panther Movement, where the Blacks decided to have their own history, literature, music, folklore, and also black universities with black curricula. Though the slaves endured slavery for 250 long years, their patience and tolerance was tested and they started resisting their oppression to the greatest shock of the Whites.

African-American literature has been fed by oral poetry which the slaves composed while working in the plantations. It was a form of expressing their suffering and anguish which led them to some kind of resolution. In a way the blues became some form of confirmation in the midst of darkness and thunder. These forms of oral poetry which is called as Blues have two aspects, one is they wrestled with themselves and the other is, they wrestled with the outer world.

Long years of oppression and humiliation compelled the Blacks to go against the Whites and in way they resisted strongly to have their identity in the White world.
On September 13, 1663 there emerged an organized slave resistance in Virginia which is said to be the first recorded instance of slave resistance. But the actual rebellion of slaves took place in 1712 when the slaves set fire to a building in New York City. In addition to this there emerged numerous rebellions and revolts and David Richardson has counted around 485 acts of violence from the slaves and he says 90% of them have occurred between 1698 and 1807. These figures clearly show that around one in ten voyages were affected by some kind of violence by the slaves. Usually these revolts were put down with great force from the Whites and very few revolts achieved success in their attempt.

Apart from these revolts there were individual runaways that happened because of the slaves’ concern for their freedom and they were more worried about their freedom than challenge the system of slavery. Among all the rebellions which took place in different places, the Haitian Rebellion gets mention because of its successful nature in replacing the slave holding regime into a polity organized by those who were enslaved.

Regarding slave rebellions Gad Heuman writes:

The United States experienced a handful of major rebellions and conspiracies, the largest of which resulted in the death of between 60 to 70 whites. …The one revolt that succeeded in ending slavery occurred in St.Domingue, and revolts elsewhere in the Caribbean in the nineteenth century played a significant role in the British government’s decision to abolish slavery. (Heuman 270)

African slaves resisted slavery very strongly and they rebelled in November 1733 followed by another strong rebellion which took place after six years in 1739 in Stono River in South Carolina. Mark Smith described this rebellion as an act of both a mass escape and also a genuine uprising. In 1760, African slaves in Jamaica led one of the largest rebellions and three years later in 1763, a major rebellion broke out in Bernice, earlier a Dutch Colony which was taken over by the British as part of their British Guiana.

In August 1791, thousands of slaves on the sugar plantations of the Northern plain of Saint Domingue took a very drastic step and expressed their anger by killing their masters. In addition, they also burned and looted the great house in the
plantations and set fire to the fields of sugarcane and smashed the machinery that made cane into sugar. The Dominican Republic was the first country to abolish both slavery and slave trade in 1822 and in 1811 in Chile slavery was abolished with a declaration that the children who were born after that date were considered as free though they were made to stay in the plantation until they attained the age of maturity. By the end of 1820’s most of the Latin American Republics had abolished the cruel slavery though the final abolition would come to most only in the 1850’s.

First and foremost the slaves got enough courage to rebel against their masters and their intention was to get freedom from the institution of slavery. Later on they started thinking about educating themselves because if they had thought of education while being in slavery they were immediately killed by their masters. Many slaves showed interest in learning which ended in futile results because of their master’s cruel nature and they didn’t want slaves to be educated because of a threat to their position. The slaves had not even got schools and many times they studied during night without the knowledge of their master’s but once they were caught their life ended at that moment. Such was the situation of slaves and therefore they craved for freedom first and then thought of educating themselves. Yetman N.R. in his book *Voices from Slavery* records the experience of Mary Ella Grandberry who was a 90 years old slave in Alabama who says:

> De white folks didn’t allow us to even look at a book. Dey would scold and sometimes whip us iffen dey caught us with our head in a book. Dat is one thing I surely want to do an dat was to learn to read and write. Massa Jim promised to teach us to read and write, but he never had de time. (Yetman 145)

Africans always dealt with harsh penalties for their effort to seek education and many Africans did not even aspire to educate themselves for the fear of sudden death. Slaveholders generally reacted with cruel punishment and directed swift violence at those who strove for literacy. James Baldwin in his book *The Fire Next Time* says: “the power of the white world is threatened whenever a black man refused to accept the white world’s definition” (Baldwin 95).

The codes of conduct prepared by the Whites were so cruel and barbarous that the life of slaves remained far from imagination. Literally speaking, animals were
treated better than the slaves as they were deprived of all facilities which a normal human being was entitled to. Gradually when the slaves began to become aware of their situation they started revolting against their White masters and to some extent many slaves were fortunate enough to escape from the institution of slavery. The African slaves were brought from Africa and after their escape they were in a dilemma whether to return to their motherland or to stay in America. Though many slaves went back to their mother land after the abolition of slavery most of them remained in America because of the loss of their roots. In other words after getting freedom slaves became worried about their future. Regarding the effect of slavery on the African-American psyche Anthony B. Mitchell in her article “Self-Emancipation and Slavery” quotes the words of Patsy Mitchner who says:

"Slavery wus a bad thing, an’ freedom, of de kin’ we got, wid nothin’ to live on wus bad. Two snakes full of pisen. One lyin’ wit his head pintin’ north, de other wid his head pintin’ south. Dere names wus slavery an’ freedom. De snake called slavery lay wit his head pinted south, an’ de snake called freedom lay wid his head pinted north. Both bit de nigger, an’ dey both wus bad. (Mitchnell 92)"

With the issue of the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln, slavery was abolished and all the slaves were declared free. The 13th Amendment outlawed slavery in 1865, the 14th Amendment provided citizenship to African-Americans in 1868, and the 15th Amendment granted voting rights to men irrespective of color or race. But women did not get voting rights till 1920 which was granted to them by the 19th Amendment.

Though the slaves were granted voting rights and citizenship they still lagged behind in terms of education because of no proper schools for them. They knew well that access to education and to educate themselves would be the first step towards self-emancipation. Du Bois estimated that by the end of the Civil War only five percent of slaves were able to read and write and it was the White children who played a significant role in the education of Blacks because they helped Blacks a lot in their efforts to achieve literacy. According to Genovese: “…Slave children who carried books of white children to school would sit outside, listen, and try to keep up with their lessons” (Genoseve 564). In many cases the White children taught the
Black children by disobeying their parents who ordered their children not to assist the Blacks in their efforts to get educated. Though the Blacks did not have any proper schooling facilities the White children taught them during playtime which clearly shows the urge of the Blacks to educate themselves.

The emergence of Martin Luther King Jr. in the mid 20th Century raised hopes for those who favored assimilation. Being a leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement he claimed civil rights through non-violent civil disobedience and became famous for using non violent methods to claim the rights of the Blacks. He also received the Nobel Peace Prize for fighting racial inequality through non violence method. His slogan “We shall over come” was drowned in his blood when he was assassinated.

During the 1960’s the uprising slogans such as “Black Power” and “Black is Beautiful” emerged and the birth of the Black Panther Party For Self Defense (BPPSD) in 1966 advocated the return of African identity, Black consciousness, Black pride and culture. Blacks had to be two people within a single body and Du Bois termed it as “Double Consciousness” and in his book *The souls of Black folk* he writes:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois *The Souls, 3*)

On the one hand the Blacks had their own community, which for many years they had been limited to while on the other hand they were expected to be “Americans” without having access to any of the facilities in every field. According to Du Bois, the Blacks were in need of both education and work and he felt the Blacks should be educated first and then should help their community people to gain an identity of their own.
With this background about slaves rebellion and their effort to gain an identity through education one can go through the select autobiographies of African-American writers which will be discussed in detail like the Dalit autobiographies in this particular chapter. Similarly like the Dalits, the Blacks have also fought very hard to overcome their cruel life and carve an identity of their own in the midst of White cruelty. The autobiographies of Frederick Douglass, Booker.T.Washington, Richard Wright and W.E.B.Du Bois along with their struggle to gain education will be focused on a large scale in this chapter while their exploitation and suffering was dealt in Chapter three of the thesis.

Frederick Douglass in his autobiography *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* chronicles his life which is full of suffering and oppression and also talks about his struggle to get education which enabled him to become a great writer and social activist who fought for the betterment of the Blacks in America. Being a slave, he rose to a very great position and in his autobiography he gives a detailed picture of his life and struggle. In the introduction written by George L.Ruffin to the autobiography, Ruffin talks about Douglass’ life as a slave and also as a free man who became very successful in his public career. Soon after his escape from slavery, he left Maryland and came to the Northern States from where he started his public career. Ruffin says:

“He became a member and agent of the American Anti-Slavery society. Then commenced his great crusade against slavery on behalf of his oppressed brethren at the South. He waged violent and unceasing war against slavery. He went through every town and hamlet in the Free states, raising his voice against the iniquitous system. (Douglass 8)

Douglass, when he was just seven or eight years old, the first thought of escape from slavery entered his mind. This happened because of the successful escape attempted by his aunt Jennie and Uncle Noah who got away from slavery. This influenced Douglass very much which made him to think seriously about his escape from slavery.

At the age of 9, Douglass was sent to Mr.Hugh Auld’s house to take care of his son Little Thomas. It was here that Douglass became aware about education and in
other words it can be said that the informal way of learning of Douglass started when he entered Auld’s house. In this regard he writes: “The frequent hearing of my mistress reading the Bible aloud, for she often read aloud when her husband was absent, awakened my curiosity in respect to this mystery of reading, and roused in me the desire to learn” (Douglass 42). Until his entry to Auld’s house Douglass was not even aware about education or how it would be helpful to him. In a way he was completely ignorant about the value of education because during slavery the slaves were not even allowed to know about education due to the kind of fear the Whites had created in their mind. They thought that if the Blacks get education they will become aware about their rights and inhuman condition and there was all the chances of rebellion from them.

However, Douglass asked Mrs.Auld to teach him to read and write which she readily accepted to Douglass surprise. Usually slaves were not encouraged in the field of education but due to Mrs.Auld’s kindhearted and pious nature Douglass became educated and a public figure in the history of America. Meanwhile his way of gaining education was not an easy task but filled with many obstacles and complications. Though Mrs.Auld was teaching him and Douglass also mastered the alphabets and went to the next level of reading words consisting of three or four letters, this was put to an end by Mr.Hugh Auld who expressed anger on witnessing his wife’s work. He considered teaching slaves not only unsafe but also unlawful.

This attitude of Hugh did not discourage Douglass instead gave more inspiration to gain education and says: “…the very determination which he expressed to keep me in ignorance only rendered me the more resolute to seek intelligence” (Douglass 43). For seven years Douglass lived in Baltimore with the family of Mr.Auld and it was this span of time that Douglass considered as his best and valuable time. He writes: “The most interesting feature of my history here, was my learning to read and write under somewhat marked disadvantages” (Douglass 44).

During the initial stages of his learning he mastered alphabets and at this time he remembers Master Auld’s words and says: “Teaching me the alphabet had been the “inch” given, I was now waiting only for the opportunity to “take the ell”” (Douglass 45). When Mrs.Auld stopped teaching Douglass, instead of becoming disappointed he executed another plan of using his White playmates whom he met on the streets as his mentors. Though he was still a slave working for the Auld family he utilized his
Douglass’s interest to learn was so extreme that he decided to get education by hook or by crook without wasting any of his free time. Apart from working in Auld’s house for which he was not getting any money in return he started doing other work like blacking boots, out of which he gained little money which he used for purchasing “The Columbian Orator” by paying fifty cents which was a very popular school book at that time.

After staying for seven years in Baltimore with the Auld family, Douglass went to St.Michaels in March, 1833. When he was in Baltimore he never felt hungry because of plenty of food there but the life at St.Michaels once again opened the doors of hungry because very little food was given to the slaves. But this did not come as a hindrance in his way of accessing education. By the time he came to St.Michaels, Douglass was able to read and write and in a way he was educated compared to fellow slaves who were still ignorant about the value of education. He says: “…having learned to read and write already, I was more a teacher than a scholar…” (Douglass 61), but his master Mr.Thomas never allowed Douglass either to teach or to be taught at the Sabbath School in St.Micheals. However fortunately with the help of Wilson, a pious young man, Douglass got an opportunity to teach in Sabbath School which used to be held in the house of a free coloured man named James Mitchell weekly once on Sunday as it was a holiday for slaves which was declared by their White masters. But the Sabbath School sustained only for one week as it was destroyed by Mr.Wright Fairbanks, Mr.Garrison West and Master Thomas.

Douglass exposure to education made him to become aware of his rights as a human being and thereby he realized the horrible life of the Blacks as slaves and the cruel treatment of the slaveholders in the plantations. He became aware about what freedom means for slaves and says: “The highest evidence the slaveholder could give the slave of his acceptance with God, was the emancipation of his slaves” (Douglass 60). After this Douglass was placed under Mr.Covey who was famous for breaking young Negroes and here Douglass was the only slave who was able to read and write. Douglass witnesses cruel treatment during his first six months stay with Covey but unable to tolerate him anymore he fought back when Covey tried to hit him very hard. Douglass writes:
…this battle with Mr.Covey, undignified as it was,…was the turning point in my “life as a slave”. It rekindled in my breast the smoldering embers of liberty; it brought up my Baltimore dreams, and revived a sense of my own manhood. I was a changed being after that fight. I was nothing before; I was a man now. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect, and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a free man. A man without force is without the essential dignity of humanity. (Douglass 80)

Douglass was just 16 years old when he fought against Mr.Covey who was famous for breaking the slaves both mentally and physically. He was very cruel that he treated every slave under him worse than animals and also thought of breaking Douglass and make him a honest slave. But to his great shock Douglass hit him back and never again he raised his hand against Douglass because of the fear which Mr.Covey had about him.

Douglass started Sabbath school once again while staying at Mr.William Freeland who became his new master. Slaves’ assembling to learn was not tolerable to the Whites because they always wanted the Blacks to remain slaves till the end of their life. Douglass writes:

We might have met to drink whisky, to wrestle, fight, and to do other unseemly things, with no fear of interruption from the saints or the sinners of St.Michaels. But to meet for the purpose of improving the mind and heart, by learning to read the sacred scriptures, was a nuisance to be instantly stopped. (Douglass 86)

It was in 1836 during his stay at Mr.Freeland that the thought of escaping from slavery became very strong in his mind and Douglass also became very determined about his escape. He says: “I hated slavery always, and my desire for freedom needed only a favorable breeze to fan it to a blaze at any moment. The thought of being only a creature of the present and the past troubled me, and I longed to have a future- a future with hope in it” (Douglass 88).

Though Douglass decided to escape he knew that he could not do it alone because of its difficulty. Therefore he won the confidence of another five young men
namely Henry Harris, John Harris, Sandy Jenkins, Charles Roberts and Henry Bailey. Among the group members Douglass was the youngest but his desire to escape was a highly matured thought than others. Douglass and his friends had only one purpose and that was to escape from slavery and gain freedom. Douglass writes: “Liberty was our aim, and we had now come to think that we had a right to it against every obstacle even against the lives of our enslavers” (Douglass 91).

Douglass planned to take a large canoe which was owned by Mr. Hamilton and decided to leave on Saturday night into the Chesapeake Bay and travelling for seventy miles by paddling its head. After reaching seventy miles using the canoe, Douglass and his group decided to turn the canoe adrift and to walk towards north till they reach a free state. This was their plan and it was not easy for them to execute it as neatly as they had planned to, because as Douglass himself says: “At every gate through which we had to pass we saw a watchman; at every ferry a guard; on every bridge a sentinel, and in every wood a patrol or slave-hunter” (Douglass 92).

Unfortunately something went wrong and Douglass was arrested and it was only after a week that Douglass’s Master Thomas bailed him out of prison to send him to Baltimore with the promise of emancipating him after attaining 25 years of age. Master Thomas wanted Douglass to learn trade at Baltimore and along with this he also wished him to behave properly. The inner meaning of Thomas’s words was that Douglass should not attempt to escape from slavery again but to develop submissive attitude in order to gain liberty at a proper time.

Douglass followed his master’s words faithfully for two and a half years but he could not tolerate it any longer and once again decided to escape from slavery. This time he behaved as an honest slave by handing over all his earnings to Master Hugh and secretly planned to escape and the money given to Douglass by Hugh was spent to pay his fare on the Underground Railroad. Regarding his escape he writes: “On Monday, the third day of September, 1838, in accordance with my resolution, I bade farewell to the city of Baltimore, and to that slavery which had been my abhorrence from childhood” (Douglass 111).

Frederick Douglass in his third autobiography gives details about his escape from slavery because when he wrote the other two autobiographies he still had the fear of going back to slavery again because of the existence of slavery at that time.
But when he wrote the third autobiography, Douglass was well known and he had become a public figure due to the power of his knowledge and the way he wrote the autobiographies others doubted whether he was a slave earlier because he was highly educated and was fighting for the cause of slaves and their freedom.

Regarding the details about his escape Douglass says that there was a custom in Maryland that the free coloured people were required to carry free papers and those papers had to be renewed very often. These papers included: “the name, age, color, height, and form of the free man were described, together with any scars or other marks upon his person, which could assist in his identification” (Douglass 112). Douglass did not stand in a queue to buy the ticket in order to escape from close examination, instead got into the running train and also arranged for Isaac Rolls, a hackman to bring his baggage to the train.

When the conductor asked Douglass to show his free papers he said he had not carried it but when the conductor asked him to show something that could prove him a free man Douglass says: “Yes, sir, I have a paper with the American Eagle on it, and that will carry me round the world” (Douglass 113). This was enough for Douglass to escape from the conductor because the conductor did not observe the paper carefully due to the heavy crowd in the train. But still Douglass had the fear as he was still in Maryland where he could be subjected to arrest at any moment of time on suspicion.

Regarding his fear Douglass says: “Though I was not a murderer fleeing from justice I felt perhaps quite as miserable as such a criminal” (Douglass 114). After reaching Wilmington Douglass took a steamboat to go to Philadelphia and on reaching Philadelphia he asked a coloured man of how to reach New York. Following his instructions Douglass took a train to New York that night and reached New York on Tuesday morning by completing his dangerous journey within 24 hours. He describes his journey as: “Such is briefly the manner of my escape from slavery-and the end of my experience as a slave” (Douglass 114).

Finally Douglass succeeded in his venture and ultimately landed in a free state where he was no more a slave but a free man with no Masters to claim him as his slave. He says: “No man now had a right to call me his slave or assert mastery over me” (Douglass 115). Douglass says that his free life began on third September, 1838 and he had many plans to execute, for the freedom of his fellow slaves and also for
the abolition of slavery though he was not able to do it immediately after his escape because he had to prepare himself thoroughly for everything.

Initially he changed his name from Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey to Frederick Douglass and then started searching for a job for his livelihood. On the fifth day of his arrival in New York he found a job in a house of putting coal inside the kitchen. Though it was not a regular job Douglass was ready to do any job given to him for his survival. However for this work he got two silver half dollars as his payment and the happiness he felt at this time knew no bounds. He said: “I was not only a freeman but a free-working man, and no Master Hugh stood ready at the end of the week to seize my hard earnings” (Douglass 119).

Gradually Douglass started his anti-slavery activities and also took the subscription of “The Liberator”, the paper edited by William Lloyd Garrison which was published by Isaac Knapp. Regarding “The Liberator” Douglass says: “It preached human brotherhood; it exposed hypocrisy and wickedness in high places; it denounced oppression, and with all the solemnity of “Thus saith the Lord,” demanded the complete emancipation of my race” (Douglass 121). This made Douglass to take subscription which increased his hope for the ultimate freedom of his Black race. In the history of America, “The Liberator” emerged as a protest paper which demanded complete independence and abolition of slavery and also claimed equal rights for all the people irrespective of their race.

Frederick became a member of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society as per the wishes of its general agent Mr. John A. Collins and thereby started a new life with the main work of publicly advocating the principles of its society. In the initial stages Douglass was assigned the work of travelling with Mr. George Foster in order to secure subscribers to “The Liberator” and to the Anti-Slavery Society. Douglass became very active in the Anti-Slavery Society and started giving lectures with the intention of enlightening the Blacks regarding their inhuman position.

Meanwhile Douglass published his first autobiography Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, but after the publication he was afraid of returning to slavery again and therefore took refuge in Monarchial England in order to safeguard himself from the dangers of republican slavery. Later on Douglass published his own paper called “The North Star” and says: “The North Star was a large sheet, published
weekly, at a cost of $80 per week, and an average circulation of 3,000 subscribers” (Douglass 152). Douglass raised money for his paper’s publication by mortgaging his house and within a single year he was able to increase the circulation of his paper from 2,000 to 4,000 copies. Douglass even thought of establishing an Industrial College in order to train the Blacks in the branches of mechanic arts.

In the midst of all his social activities his personal life too needs some mention. He got married to a free woman and she took care of the family while Douglass was busy in his Anti-Slavery activities. In the meantime when everything was going on well, Douglass’s daughter Annie passed away which was really a heart breaking incident to him. But Douglass was very strong and he overcame his sadness because he had an aim in life and that was the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of slaves. His three sons were in good position and had gained a respectable status for themselves. Lewis and Charles, his two sons were in the service of the Massachusetts Regiments while his third son Frederick was recruited in the coloured troops in the Mississippi Valley.

When Abraham Lincoln was elected as the President of America, Douglass was invited by Lincoln to ask about his demands regarding Black rights. When asked by Lincoln about his demands Douglass says:

First, that colored soldiers ought to receive the same wages as those paid to white soldiers. Second, that colored soldiers ought to receive the same protection when taken prisoners, and be exchanged as readily, and on the same terms, as any other prisoners,... Third, when colored soldiers, seeking the “bauble-reputation at the cannon’s mouth,” performed great and uncommon service on the battle-field, they should be rewarded by distinction and promotion, precisely as white soldiers are awarded for like services. (Douglass 202)

The above words of Douglass clearly show that he wanted equality before law for the Blacks and their equal treatment in every field without any discrimination on the basis of their skin colour. It was Mr. Abraham Lincoln who issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1863 which declared all the slaves free with the legal abolition of slavery. Though slavery was abolished and slaves were free,
they were left with no option for doing any job because they were not educated and were not able to do any other job except plantation work. Douglass did not want just freedom but demanded equal human rights for the Blacks like that of the Whites in the society. Therefore he demanded voting rights to the emancipated slaves and regarding this Douglass says:

The ballot in the hands of the negro was necessary to open the door of the school house, and to unlock the treasures of knowledge to him. Granting all that was said of his ignorance, I used to say, “if a negro knows enough to fight for his country he knows enough to vote; if he knows enough to pay taxes for the support of the government, he knows enough to vote; If he knows as much when sober, as an Irishman knows when drunk, he knows enough to vote. (Douglass 222)

Douglass’s main intention was to gain voting rights to his people and to have political power in their hands to fight against the White domination. Douglass even says: “Peace between races is not to be secured by degrading one race and exalting another, by giving power to one race and withholding it from another, but my maintaining a state of equal justice between all classes. First pure, then peaceable” (Douglass 224). He wanted peaceful negotiation instead of violence and even urged the Whites to give their rights without giving any chances for them to revolt.

Douglass travelled to different places in order to give lectures and he was the first ex-slave to give a full time lecture against slavery. John Stauffer in his article “Douglass’s Self-Making and the Culture of Abolitionism” published in a book entitled The Cambridge Companion to Frederick Douglass edited by Maurice S.Lee writes about Douglass’s instant struggle to gain equal rights for his fellow Blacks. Douglass did not have any vengeance against the Whites but he hated American laws and legislatures, and their Churches which defended slavery.

Douglass reminds his two friends Julia Griffiths and Gerrit Smith who helped him to become financially strong and skilled in the business field. Julia Griffiths, an English woman assisted Douglass in purchasing his freedom and taught the art of editing which made him to write quickly without any errors and with full confidence.
Abraham Lincoln regarded Douglass as one of the greatest men of the age. After his escape from slavery, Douglass dedicated his entire life for the uplift of slaves and also fought strongly to carve an identity of his own. Finally Douglass emerged as a great writer, orator and social activist in the history of America. Similarly like Douglass, Booker T. Washington was one such great writer who rose to a high position by his hard work and dedication.

Though a slave by birth he achieved an identity in the history of America by overcoming all his obstacles and adversities. ‘Life of Washington’ is a story of empowerment to other Blacks to follow his footsteps in order to reach the highest position. Though he faced many hindrances, he succeeded in finding a respectable place for himself in the White world. In his autobiography *Up From Slavery* Washington gives a very detailed picture of his life as a slave and also as a great orator and writer. He experienced Slavery only for a short period because when he was a very small child, slaves were declared free with the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation. There was great rejoicing all over the plantation and slaves were in a happy mood by achieving freedom who were mentally and physically free.

After getting freedom the first thing that came to their mind was the change of their names and many took to change their surnames. Usually while working in the plantations the slaves were called just by their names and generally they did not have surnames because sometimes they were not sure what their surnames were. Many times the slaves were called by the name of their Master to whom they belonged to. Therefore after achieving freedom initially the slaves decided to change their names with a surname attached to it which Washington calls as “…one of the first signs of freedom” (Washington 23).

Washington also changed his name from Booker Taliaferro which was given by his mother to Booker Taliaferro Washington and he considered it as his privilege to name himself. He adopted Washington which was his step father’s first name because he wanted to be more like other students who had both their first and last names. In his autobiography he points out that many African-Americans at that time attached middle initials to their names. Though these initials did not represent any names it represented a sense of freedom and many Blacks referred to them as their privilege.
Washington’s education started informally after settling in a small cabin in West Virginia and his mother produced a copy of Webster’s blue-back spelling book. During that time Washington was not able to find any one of his race who could assist him in teaching and he was also very ambivalent to approach any White to assist him in learning. With the help of his mother Washington was able to master alphabets and he writes:

In all my efforts to learn to read my mother shared fully my ambition, and sympathized with me and aided me in every way that she could…. If I have done anything in life worth attention, I feel sure that I inherited the disposition from my mother. (Washington 28)

In the meantime the village members decided to start a school for their children as there was not a free school for coloured people and the members agreed to pay a certain amount of money to the teachers every month. Both day and night school along with Sunday, school was started which were always crowded and this shows the interest of the Blacks in education. Age old people were found in large number in night schools and in Sunday schools the spelling book was taught. In this way Washington’s schooling began and as he was working during the day time he attended school during night and learned more at night than any other children who studied during day time in school.

According to him to get higher education and recognition one has to work hard, and as far as the Blacks were concerned they had to perform their task and work harder than the White youth in order to get recognition and success. Washington says being born in a particular race is not enough but to have individual identity is what matters a lot. He writes:

I have been made to feel sad for such persons because I am conscious of the fact that mere connection with what is known as a superior race will not permanently carry an individual forward unless he has individual worth, and mere connection with what is regarded as an inferior race will not finally hold an individual back if he possesses intrinsic, individual merit. (Washington 40)
Once Washington happened to hear about the Hampton Institute, which appeared to be a great school for coloured people in Virginia. From then on his aim and ambition was to go to Hampton and with this thought in mind he continued to work in the household of General Lewis Ruffner and here Washington was encouraged to get educated by Mrs.Ruffner. After collecting enough money Washington reached Hampton Institute and presented himself before the teacher who gave him an entrance examination of sweeping the reciting room. Meanwhile the Head teacher Miss Mary F.Mackie offered Washington a position of a janitor which was gladly accepted by him and he continued his education along with his work. He writes:

…at Hampton, for the first time, I learned what education was expected to do for an individual…. At Hampton I not only learned that it was not a disgrace to labour but learned to love labour, not alone for its financial value, but for labour’s own sake and for the independence and self-reliance which the ability to do something which the world wants done brings. (Washington 73-74)

After graduating from Harvard University, Washington started his career and began to work as a teacher in Sunday schools. Remembering his brother John who sacrificed his own education in order to assist Washington in his studies, he decided to send him to Hampton Institute to educate him. After his brothers course at Hampton got over which ran for three years they both made efforts to send their adopted brother James to the same Hampton Institute. Consequently John became the Superintendent of Industries at Tuskegee while James held the position of Postmaster at the Tuskegee Institute.

The period of reconstruction from 1867 to 1878 occurred where many Blacks became aware of the value of education and Washington writes: “The idea, however, was too prevalent that, as soon as one secured a little education in some unexplainable way he would be free from most of the hardships of the world, and, at any rate, could live without manual labour” (Washington 80-81). After teaching for two years at Malden Washington decided to study at Washington D.C. where he remained there for eight months and observed that there was no industrial training to the students.
Meanwhile he was offered a position of taking charge of a normal school of coloured people in a little town called Tuskegee which was immediately accepted by Washington. He reached Tuskegee in June 1881 and after one month that is on July 4, 1881 he opened his school “in the little shanty and church which had been secured for its accommodation” (Washington 119). After six months a new teacher entered Tuskegee as a co-teacher and that was Miss Olivia A. Davidson who became Washington’s wife later. Regarding teaching at Tuskegee Washington says:

…we wanted to give them such a practical knowledge of some one industry, together with the spirit of industry, thrift, and economy, that they would be sure of knowing how to make a living after they had left us. We wanted to teach them to study actual things instead of mere books alone. (Washington 126)

As the school started growing they began collecting funds and contributors also started providing voluntarily. Washington got married to Miss Fannie N. Smith of Malden in 1882 but after two years his wife died and they had a child by name Portia M. Washington. He believed in hard work than luck and it was this hard work and dedication which made him the founder of Tuskegee Institute at Alabama. He says: “Nothing ever comes to one, that is worth having, except as a result of hard work” (Washington 188). Night school was also started in 1884 at Tuskegee to accommodate few who were not able to attend school during day time.

In 1885, Washington married Miss Olivia Davidson and led a very happy life by enjoying both their married life and their work at Tuskegee. But unfortunately after four years she died and by then they had two sons namely Booker Taliaferro and Ernest Davidson. Washington was also a public speaker and his speech at Malden was his first speech which he delivered in regard with the problem of races. He had a different theory about education and says:

…my theory of education for the Negro would not, for example, confine him for all time to farm life-to the production of the best and the most sweet potatoes—but that, if he succeeded in this line of industry, he could lay the foundations upon which his children and grandchildren could grow to higher and more important things in life. (Washington 203)
His speech in the National Educational Association at Madison made him famous in the North and gradually started getting opportunities to address audiences in different places. However he became a public figure by his speeches and thereby people started addressing him as a representative of Negro Enterprise and Negro Civilization. Washington did not demand equality rather he asked the Blacks to work on self-improvement in the hope that the Whites would see them as equals in all the fields.

Washington became the first free Black man to receive an honorary degree from Harvard University and he writes:

As I sat upon my veranda, with this letter in my hand, tears came into my eyes. My whole former life—my life as a slave on the plantation, my work in the coal-mine, the times when I was without food and clothing, when I made my bed under a sidewalk, my struggles for an education, the trying days I had had at Tuskegee, days when I did not know where to turn for a dollar to continue the work there, the ostracism and sometimes oppression of my race, all this passed before me and nearly overcame me. (Washington 296)

Being a slave he was successful in achieving an identity of his own and got a successful position in the world of the Whites which always looked at the Blacks as inferior and ineligible for any work. Achieving fame in a good manner was faced by various obstacles which were triumphantly succeeded by Washington and he writes: “I had never sought or cared for what the world calls fame. I have always looked upon fame as something to be used in accomplishing good…. I care for it only as a means to be used for doing good, just as wealth may be used” (Washington 296-97).

Both Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington belong to a period where the Institution of Slavery existed with all its exploitation and being born into the life of slavery both had come across numerous kinds of oppression and torture which were the internal parts of the Institution of Slavery. If Frederick Douglass’s life portrays his struggle to escape from slavery and his determination to have a respectable position in America the life of Washington also chronicles his life which was full of humiliation as a slave and his hard work which resulted in the
establishment of Tuskegee Institute. Washington was fortunate to some extent because he got freedom by the abolition of slavery at a very early age and in the meantime instead of enjoying his freedom mindlessly, he utilized his time to become literate and also to make his fellow beings literate who were both mentally and physically affected due to slavery.

If these two writers talk about slavery and its cruel nature in their respective autobiographies two other writers namely Richard Wright and W.E.B.Du Bois portray the life of Blacks after the abolition of slavery. Though slavery was abolished and the Blacks became free they were not free from the kind of exploitation which they faced in the form of racism. Because of their dark colour they were dehumanized and treated very badly by the Whites. The Whites were not able to see the Blacks as equal to them so they codified many laws which left the Blacks to remain under their control even after the abolition of slavery. But many Blacks broke free of this abuse and emerged as great personalities in the history of America. Richard Wright and Du Bois are such personalities whose autobiographies will be discussed in detail which chronicles their struggle against racism and how they became public figures in spite of atrocities.

Richard Wright in his autobiography *Black Boy* narrates his story which enables the reader to know about a Black’s life in the White world in the 21st Century. Richard Wright was not a brave boy when he was a child because he was disturbed and ill treated by Whites which made him scared of going outside the house. Therefore he resolved to stay at home to escape from the White’s torture, which was disliked by his mother. In order to encourage him and to make him overcome his fear and face the world Wright’s mother said: “I’m going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for your-self” (Wright 17). These words of his mother convey the strong determination which she had, to fight against White injustice and racism. Wright says: “My mother was telling me to fight, a thing that she had never done before” (Wright 17). Though Wright’s mother had a submissive nature she did not want her son to follow her, instead advised her son to adopt a revolting nature to come out of cruel racism.

Apart from this his mother was the first person who encouraged Wright to educate himself before attending regular schools. The neighbouring children who were going to school influenced Wright so much that he also made up his mind to
become educated as much as he could. He used to go through the pages of the neighbouring children’s books and when he started recognizing some of the words in the book he told his mother that: “I wanted to learn to read” (Wright 22) for which his mother encouraged him a lot. His schooling started at a much later age than usual and in spite of poverty his mother tried to encourage him in his studies. But he was not able to continue due to so many reasons. However when he was promoted to sixth grade he felt very happy and told his mother about his future plan that: “…I was going to study medicine, engage in research, make discoveries” (Wright 125). This shows his future plan regarding his education but he became a very great writer and a spokesperson of Blacks in the White world.

Richard Wright was not sure about his profession because when he was a small boy he thought of becoming a Doctor but when he came to the seventh grade his mind was filled with the thought of becoming a writer. When he expressed his desire in front of a White woman she discouraged him saying: “You’ll never be a writer…. Who on earth put such ideas into your nigger head?”(Wright 147). These words did hurt Wright’s ego so much that he never went back to the house of that White woman and also decided not to work in her house again. Wright says: “The woman had assaulted my ego; she had assumed that she knew my place in life, what I felt, what I ought to be, and I resented it with all my heart. Perhaps she was right; perhaps I would never be a writer; but I did not want her to say so” (Wright 147).

These words show the nature of discouragement which the White people had towards the Black because the Whites always expected them to live under their control by depending upon them. Though Wright could achieve his dream of becoming a writer he did not like the way it was said by the White woman because it was a kind of hurt to his ego.

Meanwhile he applied for the post of a Postal Clerk and he went to the extent of lying to his White boss that his mother expired, in order to attend the examination. He knew that his White boss would not encourage him to take any examination. Therefore he lied but his boss Mr.Hoffman found out that he was lying and the guilt which Wright had of lying to his boss made him to leave the job and after a week he got a job in the North side café as a dishwasher.
Apart from all these irregular jobs Wright was fortunate to get a job in the post office as a temporary clerk and he started earning seventy cents an hour. His life took a change and he began to realize his dream of becoming a writer the moment he joined the post office. He says: “…I went to bed each night now with a full stomach for the first time in my life. When I worked nights, I wrote during the day; when I worked days, I wrote during the night” (Wright 277). Wright was not able to make his temporary job permanent because of his failure in the physical examination. However not depressed by this he took up the examination for one more time and this time he succeeded in getting the job which made him happy in his own way.

He attended meetings of the local Black literary group but felt distanced by its middle-class members. Meanwhile he was also attracted by the Universal Negro Improvement Association which was a group inspired by Marcus Garvey though he did not join it for some reasons.

Wright was particularly impressed by writers like Dreiser and Joseph Conrad. His short story “Superstition” was published in the April issue of Abbott’s Monthly Magazine, a Black journal. After losing his job in the post office he started working as a funeral insurance agent for several burial societies and also started to work as an assistant to a Black Republican precinct captain during the mayoral campaign. However he was also interested in the communist orator views and especially those who were in the league of struggle for rights of the Negroes. He also wrote and submitted revolutionary poems like “I have seen black hands”, “A red love note” to Left Front, a magazine of the Midwestern John Reed Club.

Meanwhile he was also elected as an Executive Secretary of the Chicago John Reed Club and started organizing successful lecture series which gave him an opportunity to meet intellectuals. He also gave lectures on “The Literature of the Negro” at the open forum. Wright joined the Communist Party because he was greatly impressed by the party’s opposition to racial discrimination. Gradually he started involving himself in social activities along with his work as a writer. He published many poems and enjoyed literary and social friendship with many like Bill Jordan, Jane Newton, Howard Nutt and Nelson Algren.

In the meantime he broke with the Communist Party in Chicago basically over the question of his complete freedom as a writer. In the year 1937 Wright got an offer
of a permanent position in the Postal Department in Chicago with approximately $2,000 per year but turned down the offer in order to move to New York city with the intention of pursuing his career as a writer. On June 10, 1939 Wright finished his *Native Son* which was published by Harper and Brothers on March 1, 1940 and in three weeks 215,000 copies were sold.

Wright got married to Dhma Rose Meadman on August 1939 in Episcopal Church on Convent Avenue. His marriage suastained only for one year because he divorced his first wife in 1940 and the next year on March 12, 1941 he married Ellen Poplar in Loytesville, New Jersey.

Apart from his personal life he was very active in his social activities and his writing career and he was elected as the Vice-President of the League of American Writers. In January 1941, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People awarded Wright the Spingarn Medal which was given annually to a Black American for notable achievement in the preceding year. It was in 1943 that Wright began to write his autobiography *American Hunger*, the title of which was changed to *Black Boy*, later. His autobiography was published by Harper and Brothers in March 1945 and by January 1946, *Black Boy* had sold 195,000 copies in the Harper Trade Edition and 351,000 copies through the Book of the Month Club by making it the fourth best selling nonfiction of 1945. In 1959 his mother died and he left France and lived in England in the same year. On November 28, 1960 Wright died of heart attack and he was cremated at Pere Lachaise cemetery on December 3, with a copy of *Black Boy* with him.

Richard Wright, throughout his life fought for the cause of African-Americans and the major concern of almost all his writings was on racial themes. He won many awards for his meritorious works and mention must be made of the Spingarn Medal in 1941 and the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1939. In April 2009, Wright was featured on a U.S postage stamp. Though he appeared controversial many times his work helped change race relations in the United States, according to some critics in the mid 20th Century. Though he belonged to a race which was dehumanized and considered as inferior by the Whites, Richard Wright himself emerged as a great revolutionary and social activist who raised his strong voice through his writings and also became a mouth piece of his community.
One more writer whose autobiography has been selected for this research is the autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois who like Richard Wright expressed his displeasure for the practice of racism and revolted against it throughout his life. Like Richard Wright, Du Bois was also fortunate to escape from slavery because of the abolition of slavery but he too had experienced the horrible racism which he fought against successfully by emerging as a great writer, social activist and revolutionary. Du Bois was the first of his clan to finish high school. He entered the Public School when he was five or six years old and for ten long years he went to school regularly and Miss Cross was his first primary teacher.

Due to poverty he worked early mornings and then went to school and in this way he finished his high school. Du Bois was the only colored student to graduate from high school in 1884. He excelled in his studies and was of course a very brilliant student who challenged the White students in education. After his high school he selected Harvard but due to some reasons he was not able to go to Harvard. Instead he prepared to go to Fisk University, which was a college for Negroes in Nashville, Tennessee and he went to Tennessee, at the age of 17 as a student of Fisk University. At Fisk he edited the school paper, *Fisk Herald* and in a way he was active in the field of education.

Along with his studies he also earned 20 to 30 dollars per month by teaching during summer. He says: “At Fisk I began my writing and public speaking. I edited the *Fisk Herald*. I became an impassioned orator and developed a belligerent attitude toward the color bar” (Du Bois 125). In 1888 he graduated from Fisk. Later on he went to Harvard and studied there from the Fall of 1890, as an undergraduate. At Harvard he became a member of clubs like Phiiosophical Club, and Foxcraft Dining Club. He formed the Niagara Movement which later on became a founding part of NAACP.

When Du Bois saw another coloured boy at Harvard he was greatly impressed by his intelligence and says: “Here is what an historic race can do if they have a clear field, a high purpose, and a resolute will” (Du Bois 147). At Harvard he worked on the thesis entitled “The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America” and hoped to get a Doctor’s degree in two years.
During that time in order to encourage Black education, fellowships were given and Slater Fund was one of the fellowships which Du Bois applied for and he was given a fellowship of $750 to study a year abroad after finishing his Master of Arts at Harvard. Du Bois was also promised that the fellowship might get renewed for the second year also. For two years from 1892 to 1894 Du Bois was in Europe doing his Matriculation which commenced on October 15 and in 1894 he finished his Matriculation. After completing his education he started searching for a job and wrote letters to colleges saying: “I am a Negro, 27 years of age, educated in the public school of Massachusetts, at Fisk University, Nashville and Harvard University, where I took degree of A.B and A.M. I wish to teach next year. Have you a vacancy, etc.” (Du Bois 184-85).

He got many offers and initially he started his teaching career at Wilberforce in a small coloured denominational college. It was here that he married Nina Gomer in 1896. In the Fall of 1986, Du Bois went to the University of Pennsylvania as an Assistant Instructor in Sociology and he was offered $900 for one year. Later on Du Bois went to Atlanta University in Georgia and worked for 13 years there. Throughout his profession as a teacher Du Bois’s main interest was the Negro Problem and says:

The main significance of my work at Atlanta University, during the years 1897 to 1910, was the development at an American institution of learning, of a program of study on the problems affecting the American Negroes, covering a progressively widening and deepening effort designed to stretch over the span of a century. (Du Bois 213).

Du Bois took charge of the Atlanta Conference and the first conference was held in 1896 which particularly emphasized Negro Health problems. He also became a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1900. On January 31, 1906 the Niagara Movement was started in the district of Columbia with some principles like: “Freedom of Speech and criticism, manhood suffrage, abolition of all caste distinctions based simply on race and color, recognition of the principle of human brotherhood, belief in the dignity of labor etc” (Du Bois 249). Du Bois prepared some resolutions of the Niagara Movement and they were: “right to vote for everyone, discrimination in public accommodation should be ceased, right of freemen
to talk, walk and be with them who wish to be with us, laws to be enforced against rich as well as poor, against white as well as black especially and claimed education for their children” (Du Bois 250-51).

Du Bois became a leading official of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He joined NAACP in 1910 as Director of Publications and Research. The NAACP declared that no discrimination should be made based on race or colour and the Legal Department of NAACP decided to attack any kind of discrimination of Blacks. In 1934 Du Bois resigned from NAACP but returned after a gap of 10 years. George Padmore, Pan-African Congress’s Secretary published a book called Pan-Africanism or Communism in which he said:

In our struggle for national freedom, human dignity and social redemption Pan-Africanism offers an ideological alternative to Communism on one side and tribalism on the other. It rejects both white racialism and black chauvinism. It stands for racial co-existence on the basis of absolute equality and respect for human personality. (Du Bois 399)

In one of the speeches delivered by his wife Shirley at Accra, Du Bois’s last words were read by her as follows:

Awake, Awake, put on they strength…
Africa awake put on the beautiful robes of Pan-African socialism…
You have nothing to lose but your chains!
You have a continent to regain!
You have freedom and human dignity to attain! (Du Bois 404)

Du Bois was not able to attend this conference as he was old age but his speech and his caution to Blacks to awake was strong and inspiring. Throughout his life till his last breath he fought against racial discrimination and had the dream of seeing Blacks in better condition in all fields. He writes: “As a result of my work and that of others, the Supreme Court began to restore democracy in the South and finally outlawed discrimination in public services based on color” (Du Bois 421).

Even in the 21st century the situation is not favourable for the Blacks in America because of racism and classicism but Du Bois emerged as a successful writer and he became the first person of African descent to get a Ph.D from Harvard
University. The life of the Black in America is an internal fight between two options, one to restore their cultural roots and the other to make their life in a foreign place by considering it as their own. According to Du Bois a Black should live in America without losing their cultural roots and also to challenge the exploitation by fighting against the White’s injustice by having an identity of their own. In his book *The Souls of Black Folk* which is considered as the most influential book in American Literature which was published in 1903, Du Bois writes:

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,-this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self…. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (Du Bois *The Souls of Black Folk*)

By going through the autobiographies of the Dalit and the Black writer’s one thing becomes very clear that both have struggled and resisted so much to come out of their ignorance in their respective places. Education was not easily accessible for both but by their hard work and effort they became educated and challenged their exploiters in their own way. By looking at the situation that both have faced in India and America one can easily say that the life of the Dalits and the Blacks appear similar because of the kind of oppression they met in the form of caste system, untouchability, slavery and racism. This particular chapter focused mainly on their struggle to gain education and how they revolted against the oppressors after gaining knowledge about their humiliating life. The next chapter discusses in detail the life of the Dalits in India and the Blacks in America by making a comparison as the research is mainly a comparative study and brings out the similarities and also dissimilarities between the Dalits’ and the Blacks’ life in India and America respectively.
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