Chapter VI

A Comparative Study

People generally believe that human beings are the best creations of the God on the earth. However, human society throughout its history has been an exploitative system. It is always found that a section of people, in a given society faces inhuman discrimination by the upper crust. The reality is no exception to the most powerful democracy and the largest democracy in the world. For hundreds of years, the socio-economic conditions of the Afro-Americans and the Dalits in India have been marked by poverty, illiteracy, ill treatment and exclusion. Both Afro-American and Dalit sections have had similar experiences of historical marginalization. It is an accepted fact that social forces do make a distinct imprint on literature. Any literature is a mirror of the society and society is viewed always in the light of the condition of people in a cross section. The present chapter has sought to examine in a comparative perspective the struggle for justice and equality by the Afro-American and Gujarati Dalit writers depicted especially in their poetry. Their writings are more about assertion of human rights, self-pride, revolt against social injustice, chronicles of personal and collective suffering, and hopes and aspirations for a new society devoid of discrimination. It is a weapon for the struggle for selfhood.

Inequality is the main source of marginality, as it gives insecurity, injustice and exploitation. Marginalized sections of society are generally beyond the pale of dominant culture. Their existence is by and large peripheral. All cultures and societies, advanced or traditional, have power centers in their corpus. The marginalized sections are consciously or unconsciously distanced from the power centers. They are scattered here and there and lack cohesiveness and strength. Deprived of economic, political or religious power, they grope in the dark for survival. They live in physical or psychological ghettos. The social organization in which they are imprisoned by custom and tradition builds walls of segregation around them. However, they struggle for emancipation. Most of the marginalized groups all over the world have a similar system of oppression but the titles are different as per the class division. In India it was under the pretext of the caste and in the Western World it was under the name of the race. The chief objective of this chapter
is to comparatively discuss the politics of caste in Indian society and race in the United States of America. Both are considered to be the largest democracies in the world.

It has been observed that both Dalits and Afro-Americans are engaged in similar kinds of liberation movements. Given that the two societies are different in terms of place and time, it is understandable that there should be certain limitations and differences in their literatures. On the other hand, there are similarities too. Dalits in India have several times been compared to the condition of Afro-Americans. In Indian context, the caste system, with a history of thousands years, is a unjust social system of social segregation. It works on the principle of purity and impurity. Purity is rich and white or whitish, impurity is poor and dark. So is the case of Afro-Americans who were captured and then brought to America by White Americans for their selfish motives since August 1619. With this the slavery of Afro-Americans began. Racism originated as an ideological support for slavery. Slavery was not born of racism; rather racism was the consequence of slavery. In America the practice of slavery supported and perpetuated racism. Dalit society, on the other hand, has experienced slavery since ancient times. Unlike the Afro-Americans, whose motherland is Africa, from where they were captured to be sold in America, India is the motherland of the Dalits. They are not from somewhere outside. Just like racism which is a prominent factor in dividing people in Western history, the caste system, a deep-rooted factor which is a shame for Indian culture, affects the socio-economic and socio-cultural systems of Indian society. One of the prominent critics namely Gnaniah observes in this context:

“There are ample grounds to compare and contrast the brief history of the Blacks in USA and the age long ancient history of misery of Dalits in India. There are numerous similarities of both these black peoples especially in their sufferings and miseries, legal and illegal violence, segregations and ghettoes, whippings and punishments, destitution and hunger, brainwashing and punishments, livelihood, employment, education and culture, denial of entry into Churches and Temples, untouchability and apartheid, housing and civic
facilities, suppression and oppression, above all total exclusion from
the social order.”

(Gnaniah, 3)

❖ **Race and Caste Issues:**

Sometimes one may question: are caste and race similar or not? The two groups are both similar and dissimilar. On one hand, both Dalits and African Americans have their status determined by birth, endogamy, sexual taboos, and exploitation in their respective societies; on the other hand, as mentioned above, one group’s identity is sanctioned by the rationale of sanctioned purity in orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism, and the other’s by the pseudoscientific rationale of African origin occupying the lowest rung in their society. Moreover, although both the Dalits and the African Americans are distinctive groups that occupy a similar position in their respective societies – the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy, it is important to note that the hierarchies are different. A major difference between their socio-economic identities involves the basic difference between the two societies–USA’s First/Developed World identity with its urbanization, prosperity, industrialization and India’s so-called Third/Developing World identity, with its poverty, over-population, and a wide gap between rural and urban lives. Thus, the Dalits, occupying the lowest position in Indian society, is in an absolute position quite below the average Afro-Americans.

The similarities of the Dalits and African Americans are striking and interesting. Even today, despite the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, the abolition of the caste system in 1950 by the Indian Constitution, and affirmative actions in both the USA and India, these groups are characterized by less education, lower-status jobs, and lower income than the dominant groups – Whites and caste-Hindus. On the creation of a free India in 1947, universal suffrage was a right given to all its citizens, irrespective of class, caste, and gender. So the Dalits could vote, but their social identities and acceptance did not change with their political identities. Similarly, while ‘equality for all’ as an American ideology was articulated in the Declaration of Independence, slavery and subordination of African Americans was common practice. Thus, the Dalit and Afro-American literary artists point
out that there exists a gap between the dominant political ideology which is equalitarian and the reality of caste or race relations.

It is also important to note that neither of the subordinated groups is homogenous internally. There are issues of class, gender, and sexuality that punctuate and de-homogenize their respective identities. Moreover, it is also a fact that there is a difference in the internal differentiation in the two groups. While the Afro-Americans have internal differences along vertical dimensions such as education, occupational status, income, the Dalits have more horizontal differentiation – they speak different languages, belong to more identifiable subgroups staying more in rural areas than in urban outskirts. Returning to the vertical and horizontal differences within the groups, it is to be noted that vertical differentiation allows for the development of leaders and followers even after threatening surrounding among the Afro-Americans. In the case of the Dalits, however, because of the complexity of divisions and sub-divisions among the castes, jatis, regions, and languages, communications and holistic development becomes difficult. Thus, one of the greatest Dalit leaders, B. R. Ambedkar is recognized widely and acknowledged for his dedication to the plight of the Dalits and for his opposition to elitist political leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. But he has never been able to reach every part of the country owing to language barrier and specific caste sub-group identity. He spoke Marathi and English. Since English could not (and still cannot) reach every part of India, especially the vast rural areas, Marathi could have been the only channel. But the language is spoken and understood in only two states of the twenty eight states. Similarly, his caste-group Mahar is a specifically Maharashtra-based untouchable caste-group, not recognized in other parts of India. Also, although deprivation and dehumanization characterized all Dalit experiences across the country, caste-based professions varied from region to region and so did the nature of exploitation. Thus, the reach of Ambedkar’s work, although extraordinary and inspiring, was limited when compared to, say in the USA, the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. not every Afro-American was in Alabama, but what King said reached and touched every one of them, across the United States. Of course there have been social reformists and activists in different parts of India who have and are still actively working for better conditions and rights of Dalits, but one concentrated effort is difficult in a country like India where the Constitution itself recognizes eighteen major
languages and thousands of regional dialects. At this juncture, the point should be discussed: which is worse: casteism or racism?

It should be noted here that in spite of the exchanges in the early twentieth century between Afro-American and Indian leaders, there were several moments when racism and casteism were compared and one was judged to be worse than the other. Nevertheless, some scholars have investigated how several noted Indian thinkers, including Gandhiji, compared the structures of caste in India and race in the USA and found the latter worse off. Several Indian leaders, including Gandhiji, Lajpat Rai, Netaji S.C. Bose, Vivekananda, and Tagore attempted to illustrate how the race structure in the USA, including slavery, was a far worse condition than that of the caste system in general in India. Contrary to this, Ambedkar insisted that the Untouchable condition was worse than racism in the USA while overlooking the racial tensions in pre-1920s America that he witnessed first-hand as a graduate student at Columbia.

India is a country which boasts of centuries-old traditions and culture. It’s the reason why it is called ‘Incredible’ India. Though it is considered incredible in many ways today, it has had its share of dark moments. It has a very long history about the suffering and mal-practices in the name of religions and morality, in the name of socialism and ethics. One of the major drawbacks of the country, even today, is the caste system ‘varna vyavastha’. The caste system was established in the name of religion and enforced with the help of law books such as the Manusmriti and the support of kings who considered themselves as upholders of religion - ‘dharma’. The force of tradition, superstition, religious beliefs, fear of punishment, the Law of Karma - ‘karma siddhant’ also played an important role in its success. The caste system was based on birth. People inherited caste from their parents and passed it on to their children. They had no right to change their caste as long as they practised the Vedic religion. These groups may be given physical area where they are allowed to live in ghetto but they are not offered any space to breathe freely in. They are entitled as individuals but have no individual identity. Their search for self and space sets in motion from the moment when they realize their marginalized condition. Untouchability was thrust upon the Dalis right from the ancient times. For this reason, some Gujarati Dalit poets feel humiliated when they share their first hand experiences in
their poetry. Buddhahvan Visnagari feels pain when he does not find any mark of untouchability on his body. Untouchability is not a gift given by God but a stigma given by society where he lives. He cries out in his following poem *Equal Lines*:

> “From childhood have I burned!
> Humiliated by inhuman treatment.
> When I see the boards of ‘genuine’ astrologers,
> I think:
> There must be a line of untouchability
> In my palm besides the lines of wealth,
> Children and fortune.
> Why should I be a Dalit otherwise?
> Scholars of palmistry I ask you:
> Where is the line of equality
> In all this conspiracy of yours?
> Where have you hidden it?
> I have been waiting for ages
> For the line of equality to appear.
> When will it show in my palm?”

(Buddhidhan, 84)

Fourteen thousand kilometers away from India, the most powerful nation in the world, America has also witnessed the same phenomenon of suffering amongst a marginalized group. If the Dalits were victims of castism, the African American community suffered unimaginable oppression under the guise of racism. As the dominance on Dalits prevails in India, the repression on Afro-Americans is seen in America. In India, this dominance is based on the birth which is not in human hands. In the same way, in America, this repression is based on the color of the skin, which is also out of the human reach. One noted poet France Harper acknowledges in one of her poem titled *The Slave Auction* that black color is seems to be a crime for all Afro-Americans for which they have been hated for ages:

> “And woman, with her love and truth-
For these in sable forms may dwell-
Gazed on the husband of her youth,
With anguish none may paint or tell.

And men, whose sole crime was their hue,
The impress of their Maker’s hand,
And frail and shrieking children, too,
Were gathered in that mournful band.

…”

(Harper, 96)

Harper presents a picture of a slave auction in these lines. No Whites could ever understand the feelings and sensibilities of the Black slaves. The Black slaves were treated as non-living entities. Their only fault was their skin-color. In the name of racism, these Afro-Americans were victimized. Robert Blauner believes that racism is a principle of social domination by which a group seen as inferior or different in alleged biological characteristics is exploited, controlled and oppressed socially and physically by a superordinate group. Literary expressions by both the authors have the saga of suffering, the quest for the self, the urge to be given them space as human beings. With the background of a marginalized caste, they have depicted their existential identity in their poetry. Through American history, from the abolition movement and the Civil War, the Reconstruction era, the Harlem Renaissance until the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, the African Americans have always constituted a distinct cultural and social ethos within the nation but beyond the pale of the USA’s national imagination. One hundred and eighty-nine years after the nation-state was drafted into political existence, the African Americans, the ‘others’ of the nation, were inducted as rightful citizens in 1965. Exclusion from the mainstream has a parallel story regarding untouchability in the received narrative of Indian democracy.

In fact, it is not productive trying to judge which system of socio-political and economic structure is more repressive and which leaders took what stand on the comparison. That these structures have existed and continue to do so, though in ways different from the
past, seems to be most crucial aspects of both societies. The toll they take and have taken on the identity and dignity of the oppressed people is more important than the comparative advantages or disadvantages of each. It is important to remember that the two societies are very different and that the two systems work differently. They were not accurate in the comparisons nor were they right in elevating the caste system above that of racism; but it is important that today one looks beyond these differences and misjudgments and instead focus on the similar ways in which any form of oppression operates within a given socio-political context and undermines human dignity.

It is also crucial to understand that caste and race are distinct, not mirror images of each other. Nevertheless, the economic situation of the lower castes in India often resembles to that of Afro-Americans in the United States. Just as major events based on racial differences have punctuated the USA’s social, political, and economic history since the contact of the land with Europeans, the caste system has served as the foundation of India’s socio-economic history for several millennia. Also, it is important to note that the caste system gained acceptance as a codified social system under British rule. However, unlike race and racial difference that received pseudo-scientific sanction in the USA, the caste system in India has got religious sanction from the ideology of Brahminic Hinduism. Thus, in two already different societies, the two structures have different types of meaning and tradition.

As a matter of fact, Afro-Americans are not the original inhabitants of America and they did not go to America by choice. As is well known, they were forcefully taken there and were forced to enter into servitude, becoming merely a tool of production for the White man. They were uprooted from their language, culture and history. What remained with them was an African body and African mind. Over a period of time, though, through interaction with the White race, a certain amount of ‘White blood’ entered their bodies and they also went through a process of cultural change.

On the other hand, though Indian Dalits have lived within the subcontinent for time immemorial and have acquired the language, religion, culture and history that they currently possess through a natural process, they have still been forced to experience discrimination and prejudice for generations. And this has happened despite their
absolutely identical racial profile with the rest of the communities within the society subcontinent. Ambedkar elaborated upon this theme in his *Annihilation of Caste*, stating that:

“Caste System does not demarcate racial division. Caste is a social division of people of the same race. Assuming it however to be a case of racial divisions one may ask: what harm could there be if a mixture of races and of blood was permitted to take place in India by inter-marriage between different Castes? Men are no doubt divided from animals by so deep a distinction that science recognizes men and animals as two distinct species. But even scientists who believe in purity of races do not assert that the different races constitute different species of men.”

(Ambedkar, 18)

A few Afro-American leaders like Marcus Garvey, by establishing the 'Universal Negro Improvement Association' advocated for 'pan-Africanism' and inspired the African people for a global mass movement to take them back to Africa. None of these schemes materialized fully. Thus, they all remained integrated with the White society, yet separated and forced to do menial jobs and they were made to settle in the ghettos outside the White localities. As Dalits belonged to this country, the question of leaving the country never arose. However, like the Afro-Americans, they were forced to survive on the outskirts of the villages.

Both the Afro-Americans and the Indian Dalits have historically been members of a closed society in their respective countries, and they have both been relegated to the fringes of the mainstream. This is quite true as both the Dalits and Afro-Americans have had their habitats outside the boundary of the town, living in segregated ghettos or *bastis*. Both have been subjected to peculiar forms of class oppression. One major difference, however, is that though caste is not in the least determined through biology, race to a certain extent is, for it is the color of the skin that is the defining feature in this case. In this sense, it can be said that while races are, to an extent, pre-ordained, caste is entirely man-made. However, the major similarity between the two is that just as African
Americans cannot change the color of their skin voluntarily, so can the Untouchables never denounce their caste. The Afro-American becomes 'blacker' because his entire identity revolves around the color of his skin, while the low-born Dalit becomes even 'lower' as his entire identity is defined by his caste.

The one contrast between Dalit and Black situations could be the start of violence that was a chief feature of the slavery in the United-States, though this was of course also pervasive in the Dalit context. During slavery, for example, Afro-American men and women did not even possess the right to lead a family life, since African American women were owned by the White masters. This cruel scene is very well depicted by Frances harper in her poem *The Slave Mother*. Here are some stanzas:

“Heard you that shriek? It rose
So wildly in the air,
It seemed as if a burdened heart
Was breaking in despair.
Saw you those hands so sadly clasped-
The bowed and feeble head-
The shuddering of that fragile form-
That look of grief and dread?
She is a mother, pale with fear,
Her boy clings to her side,
And in her kirtle vainly tries
His trembling form to hide.
He is not hers, although she bore
For him a mother’s pains;
He is not hers, for cruel hands
May rudely tear apart
The only wreath of household love
That binds her breaking heart.”

(Harper, 97)
Even after the abolition of slavery, extremist White organizations like the Ku Klux Klan killed thousands of Afro-Americans in public places, after humiliating them in several perverse ways. Afro-Americans, suffering under massive poverty and deprivation, were forced to abandon their homes and hearth and move to the North where millions of them had to live despicable lives in the ghettos.

Despite the fact that Afro-Americans in the United States saw violence in a stark and naked way, the one similarity between the situation of Dalits and Afro-Americans, of course, lies in their equally deteriorated economic conditions. Dalits, after all, represent more than two-thirds of the total population of landless agrarian laborers in India even today, while Dalit women are most vulnerable to rapes and atrocities by the landowning upper castes to this day. The social condition of Dalits in India resembled to that of the Afro-Americans in America. It has to be admitted that Dalits are not subjected to physical torture like the Afro-Americans and they were not bought and sold in the open market like the Afro-Americans. Their families were not uprooted like their American counterparts were. However, Dalits too were subjected to a good deal of mental torture and physical torture.

**Protest Movements:**

When a comparison of the democratic Datit movement in India is attempted with the history of strong civil rights movements by the Afro-Americans in the US, one cannot ignore the more widespread nature of the Black movement. Perhaps their focus on the issues of human rights and civil liberties also succeeded in attracting a wide range of activists from all over the US. On the contrary, Dalit movements have remained confined to literature, with very little being for those actually sitting on the margins and in the villages. Perhaps this was partly because the Black movement in the US, and especially the Black Panthers, emphasized the question of class very strongly, while the Dalit movement in India failed to do so. This is the reason the latter failed to mobilize support from other backward castes who might have been outside the category of 'Dalit'. It was also the reason why they failed to garner support from progressive upper-caste organizations.
In fact, Ambedkar’s movement was so wide-ranging and so similar in many ways to Martin Luther King's inclusive politics of civil rights. One may wonder why the latter borrowed from Gandhi and not from Ambedkar, as their struggles, their means and their ends were similar to a large extent. Though Ambedkar might have noted on occasion that the fight against oppression, whether violent or non-violent, was equally justified, he never in practice overtly or covertly supported the strategy of violent rebellion. Even in Mahad when the violence spread over, it was Ambedkar who controlled the people of depressed classes and stopped them from retaliating against the violence initiated by upper castes. On the economic question too, Ambedkar supported the liberal-welfare function of the state- a position which was quite close to that of Martin Luther King. Ambedkar's inclusive slogan of 'Hate Brahmanism and not Brahmins' in fact, saw several democratic and progressive people from the upper caste aligning with him and helping him in the cause of his struggle for the depressed classes.

It might, at first sight, seem slightly strange to compare Martin Luther King with the Mahad of Ambedkar not only because of their belonging to different geographical setting, but also because, Ambedkar and King were quite different from each other in their ideologies and strategies. To give just one example, whereas King was so influenced by Gandhi that he compared him with no other than Jesus himself, Ambedkar was always at loggerheads with the Mahatma Gandhiji. Both Ambedkar and King highlighted the historical wrongs and inhumane conditions to which the Dalits and Afro-Americans have been subjected. Both highlighted the urgency of discipline in order to ensure a better culture. Towards the closing of the Mahad Satyagraha, Ambedkar had addressed a crowd of 3000 women saying:

“Never regard yourself as untouchables. Live a clean life. Dress yourself like the touchable ladies. Never mind if your dress is full of patches, but see that it is clean. None can restrict your freedom in the in the choice of your garments and in the use of metal of your ornaments, Attend more to the cultivation of the mind and the spirit of self help. But do not feed in any case your spouse and sons if they are drunkards. Send your children to schools. Education is necessary
for females as it is for males. If you know how to read and write there would be much progress. As you are, so your children will be. Mould their life in a virtuous way, for sons should be such as would make a mark in this world?”

(Ambedkar, 104-05)

Somewhere and somehow, Gujarati Dalit writers like Neerav Patel were greatly influenced by Ambedkar’s this preching. They have kept one thing in their mind that education can bring reformation. Such kind of urge can be seen in one of his poems mentioned below:

“You all forgot
That only yesterday you were all having a spittoon
tied at your neck
and broom lied at your back?
Forgot you were all eating carrion-
and now you have become lions?
Forgot you were holding the horns
and you were holding the legs
and we were dragging the carcass
and enjoying the feast?

Those were our bad days.
Someone took a spade
and someone took an axe
and someone took a spinning rod
and someone took a broom.

You forgot how we were harassed those days?
and even today we are insulted equally bad.
We are still for them
Children of devdasis- children of the temple prostitutes.
…
How shall tell you
You are all born to my womb –
all real brothers
Forgot so quickly
Your Baba’s Advice?
Educate, organize and agitate?
They will send you in jungle once again.
Read your Baba’s will again.”

(Patel, 16)

The line ‘Educate, organize and agitate’ refer to the message given by Ambedkar for the emancipation of the downtrodden mass.

King's following reflection regarding the deprived socio-economic conditions in the Black ghettos underlines a similar concern as that of Ambedkar for the Dalits:

“Our crime rate is far too high. Our level of cleanliness is frequently far too low. Too often those of us who are in the middle class live above our means, spend money on non essentials and favourites, and fail to give serious causes, organizations and educational institutions that so desperately needs funds. We are too often loud and boisterous and spend far too much on drink. Even the most poverty stricken among us can purchase ten-cent bar soap; even the most uneducated among us can have high morals. Since crime often grows out of sense of a futility and despair, Negro parents must be urged to give their children the love, attention and sense of belonging that a segregated society deprives them of.”

(King, 213)

One another contrasting views Amebedkar and King were about the means they used for their fight. While Ambedkar always remained skeptical about the effectiveness of Satyagraha, King considered it to be great weapon to be utilized for the reformation. Ambedkar firmly believed that there is a vast difference between the Satyagraha launched
by caste Hindus and one launched by untouchables. When caste Hindus initiate a Satyagraha it is against the government and they have community support. When the untouchables launch a Satyagraha all the caste Hindus are arraigned against them. It does not mean that Ambedkar wanted violence. He had full faith in the utility of that method but the skepticism he had for efficiency in adopting that tool as it is reflected in one of his speeches delivered by him mentioned below:

“It is not that you can solve all your problems by Satyagraha. This is only a request to the upper-class Hindu mind. This Satyagraha movement is going to prove whether the Hindu mind treats human beings like human beings. This Satyagraha is to change the hearts of Hindus. This movement will decide whether Hindu mind regards humanity in the new age.”

(Ambedkar, 32-33)

On the other hand, King, being follower Gandhian principles was favoring non-violent Satyagrah. He had asked his lot not to use violence in the journey of their struggle. He warned them:

“Let our action not be compared with the action of organizations like Ku Klux Klan and White Citizen's Council because while they are protesting for the preparation of injustice, in the community we are protesting for the justice in the community. Their methods lead to violence and lawlessness. There will be no threats and intimidation. We will be guided by the highest principles of law and order.”

(King, 59-60)

It must be noted at this point that there is an agreement among historians that there was no slavery in India, but Jyotiba Phule was the first to assert a unity with other oppressed people throughout the world, and it is not an accident that in dedicating Gulamgiri to the abolition of slavery in the United States, he was one of the first few men of his time to identify with Afro-Americans. Similarly, Ambedkar, in one of his essays, declared that
the practice of untouchability was more terrible than slavery in America. He articulated how slaves in America enjoyed certain privileges which were unthinkable in the case of untouchables in India. Ambedkar attempted to prove that discrimination was based on physical traits in America whereas the social exclusion of lowest castes represented mental slavery in India. He asserted that:

“...The slave was not a legal person in the eye of the law... he remained a person in the sense of a human being in the eye of a society. Slave was untouchable and enjoyed dignity from the society also. Although the law does not recognize the personality of a slave; the personality which the law bestowed upon the untouchable is with held by the society. Untouchability is worse than Slavery because it does not guarantee a lifelong social security the way it is entailed in the later. Nobody is answerable for an untouchable's food, clothing and shelter. From this perspective untouchability for sure was not just worse than slavery but crueler also. Third, important difference between untouchability and slavery is that slavery was never binding but untouchability was ...”

(Ambedkar)

Despite these differences, the strategies used by the Black struggle and the Dalit struggle in India had many similarities. Martin Luther King, for example, took his inspiration from Gandhi in fighting against the injustice of racial discrimination. He experimented with the method of passive resistance and became the hero of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States which had emerged with the Montgomery Bus Boycott. King, in his memoir, *My Trip to Land of Gandhi* (during his visit from 2 February to 10 March 1959) reveals his experiences in India in the following words:

“And there is even here the problem of segregation. We call it race in America; they call it caste in India. In both places it means that some are considered inferior, treated as though they deserve less. We were surprised and delighted to see that India has made greater progress in the fight against the caste 'untouchability' than we have
made here in our own country against race 'segregation'. Both nations have federal laws against discrimination (acknowledging, of course, that the decision of our Supreme Court is the law of our land). But after this has been said, we must recognize that there are great differences between what India has done and what we have done on a problem that is very similar. The leaders of India have placed their moral power behind their law. From the Prime Minister down to the village councilmen everybody declares publicly that untouchability is wrong. But in the United States some of our officials decline to render a moral judgment on segregations and some from the south publicly boast of their determination to maintain segregation. This would be unthinkable in India.”

(King)

Martin Luther made a profound impact on the literary writers especially those writers who were connected with Civil Rights Movement. He also supported a lot of social and literary campaigns which promoted several other young writers. NAACP was not exception. James Weldon Johnson was actively involved in it. He wrote *Lift Every Voice and Sing* which is one of the most cherished songs of the African American Civil Rights Movement. It was performed for the first time by 500 school children in the celebration of President Lincoln's Birthday on 12\(^{th}\) February, 1900. The anthem is like this:

“Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun  
Let us march on till victory is won.
Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.”

(Johnson, 32)

❖ Socio-Cultural Protests:

Although two movements might not have any comparison along the spatial and temporal registers, and their aesthetics might also seem diverse and quite mismatched, yet, on deeper reflection, one might notice the similarities regarding the voice they try to raise against racial or the caste-based oppression. Through poetry, they share how they have suffered from deprivation and inequalities in their societies. In fact, both Afro-Americans and the Dalits have got engaged in protest movement to ameliorate their socio-economic conditions as well as their cultural, religious and other deprivations. Their protest ideology involves resistance, opposition, confrontation and conflict with dominant groups to achieve their desired goals of social equality, social dignity and de-stigmatized social identity. A new ideological phase started in the history of social protest movements with the formation of the Balck Panther Party in the US and the Dalit Panther Movement in India. While the chief reason of the formation of the Black Panthers was the increasing brutality by the White police, the increasing atrocities executed by the caste-Hindus on the Dalits were responsible for the formation of Dalit Panthers. One of the most important ways of carving their identities for themselves, in the late 1960s, was the embrace of armed resistance and violent and powerful art. When the Black Panthers and
the Black Power Movement rocked the United States and the Black Arts movement published brilliant anti-establishment art, the Dalit Panthers in India in the early 1970s gave vent to a militant ideology by both organizing strikes and demonstrations which often turned violent and by composing art in a voice of protest against the orthodox Hindus. Franz Fanon influenced Malcolm X, Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver and inspired poets like Amiri Baraka to compose his poetry and plays. Because of this reason Baraka could compose such poem namely *Black Art*:

“We want, poems that kill.
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
and take their weapons leaving them dead …”

(Baraka n. pag.)

This Black discourse in turn inspired the Dalit Panthers not only in Maharashtra, the origin place of this movement, but also leading Gujarati Dalit figures. But the Dalit movement was not as militant as their Black counterpart because, among other reasons, access to guns or arms has always been very restricted in India. But in both movements the literature and the politics were not separate. Sayyada Begum remarks in this reference:

“During the closing years of the 60s, the Dalit poets read the explosive and provocative experiences of the Black poets of America and Africa. The writings of James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Dalph Elisin, etc. inspired the Dalit poet to an extent that he shrugged off his past, his inferiority complex and came to terms with himself by manifesting his dormant consciousness. His acquaintance with Black literature assured him that his experiences as a human being could certainly stand the test of universality and could have eternal value. This gave him strength and the courage of conviction. The Dalit poets of today are highly influenced by their Black counterparts in America. Like Blacks they are angry. For them their anger is both a mode of perception and the medium of
Radically and deliberately different, the Afro-American of the Black Power Movement in the 1960s’ United States and the Dalit Panther of the 1970s in India embrace violence to demonstrate their anger and frustration against race and caste supremacists. Having been crushed under colonial heels for generations, there comes a time when degradation and suppression find an outlet through violence. Similarly, in the late 1960s and 1970s, both the African American man and the Dalit man emerge on their respective socio-political scenes and attempt to reconstruct their identities by first claiming their humanitarian rights. It is important to note that Dhasal co-founded the Dalit Panther in 1972 as a militant activist of Dalit organization and it was his political agenda to brutalize upper caste sensibility by violently opposing it. Dilip Chitre notes that the “purpose of the Dalit Panther was to bring young Dalit men and women together and organize continuous action and protest against the oppression of Dalits in Maharashtra and elsewhere in India” (Chitre, 13). A group of young and radical Dalit poets, taking inspirations from the Black Panthers, formed the Dalit Panthers. The renowned writer V. S. Naipaul, in his *India: A Million Mutinies Now* wrote of them in the following words:

“I had heard, vaguely some years before, of the Dalit Panthers. I had got to know little of them beyond the name, which had been borrowed from the Black Panthers of the United States. It was a romantic borrowing; it encouraged them too simple-belief that the Dalits (or scheduled castes or Harijans or Untouchables, to take the wounding nomenclature back through its earlier stages) were in India what Black people were in the United State.”

(Naipaul, 43)

Even one of the researchers, Neha Arora mentions in this reference:
“For their voices to be heard, the dalit youths took up the task of bringing all the Dalits on a single platform and mobilize them for the struggle for their civil rights and justice. This gave rise to the Dalit Panther Movement in April, 1972 in Maharashtra. This phenomenon represented both, a generational change and change and the growing political awareness among the underprivileged sections of the society. The Dalit Panther Movement drew inspiration from the Black Panther Movement. In American society, the dark-skinned Negro population was radically harassed and discriminated by the Whites for more than three hundred years…The Dalit Panther Movement adopted the same strategy as that of the Black Panther Movement. The African-Americans have ridiculed the word ‘Negro’ And called themselves ‘Blacks’. Similarly, Dalits preferred in giving up the term ‘Harijan’ and renamed themselves ‘Dalit’.”

(Arora, 152)

While talking about the founders of the Black Panther Party, they were also masters of rhetoric and creative art. Most of the writings of Black Panthers were militant in their ideology and their language was rich in rhetoric. Elridge Cleaver wrote an article titled Revolution and Education from Algeria in order to remind the Black Panther of its commitments, which was published in the party's newspaper. It noted that:

“We are not reformists; we are not in the movement to reform the curriculum of a given university ... we are revolutionaries, and as revolutionaries, our goal is the transformation of the American social order. In order to transform the American social order, we have to destroy the present structure of power in the United States, we have to overthrow the government. .. we say we will do this by any means necessary ... and the only means possible is the violent overthrow of the machinery of the oppressive ruling class.”

(Cleaver n. pag.)
Similarly, there were similarities between the writings of Black Panther activists like Huey P. Newton, who was not only Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party, but also the chief theoretician of the party, and Dalit Panthers like Raja Dhale, Namdeo Dhasal, Pawar, Arjun Dangle and many more. Huey Newton borrowed from several militant and revolutionary figures like Lenin and Mao. Newton was highly influenced by the self-defense philosophy of Malcolm X.

Raja Dhale, on the other hand, was the founding President of the Dalit Panthers and saw the liberation of Dalits through the adoption of the path of Ambedkarism. He argued that India was not prepared for class struggle since 'class formation' could not be easily achieved. For him cultural revolution had to precede the political-revolution and in this, his thoughts were very similar to Newton's. Dhale wrote an article titled 'Kala Swatantra Din' (Black Independence Day) in Marathi which got published in the 25th Independence Day issue of Saadhana in 1972. In this article, he questioned the notion of nationalism and juxtaposed it against the question of dignity of women and wrote in the following words:

“It is not the Brahman woman who is stripped naked in a Brahman village. That is done to the Dalit woman. And what's the punishment for this crime: a month's imprisonment or a fine of Rs.50. There is a fine of Rs.300 for dishonoring the national anthem or national flag. What else is a flag if not mere cloth? A symbol created in specific colors? Disrespect to that symbol draws heavier fine than dishonoring a beautiful, alive and real lady. Should not this national flag and its honor be shoved in someone's ass? Nation is made of people. Is the sorrow of the nation's people bigger than the sorrow of the disrespect shown to the nation's flag? The cost of our honor is lesser than that of a piece of cloth. Should not the punishment for this crime be greater than that for disrespecting the national flag? How else would the people feel love for the nation?”

(Dhale)
With the writings of Dalit Panthers, there flourished a revolutionary fervor among other Dalit writers of Gujarat who then began its onward march through depicting Dalit pain and suffering in their creative arts. They proved to be the spark which set off a wave of organizing efforts. One of the prominent forms of literature these writers adopted was poetry. It highlighted the hidden fires of anguish and rebellion among Dalit minds. Their poetry were not only colored by the ideologies of Dalit Panther Movement and the teachings of Ambedkarite philosophy but also was highly influenced by Black Panther Party and their literature. Gujarati Dalit poetry protests against the Brahminical hegemony and Afro-American poetry challenges the racial hegemony. The common dominator is challenge to hegemony. After getting influenced by Dalit Panthers Gujarati Dalit Poets like Pravin Gadhvi boldly asked his brethren to be courageous in his poem *Hold Your Head High Up*:

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“Hold your head up high
But say that
You are hollow.
Kicking untouchable Shudras
Burning woman like Sita,
Cursing woman like Ahalya
To be stone-like,
Stripping woman like Panchali
Cutting the thumb of a
Disciple like Eklavya
Cutting the head of Shambuk
Insulting son of lower caste, Karna
Entrapping of Abhimanyu
Gambling in the court
Speaking lie in the name of Ashwathama
Burning down of Khandavvan with
Innocent Nagas in
In drunkenness
assassinating a great soul like
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Mahatma Gandhi
Preventing Ambedkar to drink
The waters of Chaudar lake
This is our great tradition
Now hold your head up high
And say that you are hollow.”

(Gadhvi, 53)

Both revolted against the existing system and both took the help of literature which they thought to be a significant vehicle for their revolution. Both search for their respective cultural identities; both drew material from social and cultural differences; both are bound by creative necessities; both celebrate the triumph of an outcaste. The pain was same; the same was the medium of revolt-pen. With the literature of their own, these subalterns finally got the opportunity to speak and being listened to. The poets of both the groups revise and reconstruct the images of Afro-American and Dalit lot in their poetry. The speakers of their poetry attempt to live or even die as individuals in their own right rather than as shadows jostling for space in their hostile society. It is their ability to work out diverse strategies of survival and challenge that mark them as strong entities in a hostile racist and caste-oriented world. All the selected poems the researcher has discussed speak of solidarity, power, independence and struggle at the individual as well as collective level.

❖ **Search for Self-Esteem:**

It has been observed that both the Afro-Americans and the Dalits have been the victims of inhuman racist and casteist ideological practices of Whites and high caste Hindus respectively. Such centuries old practices alienated both the Afro-Americans and the Dalits from their ancestral lands. Their alienation was geographical, cultural and psychological. It was due to this socio-cultural dislocation they were excluded from their respective mainstream cultural practices. This exclusion gave rise to their consciousness of beings others.
The Afro-Americans were deprived of their cultural heritage and enslaved into a marginalized life in the White racist society. However, the Black cultural diaspora in America began to overcome spatial and temporal distance. The Afro-Americans became aware of the profound socio-cultural dislocations epitomized in the history of indenture of trans-Atlantic slavery and the expulsion of African tribes from their ancestral lands. As a result, they started demanding their legitimized status and equality with the White Americans. Earlier the Afro-Americans despised themselves for the skin of their color. They were the victims of double consciousness as they used to look upon themselves through the eyes of White people. But due to their knowledge and experience of the world they began to celebrate their identity as Afro-Americans. This awareness of their identity as Afro-Americans has been the most powerful and creative source of literary inspiration for all the Afro-American writers in the U.S.A.

The Dalits in India faced similar predicament due to the cultural practices of high caste Hindus and the casteist ideology crafted to preserve and perpetuate the practice of untouchability. This brought about a predominantly Hindu culture. This estrangement from the socio-cultural spurs of life created frustration in their minds. They too were faced with the problem with their identity and were haunted by a nagging question- what is India to me? with a view to liberate the untouchable Dalit from the restrictive and inhuman practice of untouchability. This shows that it was highly dangerous and painful for a Dalit to lead life by borrowing a Hindu identity. Once they realized their status, both the Dalits and Afro-Americans started reacting vehemently claiming that their nations’ progress owes a lot to them. Out of their collaborative efforts they created the most powerful nations of the world. In the recent decades there has been a growing awareness and acceptance of the constructive role played by them in all spheres of life. Earlier both the Dalits and the Blacks had a very low self-esteem but in their quest for identity, they realized their self-worth. Now they consider that they must get their rightful share in life. They feel that they are not pariahs but prophets of change. This has a salutary effect on their psyche as they have recognized their self-worth.

It is obvious that the poetry created by the Dalits and the Afro-Americans endeavored to assert the authenticity of their experience and ask for their legitimate place in the socio-
cultural spheres of life. They clamored their self-esteem and self-dignity through their literary and artistic expressions. As they began to think of their exploitation, humiliation and marginalization through socio-cultural structures constructed by the dominant casteist and racist classes in their respective countries, they became aware of their own dignity and self-esteem. It prompted them to establish their humanhood and search for their self-worth. The Dalits in India became aware of their subhuman status. When they discovered that they had been deprived of their constitutional rights and privileges by High-caste Hindus, they initiated a long struggle against the hypocritical and casteist forces to find out their self-worth. They have started valuing themselves. Below is a poem Self-Pride by Shamat Parmar where he considers that at least he is better human being than the other human being who hypocrite by nature. He considers a man of great worth.

“I am proud of myself
I am extremely grateful
To God for making me a Dalit

If God…
Had made me a Brahmin
(According to the Varnashrama)
I would have deceived the people
By my appearance and
False chanting of shlokas,
Frightened them in the name of religion
Feeding on delicious food at ceremonies
On good and bad occasions.

If God…
Had made me a Vaishya
(According to the Varnashrama)
I would be making profit
By dishonesty and hoarding
By creating artificial shortage
And intellectual theft.
By distributing I would gain
By selling I would gain
(the partition of India)

If God…
Had made me a Kshatriya
(According to the Varnashrama)
The king of a small kingdom would I be
Enjoying wine and women.
And looted eighteen times
The temple of Somnath.
Armed fully with weapons
Failed to protect this nation
I would have watched it
Becoming a slave.

Thank…God…
That He made me a Shudra
And liberated me from all these sins.

That is why I am proud of myself…”

(Parmar, 58)

The Afro-Americans in America succeeded in winning a legal battle for their civil rights. The Civil rights Act came into being after a long battle and proclamation of emancipation of the Afro-Americans from the shackles of slavery. For the realization of their dream they demanded the unhindered access to public accommodation, equal status with the Whites as citizens and unsegregated education. Maya Angelou cherishes the dreams of equality in the following lines of her poem *Eaulity* by remembering painful past:

“We have lived a painful history,
we know the shameful past,
but I keep on marching forward,
and you keep on coming last.

Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.

Take the blinders from your vision,
take the padding from your ears,
and confess you've heard me crying,
and admit you've seen my tears.

Hear the tempo so compelling,
hear the blood throb in my veins.
Yes, my drums are beating nightly,
and the rhythms never change.

Equality, and I will be free.
Equality, and I will be free.”

(Angelou n. pag.)

These ruling classes- Euro-America-centric Whites and Brahmins- have created ideologies and have fashioned them in such a way that these subordinated classes have been forced to look at themselves from the eyes of their masters, the dominating classes. Through the creations of the notions of race and caste, this subordinated and oppressed group of the society has been made to suffer from self-scorn, self-hatred, self negation and self erasure. Hence they have been deprived from the very notion of their self- esteem, self-dignity. This broken psyche of Afro-Americans is described by W.E.B. Du Bois in his *Souls of the Black Folks*. He believes that Afro-Americans develop a ‘double consciousness’. He says-

“that they develop ways of 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 two-ness – an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled
striving, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

(Du Bois, 3)

Parallel to Du Bois, many other literary figures have projected in detail the social, economic, political, cultural and psychological predicament of their communities. It is those communities which were colonized and subjugated by the people of other races and castes. The predicament of Dalits in India is not very different from that of the Afro-Americans. In fact, the position and status of these groups is usually defined by the people who are in power. It is defined not by themselves, but in relation to those who are or were in power. The American Whites and the Indian Brahmins with the help of their dominant culture and ideologies have established their supremacy over Afro-Americans and Dalit people respectively. They have thus made them completely dependent, helpless, passive, docile and powerless. In this reference, it can be stated that one is not born but becomes Afro-American or Dalit. In fact, it is the American Whites’ and Indian Brahmins’ monopoly over the less privileged lot which subjugated them through an absolute control over the creation of ideas, myths, symbols, legends, customs, traditions, rituals and religious practices these powerless groups of humanity are subordinated.

In short, many of these oppressed sections of humanity, the African Americans and Indian Dalits were dehumanized and were enslaved by the ruling classes and castes with the help of their dominant ideology. They have been brought under their cultural dominance so that they should never regain their humanity and selfhood unless they become conscious of the designs of social construct built by the ruling classes. Therefore when these oppressed classes responded to their predicament though art or literature, they made a radical department from established White and Brahmanical literature in terms of myths, symbols, images, fables, legends used in their discourses. This discourse creates a new universe where the roles of the subject and the object are reversed. Being others, they were the objects of the dominating forces till they became conscious of their existence. But now they will become the subjects and make their exploiters the objects of their poetic creations. To quote the words of H.S. Gill in this reference:
“When the Blacks, the Dalits, in the process of the assertion of their beings, reverse the order of this universe of reflection, when those who were the objects for centuries, suddenly refuse to be subjected to the others’ gaze, and begin to constitute their own discourses, there is necessarily a tumultuous upheaval in the order of things, the things of this empirical world. The Blacks, the Dalits, the oppressed transform the objects with subjects, and those who were used to the comfort of all powerful, invincible, sacred position of the subject, suddenly find themselves being subjected to the gaze of those who earlier dared not look at them, and the logos, the inalienable word changes hands.”

(Gill, 1)

Despite these similarities, the poetry of African Americans and Gujarati Dalits writers cannot be studied as analogous poetries, while they do have certain similarities of trends and themes, at the same time each also has certain unique features and characteristics of its own. Basically, the poetry of the Afro-American and Gujarati Dalit writers is the poetry of the people who were denied knowledge and knowledge systems. Since they were deprived of having access to knowledge, they were deprived of having ideas about one’s own self. The calamity fell on both oppressed groups only because of lack of education. The sole cause of Dalit social enslavement is their having been deprived from accessing knowledge. Afro-Americans were also maltreated by the White masters and kept ignorant deliberately. The state of deprivation from learning, reading and writing has been described by Fredrick Douglass. He was provided a tutor by his liberal White mistress. However, when he was learning a lesson from his tutor, he heard the White master telling his wife:

“If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him to be slave. It would forever in fit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontent and unhappy.”
After overhearing his master’s dialogue with his wife, Douglass tried to understand as to why his master might have uttered these words. Then he thought logically and came to know the real source of White man’s power. He understood immediately that knowledge was power and this power can be accumulated if one gained good command over words. He understood quite well that it was through words that one could define one’s world and one’s place in it and could try to create permanent place in it. As a result, though the tutorial classes were stopped, he deliberately learned to read and write and found a way out from his slavery to freedom. Since the Afro-Americans and Dalits were deprived of having access to knowledge, quest for knowledge is one of the major themes in their poetry. As they suffer from the loss of their self and are also the victims of self-hatred, self-scorn and self denial. Quest for regaining one’s own self is also one of the dominating themes found in their poetry. Thus through their poetry they try to define their own self and attempt to explore their social, economic, political, cultural and religious identities.

**Protest against Religious Discourse:**

The poetry produced by Afro-Americans and Dalits also revolts against the religious discourse of their respective countries because it was in fervor of dominant classes and it gave religious sanction and legitimacy to their exploitation and marginalization. The organized religions of their countries were completely indifferent to their sufferings and victimization at the hands of the powerful casteist and racist forces. There were a number of restrictions on their social, cultural and economic mobility. Therefore, they lost their faith in the religious ideologies and struggled hard for carving out some breathing space for themselves, and finally they renounced their religion through conversion to other religions. The Afro-Americans embraced other religion and the Dalits converted to Buddhism such as Islam. The 13th century Bhakti movement had fascinated some Dalit poets but this movement failed to bring about any kind of social transformation for the Dalits though it was against the practice of slavery. The movement offered abstract ideas about human predicament by making people fatalist and superstitious. It did not offer any concrete solutions to social-cultural and economic problems of Dalits. Even the
constructive efforts made by the saints like Dasi Jeevan, Trikam Saheb, Bhim Saheb in Gujarat failed to transcend the restrictive and ghettoized Hindu religious ideology and address the problems of Dalit mass.

The British colonial rule in India introduced people to logical reasoning, self-critical evaluation and rational thinking of the Western Enlightenment thinkers. As earlier mentioned the Dalit protest movement got impetus when Dr. Ambedkar started his revolutionary revolution for social transformation. It gathered a momentum when Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar declared that Hinduism has been the root cause of untouchability and inequality and started his deconstructive assessment. Under the direction of Dr. Ambedkar the protest movement organized programs such as entering the Hindu temples, the burning of the seminal text *Manusmriti*. The mass conversion of Dalits to Buddhism in 1956 was epoch making event and the climax of the Dalit agitation for humanhood and great protest against Hinduism. Some Dalit writers have made their writing a vehicle of propaganda against the hypocritical Hindu value system. Pravin Gadhvi has written one poem *Awakening* criticizing the text *Manusmriti*:

“Let us incinerate with petrol,
The corpses of several Manus,
Who sealed our ears with lead,
Sowed seeds of venom betwixt men.”

(Gadhvi, 31)

The segregated, discriminatory inhuman and irrational practices of the Hinduism evoked a bitter and measured response from so many Dalit poets and writers. Thus, the Dalit consciousness emerged in the literary form.

In Afro-American literature, there is a stern indictment of Christian religious establishment and the notion of God. There is a strong protest and denunciation of the Christian spirituality for its deliberate silence on racial discrimination and social segregation of the Afro-Americans. It was due to the years of proselytism, the Afro-Americans had imbibed the spirit of Christianity which they were unable to renounce. Therefore, they started challenging the accepted notions of White supremacy or tendency
to treat whiteness as God-given or good. As the Dalits found it difficult to wipe out the indelible stigma of untouchability, they found no other alternative than to renounce Hinduism and embrace the Buddhism as their new faith that never professed and practiced any kind of discrimination on the basis of caste. Therefore, Hinduism proved a kind of curse for Dalits. However, for Afro-Americans Christianity was not the root cause of their exploitation and slavery. In fact, their racial origin was the main reason behind their subhuman and marginal status. Therefore, the Afro-Americans adopted a different strategy to express their protest against the White racist ideology. As they realized that Christianity did not recommend it so they prepared an ideology of protest and offered a different reinterpretation of faith. W.E.B. Du Bois in his long poem *A Litany of Atalanta* makes a fervent plea to God to shower mercy upon them for the unjust social order. He sarcastically opens the poem by declaring that the Alminghty is silent about all this:

“O Silent God,
Thou whose voice afar in mist and mystery hath left
our ears an-hungered in these fearful days-

*Hear us, good Lord!*

Listen to us,
Thy children: our faces dark with doubt are made a mockery in Thy sanctuary. With uplifted hands we front Thy Heaven, O God crying:

*We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!*

We are not better than our fellows, Lord, we are but weak and human men. When our devils do deviltry, curse Thou the doer and the deed:
curse them as we curse them, do to them all and more than ever they have do to innocence and weakness, to womanhood and home.

*Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!*
And yet whose is the deeper guilt? Who made these
devils? Who nursed them in crime and fed them on injustice?
Who ravished and debouched their mothers and grandmothers?
Who bought and sold their crime, and waxed fat and rich
on public inquiry?

*Thou knowest, good Lord!*”

(Du Bois, 155-158)

Throughout the 19th century there was a gradual change in the attitude of the Afro-Americans towards the color of their skin and that of God. The Afro-American, Bishop M. Turner’s enunciation that ‘God is Negro’ had wide acceptance among the African Americans. Towards the twentieth century this view gave rise to a popular movement for assertion of Black identity. The Afro-American leader Marcus Garvey launched a movement for celebrating a new social identity for the Afro-Americans. Like Turner, Garvey formed a new religious faith, a new form of Christianity which claimed that Jesus Christ was the God of only Afro-American people and God always loved and blessed the oppressed. Garvey floated the concept of Black Bible and attempted to promote a Black science of liberation of Afro-Americans. According to Black theology, the Afro-Americans were identified as the oppressed people and Whites were labeled as the oppressors. The creation of Black myths such as the Black Jesus, the Black church, the Black God and Black prophets became popular with Afro-American people. There is a strong indictment of the established religion which is quite illusive and abstract on the questions of equality and happiness of Blacks in their present life in Afro-American poetry. Thus, both the Dalit and the Afro-American poetic consciousness reveal a broad perspective, insights into human predicament and intense cravings for the ideal human world.

**Quest for Identity:**

Afro-Americans and Indian Dalits are the sons and daughters of darkness journeying through infinite sorrows and sufferings. Dalits are the native sons of India. They were the salt and savor of ancient India. They live in a land where caste is often seen as one of the defining characteristics of the Indian social structure. It is also one of the most stubborn
and long-lasting institutions that continues to exist both in rural and urban India. In fact, castes are defined as distinct, separate communities whose members were bound to each other through ties of endogamy and by a common hereditary profession or duty which has been historically assigned to them. In ancient India, caste arose out of an ideology of purity and has no connection to economic structures. Origins of caste system have been linked to the early Vedic society which consisted of tribes, predominantly, Aryans made up of numerous clans consisting of lineage groups. This Rig Vedic society was predominantly pastoral in nature and agriculture was only of secondary importance. Land was communally held by the clan and cultivated by households who exercised no private ownership over them. This setting gave rise to the varna-system which implied a division of society into groups such as 'Brahmins' (priests), 'Kshatriyas' (aristocracy), 'Vaishyas' (peasants) and 'Shudras' (service communities). During early Vedic times, there was also no hint of a hereditary division of labor or of endogamy. Various factors led to the transition of the varna to jati system, while religion and political authority rose in different forms inside these clans. Brahmins and Kshatriyas were not therefore originally closed endogamous or hereditary occupations, and this might have been the result of the desire to exercise monopoly or domination over less privileged groups. Over the times, the working class people, the Shudras, got disowned by high caste Hindus making their life hellish through exercising their supremacy.

Today, the Dalit writer asks: ‘what is India to us?’, ‘a fertile land or a nightmare? He, on behalf of his brethren, is in search of answers to these questions. He knows very well that his forefathers sprang out from the same womb as the Brahmins. Why then was he rejected by the motherland? On what grounds and how? Who is responsible for that? The questions he asks through his creative art seem to be simple, but they are unanswerable. Dr. Ambedkar once told Mahatma Gandhiji that his lot is homeless in their homeland. The Dalit writers today are trying to answer these questions in their poetry. Their poetry, inspired by Ambedkarite ideology, is defining and redefining the Dalit conditions. Their pen is like an axe with which they are cutting the weeds that have grown over the centuries in this traditional land. Their poetry is, in true sense, a cultural critique that truly harnesses the emotions of the oppressed.
The same is the case of Afro-American writer who faces the same dilemma. ‘What is America to me?’ Is it an ocean filled with sorrow? A land of endless distress? He knows very well that his forefathers were brought to America in chains and auctioned on the shores of Atlanta. The Afro-Americans have irrigated the fertile land of liberty with their blood. Recent historical works have shown that the African-American population has participated fully in the formation of the United States. It is said that they have participated to a greater extent, making and creating the nation through their sweat and tears the way the Dalits in India did. The discrimination against Afro-Americans in the US can be compared only with the most humiliating forms of caste oppression in India. Truly, this discrimination usually destroyed the humanness.

Africans were, for instance, not allowed to speak their own languages, practise their religion, marry as they liked, build their families, or participate in the political or economic processes except as slaves. Even today, the economic discrimination against Afro-Americans continues. A large proportion of African-Americans, especially males, are either de-employed or unemployed in today's America, leading to a disruption of family lives. It has been argued that in contemporary America, cultural colonization of Afro-American populations continues unchanged. Even the colonial ambitions of the United States are honed and sharpened on the backs of its underprivileged African Americans. They are discriminated during the course of the smallest political activity right from the census. This discrimination is also a part of the politics of the major political parties. The corporate culture of America has gained heavily from the enslavement of the Black culture and the exploitation of the Afro-Americans. If they were allowed to compete in a fair way, the American society would have been a very successful community, economically, politically and culturally.

In terms of employment, Afro-Americans have been the last to be hired and the first to be fired and are also not paid their due wages on many occasions. In terms of housing, they have always been relegated to the poorer sections of various towns, to the 'ghettos' as they are called. Conditions of severe food crisis have always existed amongst and their community has always been the target of police brutality. These realities can be seen as
direct outcomes of slavery and its institutions and police oppression. Michael Harrington, in talking about the poverty amongst Afro-Americans, notes that:

“The Negro is poor because he is black; that is obvious enough. But, perhaps more importantly, the Negro is black because he is poor. The laws against colour can be removed but that will leave the poverty that is the historic and institutionalized consequence of colour. As long as this is the case, being born a Negro will continue to be the most profound disability that the United States imposes upon a citizen.”

(Harrington, 75-76)

This poverty, however, is sometimes seen as a symptom of inferiority and of a lack of merit. The logic of biological superiority began to work here. In addition to this, there had been attempts throughout history to keep the dominant Whites segregated or separated from the Black population. Deliberate efforts have also been made to raise social barriers against the intermarriage of groups of people, and these barriers have been created along religions, economic, educational and linguistic identities. However, in the United States of today, successful individual and group attempts are being made to surmount these boundaries and to promote a fusion of races.

Though these legal battles were eventually won, they took a long time coming; and even after they had been nominally granted, equality did not appear. For the majority of Afro-Americans, in order to be able to live with these oppressive structures, it was necessary to devise new ways of achieving a measure of freedom. Resistance, both group and individual, was the order of the day as the Afro-American community in America experimented with ideas and strategies. These ranged from the methods and goals adopted by W.E.B. Du Bois to those advocated by Marcus Garvey or Elijah Muhammad, to those that were adopted by Martin Luther King under the banner of the Civil Rights Movement. All of these strategies were partly or wholly non-violent in nature. It was only after they failed to fully achieve what Afro-Americans wanted that violence was resorted to, leading to the militant ideology of self-defense that emerged under the banner of
Black Power. Stokely Carmichael, who propounded the theory of Black Power, reflected upon the state of affairs that led to this violent phase noted that:

“Racism as they understood was not merely exclusion on the basis of race but exclusion for the purpose of subjugating or maintaining subjugation. The goal of the racists was to keep black people on the bottom, arbitrarily and dictatorially, as they had done years.”

(Carmichael, 47)

Despite these campaigns and movements that brought the question of equal rights into focus, Michael Harrington in the 1980s noted rather in his powerful work The Other America that:

“If all the discriminatory laws in the United States were immediately repealed, race would still remain as one of the most pressing moral and political problems in the nation. Negroes and other minorities are not simply the victims of a series of iniquitous statutes. The American economies, the American society, the American unconscious are all racist. If all the laws were framed to provide equal opportunity, a majority of the Negroes would not be able to take full advantage of the change. There would still be a vast, silent and automatic system directed against men and women of color.”

(Harrington, 75)

The realities in Dalit life and those in the life of Afro-Americans in America is the same—poverty, ignorance, oppression and the ultimate alienation. Protest, anger, aggression, and discord are the outer expression of the inner reality. Their clamor is not a cry in wilderness today. Their voices they projected in their literary arts are not passive by nature. Marcus Garvey proclaims this to his brethren in the following lines of his poem Get Up and Go:

“Get up! You broken bits of flesh!
Take courage and go fighting on;
For every black man there's a day,
Which pride in race has well begun.
Get up my man and do the "stuff"
That leads to blazing glory's fame:
Hold on, and be like good Macduff,
And damn the man who'd foil your name.”

(Garvey n.pag.)

They command everybody’s attention. They are, in real sense, in search of their identities. Their writings are autobiographies of their communities. There is a peculiar phenomenon found in the poetry of both these marginalized groups. On one hand, there is an individual who stands for the community and the community on the other hand for the individual. They are celebrating their own heritage in their own idiom. They have their own aesthetics in simple and rustic forms. They are harnessing and developing their own aesthetics. As a matter of fact, the Afro-Americans have their own Black aesthetic theory. The Indian Dalits are trying to develop their own aesthetics. Everyone knows that literature mirrors the life, reflects the outer world and inner reality. What is more important in the literature of these two oppressed groups is the social milieu. The creative writer’s art should emerge from his social milieu. He should not forget his social milieu. The Black bourgeois has emerged from the Black mass. Similarly, the Dalit bourgeois has started emerging from the Dalits. Now the main important thing is that the writer of the bourgeois section must not develop the bourgeois mentality. All members of oppressed mass in India are awakening from their slumber. They are analyzing their social and economical situations in their works of literature. Similar is the case of Afro-Americans. Both have established their own literary forums and organizing their own literary conferences. They are redefining their identities.

The literatures of this oppressed lot oppose the canons of literature. Afro-American and Dalit poetry has already refused to be evaluated by the established literary standards. It has become a discipline demanding an independent inquiry. It not only subverts the old canons but also creates new ones. It seeks to reject those conventions and cultural norms which marginalized their voice. It reveals the collective consciousness of community
whose voice has remained suppressed for ages. It brings out dichotomy which always existed between ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures and attempts to deconstruct the old cultural narrative which is biased and partial by nature. It stands for a new ideology. It includes all sort of remapping of a social territory which had several lapses and need to be reorganized. It is subversive by nature but not insulting one. It relates itself to cultural context and speaks for the revival of socio-cultural context and speaks for the revival of sociological approach to literary arts. It opposes the obsessive concern with the formal accomplishment, the linguistic expertise and modernistic tendency to look for the meaning of the text within text itself.

Like India, the United States of America is also a plural society and like Indian society, there are several cross-currents operating within the nation. About America, it is said that it is a melting pot. People of different nations in Europe settled in America in the 16th century. Though they practiced the same religious faith and similar racial features and appearances, they had brought with them the national identity and ethos which in each case is different. In that already existing heterogeneity was added the Afro-Americans race. The arrival of Negroes in America seems to be a mole on a beautiful bright face. Looking them in the arena of literature, ‘Negro’ is no longer a marginal character in Afro-American writing, but a hero who asserts his racial identity. In African American writing, poetry reigns supreme. In Afro-American poetry, he opposes his earlier image of himself as a docile, self-conscious, submissive African American man knocking at the door of God who has always been unkind. Jesus Christ has been described as White devil with blue eyes. If at all there is God benevolent to Negroes, he must be an incarnation of his own image and personality. Why should he be White with a pain of blue eyes? It is the concept of beauty that has destroyed the lives of many Afro-American women. Basing itself on this feeling of inferiority, a peculiar trend began amongst the Afro-Americans in the United States of America whereby many Afro-Americans started changing their dark complexion and straightening their curled hairs. Tony Morrison, in The Bluest Eye, which she wrote in 1970s tells the story of an eleven year old Black girl who used to pray for her eyes to turn blue so that she could be as beautiful and beloved as all the blond, blue-eyed children in America. It was standard of beauty in the world where she exists. She finds herself unacceptable everywhere. She ultimately ruined as the
destiny she longed for was unattainable. Morrison later wrote in the afterword to her first novel that:

“The assertion of racial beauty was not a reaction to the self-mocking, humorous critique of cultural or racial foibles common in all groups, but against the damaging internalization of assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze. I focused therefore on how something as grotesque as the deionization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable; a female.”

(Morrison, 12)

Morrison attacked on the Afro-American community for being carried away by the Anglo-Saxon standards of beauty. She also brings out at the same time the helplessness which drives them towards self-hatred and self-destruction. The image of the Negro popularized by Jazz orchestra during the 1920s is also unacceptable to the present generation of the Blacks which takes pride in being called African-Americans. According to them, jazz music indulges in extreme primitivism. The singer mostly sings the blues or songs modeled on the spiritual longing or by self-torturing. The recent African-Americans reject the image of themselves and want to be self-confident and most articulate in today’s world. The modern literary artists are the representatives of their community and see themselves as equal to the Whites of their society.

In a very similar way, Dalits found themselves caught within this vortex of self-denigration and self-loathing. Dalit literature made its mark by criticizing and highlighting this dominant feeling and by trying to bring about a new awareness of social revolution. It focused the reader’s attention on Dalit life itself and not on the perception of Dalits by the higher castes. By getting inspired by Ambedkarite ideology and Dalit Panther Movement, Gujarati Dalit literature adopted a new revolutionary stand and vigorously began its onward march towards class analysis along with a depiction of Dalit pain and suffering. Such kind of bold voice can be seen in one Gadhvi’s poem *Awakening:*
“Let us awaken friends!
Take the earth by storm, wipe out from its face
Temples untouchable…
Let us drench the soil in red,
With the blod of Huns-
Who swooped down from mid-Asia
Onto our fertile land, green…”

(Gadhvi, 31)

One can grasp how during and after Black Arts Movement and Dalit Panther Movement, the Afro-American and Dalit writers were all directed towards the eradication of the discriminative mindset of certain racial or caste groups. They have a vision to create a just society, a society for all. The different modes of expression of both Afro-American and Gujarati Dalit poetry are verbal, emotional as well as physical. This sort of employment of language does not only shape consciousness, but can also does change consciousness.

Both African-American and Gujarati Dalit writers are a mirror image, though widely separated in time and space, because they share the same kind of feeling of oppression and the aspiration of freedom and equality. And it is also because that through their writings, they are engaged in creating a platform for unheard voices. The idea of consciousness, self and identity is found identical. The driving force of African-American and Indian Dalit movements is the same. The 1973 manifesto of Dalit Panthers quoted in Sahitya aur Dalit Chetna by Maheep Singh and Chanrakant Bandiwadekar mentions one such parallel:

“…because of the monstrous power of America, the third world is subjugated, and in India, the Dalit are exploited and tortured. In America also, a handful of white racists are exploiting the Black populace. As a reaction to this, the Black Panther Movement came into existence in order to eradicate racism. The fire of this struggle is closely related with our struggle.”

(Singh, 33)
Art for Life’s Sake:

An enormous amount of literature is available depicting socio-economic discrimination in the United States and India. Both African American and Dalit literature played a pivotal role in portraying the discrimination faced by the Afro-Americans and Dalits respectively. These literatures also outlined the context against which new agendas for resistance against historic injustice had to be devised. A comparative study of the Afro-American poetry and Gujarati Dalit poetry means a critical study of the life of Afro-Americans and Dalits as a whole and the kinds of dominant structures to which they were exposed in their respective countries. Here in this chapter, the researcher has tried to evaluate the Indian Dalit life as a whole through selected Gujarati Dalit poems. Gujarati Dalit writers are the representatives of their community living in different parts of the nations. Though their languages, professions and traditions are different, their experience is the similar. Gujarati Dalit poetry is the microscopic view of the entire Dalit lot living in Indian subcontinent.

Both Gujarati Dalit and Afro-American poetry is literary weapon of protest and resistance against the established social order that even does not recognize them as human beings. Despite the fact of having different cultural, religious, linguistic and geographical boundaries, both of them represent the voice of the people who were forced to remain marginalized due to their race and caste for centuries. Their vision is the resistance against the culture of domination and establishing the culture of egalitarian. Both the Dalit and Afro-American poetry is popular forms in their respective literary arena. They express the plight of their day-to-day life that they live under the command of the established social order. At the same time, they become a platform to protest their anger against the uncountable injustices thrust upon them by the same order. They make the readers aware of the experiences and agonies of the oppressed lot.

Both of them are the most powerful and heart-breaking poetic narrative in the popular arena of Afro-American and Dalit literature. Afro-American poetry portrays White domination over Afro-Americans in America, which makes them victims of racial discrimination. Similarly, Gujarati Dalit poetry reveals and attacks on the heinous form of caste system of one of the largest democratic countries of the world. Their power of
narration makes the readers introspect deeply. The question of communal identity remains at the centre of their poetry. In other words, they represent the pain of the people who have been denied their fundamental human rights and gradually excluded from the mainstream society. In true sense, they are a replica of social injustice and human suffering. The issues of humiliation, inequality, segregation, caste, color and suffering remain at the centre in their poetry.

Gujarati Dalit poetry signifies the social exclusion and carries the pain of millions of Dalits in India right from the four-fold caste-system. They have been neglected and dislocated from mainstream society and disassociated from resources, rights and privileges. It is an accredited masterpiece in Dalit dialect emphasizing their internal quest for identity through distinct idiom, metaphor, symbols and imagery. In terms of tone, imagery, intensity of anger, both the streams of poetry have similarities. Sometimes, in the poems, unless contextualized, it becomes difficult to assess whether they are written by Dalit poets or Afro-American poets. There are certain images like the image of prison, of lost home, the animal imagery, which can be found in both the streams of poetry. Below mentioned poem is actually written by Gujarati Dalit poet Kisan Sosa, but by by first reading no one can identify by who it would have been by. The dismal life and agony it reflects are found among the lives of both-Afro-Americans and Dalits. Observe the poem:

“The stale old air we have inherited
The helpless prayer, we have inherited.
As a ceiling we got rusted tin
The wall of fear we have inherited.
The back got the dried river of sweat
And the eyes had inherited the empty well.
The thirst in the corridor and in the house hunger
The mind had inherited the desire for a silent cry.
Where the self-esteem is wounded and screams,
Lying in a bleeding corner, we have inherited.
Wherein so many snakes move and move
Both Afro-Americans and the Dalits feel suffocated in their life. Both the oppressed classes do not find their life worthy of living and feel. The experience of humiliation they have undergone and identity quest are the dominating themes is found in their poetry. They are not merely a record of personal agonies, but a form of social protest intended to change society it depicts. In other words, it is a statement of war against injustice. They raise a number of questions about the nation’s unequal system of distribution and unequal opportunities on the basis of racial and caste differences. The poets of both the nations reflect various facets of marginalized life and pose some serious questions.

In addition to this, their poetry is also the poetry of consciousness. These literary figures, while speaking about themselves or their communities, try to reveal that they are victims and try to understand as to why they are being victimized. They know that they are oppressed not because they are lazy, not because they are ignorant, not because they stupid, but just because they are either African Americans or Dalits. An awakening and awareness about their own state and condition of victimization generates in them a kind of consciousness which could be an African American or Dalit consciousness. It also generates in them a feeling of dividedness such as subject and object, self and other, private and public, oppression and resistance, domination and sub-ordination, supremacy and marginality, sameness and difference and so on. They provide a critique of the White or upper caste domination. Through their poetry, these writers go for consciousness-raising of their oppressed brethren. They project that the oppressors-Whites and upper castes- are supreme not because they are powerful but because they have constructed the society and value system that enables them to subjugate others and through these values and ideology they carry on their own domination. They try to highlight the sources which enable the oppressors to oppress them. Therefore, they try to alter the consciousness of the oppressed. They outline certain social contradictions, seen and observed in the life of the oppressors and oppressed. They reveal that certain features of social realities as intolerable and unbearable and turn social fact contradiction. Thus they project a picture of the social reality to manifest what they are in contrast to what they are not yet. They
try to build in their oppressed readers a consciousness of victimization and try to convince them to apprehend themselves as victims so as to make them aware of the alien and hostile forces and circumstances responsible for the unjust treatment. They also demonstrated that the victimization is in no way earned or deserved.

They display the sufferings of their people in such a way that the victims understand and realize that like them others are also made to suffer in the same way. These creative writers force them see a larger society based on oppression not in the same old way but from a new awakening and consciousness. They have also generated a feeling among them that while one has already sustained an injury, one is also exposed to other injuries as well, and at the same time they try to make them aware of their power so that they can protest against inhumanity. These poets also try to generate a feeling in their respective communities that there are no places where they could hide and that one could be attacked anywhere anytime by anyone. They are of the view that the systems of racism and casteism and their agents are everywhere, even inside their own minds. In this reference, the oppressed Afro-Americans and Dalits become vigilant and suspicious of the things which ultimately led them towards war. It is because of this situation of theirs that Richard Write has written in his *12 Million Black Voices*:

“Everywhere Black people are on a war...from day to day we live in atmosphere of a war that never ends. Even when the sprawling fields are drenched in peaceful sunshine it is war. When we grub at the clay with our hoes, it is war. When we are awake, it is war. When we sleep it is war. When one of us is born, he enters one of the warning regiments of the South.”

(Wright, 46)

This is how they develop an anticipation of the possibility of attack. It produces a feeling that one must always be alert and be ready to suffer from social and ethical shocks. It enables to understand the truth about one’s self and one’s society. These writers ask their lot as to why many of them lack any genuine conviction of personal worth and try to create a unity among the oppressed groups of the society. They try to convince this to them by telling them that their unequal and inferior social status is unjust and needs to be
reformed. They create a feeling that justice requires freedom and equality and they give a new interpretation to the familiar realities. As these people were deprived of having access to reading and writing, they try to attempt if words could be used as weapons. Through these weapons, they try to get back at their enemies and to express and articulate the grievances of their communities. As Amiri Baraka believes, such writers try-

“to report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society and of himself in the society that other men are moved by exactness of their rendering, and if they are opposed, go strong through this kind of moving, see their own strength and weakness and they are oppressors, tremble, curse and go mad because they will be drenched with filth of their evil.”

(Baraka, 251)

Both Afro-Americans and Gujarati Dalit are among those writers who never dream of becoming literary icons. It is because they always tried to feel and depict in their poetry the inhuman condition meted out to the poor ‘others’ of the society without labeling themselves as the messiah or the sole representative of their caste and race. Their poetry in itself shows that they write not with ink but with pain. They have propagated a message among Whites and high caste people that beyond their luxurious world, there is also a world full of pain and suffering. Their poetry form a collage in which the heartfelt condition of human psyche is shown, where the naked reality of subjugated people is described with tears. Reality in their poems is not directed towards forming a new ideology, but towards depiction of the real, sordid truth of life for a specific section of the populace. Both the literary artists knew very well about the negative aspects of religion and socio-political implications. Through their poems, they want to highlight the idea that realization of self and consciousness is more important than mere performance of rituals. Observing minutely, many readers would find their poetry to be vehement attacks on religion. On deeper reflection over their poetry, one will find the bankruptcy of religion which has divided man from man leading to inequality in the society. As Mary Beth Culp remarks in this regard:
“Anything which makes people think of existing evil conditions is worthwhile. Sometimes in order to attract attention somebody must embody these ideas in sensational forms. I meant my poem to be a protest against the domination of all stronger peoples over weaker ones.”

(Culp n. pag.)

The power politics in India also exploits these ruptures that exist in present social movements in order to make these inequalities persist in the society so that they can rule without any resistance. In simple terms, one call this tendency as ‘vote bank’. Dilip Chitre is of the view that Dalit votes can cause decisive swings in electoral politics and caste leaders are not only aware of this but also base their political stance and manipulation on the Dalit factor. However, the Afro-American and Indian Dalit writers have not got engaged in such dirty mind games. All they do through the medium of their poetry is to strengthen the morale of their brethren. They are well aware of their roots and draw the material for their creative instincts from the margins.

Talking about the poetry form, both Afro-American and Gujarati Dalit writers have made drastic changes in the form and content making some experiments. They have rejected old and orthodox poetic canons and traditional aesthetic standards. Their poetry has never been fanciful or utopian by nature; rather it is filled with realistic imageries. This means to tell that their art has been dedicated to a cause. And this cause is to create awareness about the discriminating policies of dominating classes and raising the voice of protest. Its tone has been different to that of the mainstream poetry. Theirs is not art for art’s sake; it is, in real sense, art for life’s sake, for reality’s sake. Theirs is a discourse as specific articulation of a specific perception of a specific existential experience. Change is their motto with which they write. Maya Angelou in her following poem Million Man March Poem calls her all brethren to unite together and work to create a new history through their art:

“I say, clap hands and let's come together in this meeting ground,
I say, clap hands and let's deal with each other with love,
I say, clap hands and let us get from the low road of indifference,
Clap hands, let us come together and reveal our hearts,
Let us come together and revise our spirits,
Let us come together and cleanse our souls,
Clap hands, let’s leave the preening
And stop imposterising our own history.”

(Angelou n.pag.)

After this exhaustive comparative analysis of this study of these poets and their literary creation, it is obvious that there are striking similarities between the Dalit and African-American poetry in terms of the origin of their sufferings, their unvanquished will to fight against discriminatory social and cultural structures, their resistance and struggles, their protests and their perception of human dignity and their aspiration to construct a classless and casteless human society in their poetry.

The exhaustive discussions in this chapter about the similarities between the creative expression of these two groups of poets and their socio-cultural backgrounds can be summarized as under:

1. While both the countries have distinct trajectories of historical, political, economic, and cultural development, both societies are marked by extreme inequality.
2. Both nation-states play important global roles as major democracies and both are extremely hierarchical.
3. The institutions of slavery and racism in the United States have their parallel in the caste system and notions of untouchability, purity and pollution in India. Although the socio-political structures of race and caste operate differently in the respective societies, the resulting effects of discrimination, humiliation, unequal opportunities and subordination affect the lives of the disempowered in similar ways.
4. These historically suppressed groups live the legacies of exclusion based on their race (USA) and caste (India). Their identities have been crushed by the histories of their oppression in their respective societies. They constitute the ‘Others’ of their respective nation-states.
5. Just as lynching of Afro-Americans was a familiar terror-tactic employed by the Whites, different forms of physical abuse were familiar experiences for the Dalits.
6. Along with the demolishing White monuments of authority, the Afro-American activists insist on a new identity for Afro-Americans, radically different from the submissive and docile ‘Negro’. They justify that the term ‘Negro’ is the invention of their oppressor; so they started referring themselves as ‘African Americans’ and as ‘Black’ people who are in fact energetic, determined, intelligent, beautiful and peace-loving. This parallels the Dalit initiative to rename themselves proudly as Dalit (literally, the broken), instead of succumbing to the derogatory ‘Untouchable’ and ‘Harijan’ as used by Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, both the Afro-American and the Dalit activists examine their respective subaltern statuses from the dominant viewpoint as well as from their own, shuttling between realities, their identities reformatting out of another, third site.

7. Both the authors, having experienced marginality and suffering - psychologically, socially, and politically - have drawn the sketches of their own experiences with the use of words. Their literary expressions are revolt against oppressions which they experience in their lives and which they watch in their people too. Whether the victims are the Afro-Americans of America or the Dalits of India, they have to suffer due to their place in the margin.

8. Although slightly different in their calls for unification, both poet-activists call on their fellow subalterns to unite against the race and caste supremacists.

9. At both the places, in America and in India, the dominant classes discriminated certain class of people on the base of religion. The literary figures of both the marginalized sections have therefore attacked on the so-called religions which are responsible for their lowly status in their respective societies. The Dalits have started erasing all religious reference in their envisioned world of equality. Similarly, though the Bible was used to justify slavery in America, there is no religious foundation for racism. So the Afro-American writers tried to convince their lot of their inherent potential by citing examples of great spiritual leaders like Christ or Krishna or Buddha who were not White. It is their attempt to decolonize the Black mind with the desire to raise the consciousness of a divided and debased people.

10. The literary writers of both the groups demonstrate to their fellow subalterns that their low-caste, polluted, and untouchable identity (for the Dalits) and their inferior racial
identity (for the Blacks) are cultivated and engineered by the White and high caste fellows to serve its own needs for superiority.

11. While encouraging their fellow people to fight their oppressors, both poet-activists pay tribute to their ideological gurus whom they have made their icons. The Afro-American poets remind their fellow-Blacks of their leaders’ dedication to the cause of their equality and dignity. The Dalit poets not only pay tribute to Ambedkar but also remind their fellow-Dalits of the leader’s commitment to reviving their dignity and humanity. By challenging the age-old socio-cultural hegemony of caste, which is as firm and deep-rooted as the banyan tree, they constantly remind them that Ambedkar was resolved to shatter the unjust caste system that degraded human beings in order to seek justice and humanitarian rights for his fellow-Dalits.

12. The poets of both the groups salute the agents of change. They have been and try to instigate the same vigor, courage, and motivation among the people in order to continue the leaders’ legacies. They hope to forge a change in the thinking of their fellow subalterns so that the latter could dismantle the self-images handed down to them by their oppressors. The colonized mind is so overwhelmed by the colonizer’s definition that renegotiating self-identity becomes a crucial task for the decolonialists. They identify a source of empowerment in the two decolonialist leaders. Being the ardent followers of their respective leaders and firm believers in justice and humanity, they urge their fellow people to embrace the examples set by the leaders and to progress toward self-pride and a new identity. What they are essentially doing through their art is helping the subjugated classes to identify the artifacts constructed by the dominants and then guiding them to deconstruct them to allow social justice.

13. They employ aggressive language to urge their fellow subalterns to rise above their degraded state and complaints and be inspired by their leaders’ sacrifices. It is arguable that such employment of aggressive diction and tone reveal a level of frustration with the present unjust social system and peaceful attempts of earlier generations and the continuing dehumanization of the people.

14. Such a combative tone perhaps shatters the preceding voicelessness of the subalterns and functions as a clarion call for violent opposition to injustice. The Afro-American writers warn their fellow Afro-Americans of the irreversible degradation they will bring upon
themselves if they fail to continue their leaders’ example of wrenching identity and pride for themselves from the White grip. Similarly, the Dalit poets proclaim the caste hierarchy as a chronic disease in India’s psyche that must be uprooted (in order) for the country to progress.

15. Along with appreciating and acknowledging the leaders’ contributions, they employ a bold, aggressive, challenging tone and voice to remind the dominant people that violence is the appropriate weapon of the oppressed and it will be wielded in order to reclaim the dignity of human life, the sole motivation that guided these two remarkable leaders of the oppressed.

16. By employing extreme masculine images of brutal rapes and torture, of wielding weapons of destruction, both these poets are trying to reclaim the emasculated subaltern’s masculinity. Through violent imagery the two poets become spokesmen for the revolutionary time of the late 1960s and 70’s when the oppressed people in the two countries actively sought a new self-definition not through negotiations but through armed rebellion, through urgent demands for political and humanitarian rights.

17. With these traumatic situations in mind, Afro-Americans in America and Dalits in India urge to be free. Their identity has to be redrawn. Their uniqueness has to be re-sung. Their importance has to be regained. Their self esteem has to be re-established. Their search for space has to be given importance. Their quest for self has to be respected. For these purposes, both the authors have shown the way.

18. The dominant classes and castes used religious manipulation for exploitation and marginalization. They were made to believe that their secondary status and subhuman existence were god-ordained and according to the divine plan. Such a pseudo-spiritual discourse inculcated in them an extremely superstitious and fatalist attitude towards life for many generations.

19. Interestingly, both the movements were guided and led by creative writers. They tried to reach out of their communities through their creative expression and inspired them to become a powerful force for social transformation by instilling in them courage and conviction about their grand mission.

20. Both the groups realized impossibility of bringing about any affirmative or positive social transformation and thus adopted a strategy of renouncing their respective religious faith
and converted to another religious faith in order to find a way out of this deadlock. They tried to get rid of their so called fallen and sinful status imposed by their respective religions. Accordingly, some of the Afro-Americans like Le Roi Jones renounced Christianity to convert to Islam and later he came to be known as Imamu Amiri Baraka. And the Dalits gave up Hinduism and converted to Buddhism at the behest of Dr. Ambedkar

21. Both the Afro-Americans and the Dalits revolted against the established classes and the Dalits in their respective countries and expressed their protest through literary forms such as poetry, songs, rhymes, autobiography etc. in the early stages of their agitation.

22. Both the poetry is a part of conscious effort to explore and expose cultural politics of dominant ideologies and their originators to keep a large section of humanity marginalized.

23. In both the countries the protest movements gathered momentum and inspired creative minds to form systematic literary movements. Both these movements started their own publications, magazines such as shabda (words) Asmita (self-respect) later on known as Asmitadarshan and host of others in Marathi and the Afro-Americans launched their publications such as Crisis and Liberator and a few more.

24. It was due to their humanitarian appeal and concern for the oppressed humanity they won sympathy and support from other classes in their respective countries.

25. Both the African-American and the Dalit writers abide by their commitment to bring about the desired social transformation. Similar impulses have driven these writers to shape their creative expressions.

It is a fact that the poetry of both the groups has carved out an independent space for themselves in the mainstream literatures of their respective countries. It can be firmly said that it is due to their consciousness both the groups have been respected and taken seriously by all the readers and critics of their countries and the world at large. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the comparative perspective focuses upon similarities and dissimilarities, convergence and divergence, concord and discord etc.

This study has taken note of some prominent dissimilarity between the African-American poetry and the Dalit poetry. They are as follows.
A. The Dalit lost their dignity and status as human beings due to the discriminatory caste (varna) system prescribed and perpetuated by the Hindu religion but the racial difference formed the basis of discrimination in the American society.

B. The caste-based varna system is unnatural, irrational and arbitrarily invented by man for exploitation of large section of human community for the sake of its own benefit and comfort. From anthropological perspective the black color of skin of the Afro- American is a natural phenomenon and a not a human creation. Thus, they are anthropologically quite different from the Whites.

C. The caste is a man-made construct and cannot be identified by the physical appearance of the Dalits, whereas the blackness of skin is the determinant of a human being or the Negroes.

D. Both the Dalits and Afro-Americans had to undergo harassment but differently. The Afro-Americans were physically assaulted, tortured, persecuted and punished. They were sold or bought in the market as slaves. But Dalits suffered mental torture due to the low social status. They were never treated as commercial commodities. Moreover, they were never separated from their families. Therefore, they had a stronger sense of togetherness and belonging to their families. But due to their sales, the African American families were under the constant fear of separation and disintegration. This created a stronger sense of alienation and frustration among them. It is reflected in their Jazz music and the blues (sentimental) songs.

E. In the initial period of slavery the Afro-Americans could secure their freedom from their owner by paying ransom. But the Dalits could not escape the social stigma of untouchability since freedom is an abstract and intangible state of mind. However, it was essential for the Dalits to wrest it from the upper caste people by staging a revolt against them.

F. The Afro-Americans were not the native inhabitants of America as they were imported from the African continent under the slave trade by the White Euro/ American slave traders. Hence, it took many years for them to become one with the White American people. But all the Dalits have been the indigenous people of India.
G. The Dalits were inspired and guided by Dr. Ambedkar. In America the Afro-Americans were inspired by great men like Booker T. Washington, Du Bois, Martin Luther King (Jr.) and a host of others who strengthened their movement.

H. Both the movements emerged and remained active in different countries. Therefore, they grow independently without any mutual influences.

I. The Harlem renaissance of 1920s inspired the Black aesthetic or literary movement and the Dalit literary movement began to flourish after 1970s in Gujarat.

J. The early poetry of the Afro-Americans was in a soft, Jazz and sentimental mood. It was known as blues. It was appreciated by the Whites for its beat and rhythm. But up to 1970s there was not much enthusiastic appreciation of the Dalit poetry by the established class. Therefore, it looked upon it with suspension, derision and apprehension.

The comparative study of these two distinct literatures offers a comprehensive underlying of their creative efforts. The comparative study of these literatures unfolds before us the age-old experience of two human communities which is far more important than the formal criterion of technical merits of these works of art.
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