Chapter-I
Introduction

Introduction:

The catastrophes of historical currents and scenario often indicate crises and the zeitgeist is captured in the literary works. Literature is a creative force and if it comes from oppressed class, protest is the dominant element in it that will be different from the literature of the mainstream. There are two kinds of protests: overt and covert. Violence, suffering, bloodshed are the dominant components in overt protest, while the covert resistance is always projected through literature. This kind of literature is self-revelatory where ‘I’ is the dominant one. For the people who want to express their resistance against injustice, literature will be the best platform for articulating their voice of protest. They had been, or were made, mute and invisible, but through writing literature they became visible, they made themselves known. They became assertive by nature and literature proved to be the best medium for them for expressing their sensibilities. This is true with the two sections of the world living in different continents namely Afro-Americans in the U.S.A. and the Dalits in India who present their sense of revolt and protest against the established society that considers them marginalized and has segregated them because of the difference in the color, race, caste and class.

The literature produced by them project juggernaut of social, religious and casteist oppression under which the Blacks in America and Dalits of India eke out their too heavy burden of life. The causes and circumstances leading to the age-old existence of oppression and despair of the lives of the marginalized can be enumerated thus:

- The degradation of these people since ages, suppressing even the slightest protest against injustice that sought to find a voice.
- The conditions of abject poverty, unhealthy and insanitary conditions in which these people had been sheltered, but they were forced to believe to live such lives.
• Even the minimum rights as human beings denied to them, making them incapable of seeing the light of freedom and comfortable living, due to the age-old ideology taught to them by the upper castes in India and White people in the U.S.A.

• The doors of education were never opened for them to taste the power of freedom.

The literature was and is produced by writers, who themselves had experienced at first hand, the oppression and segregation, and thus they have issued out of the cores of their bleeding hearts. The writings of these marginalized sections attracted the readers, both of the downtrodden and well-paced sections. Their literatures were, even continues to be even today, the poetics of liberation. Their basic need is to fulfill a long-desired and much deserved liberation of the downtrodden through education and legislation. The social process of regeneration that has been set in motion by the literature produced by the oppressed, for the oppressed. They have also got the result namely that of creating awareness, among the oppressed about the need to rise above their line and claim to live with honour. Afro-American and Dalit literature both are born out of the necessity and urgency to give expression to their agony suffered by themselves. It is the voice of protest against the injustice and inhuman social system which perpetuates discrimination on the basis of color and caste.

The researcher is concerned to investigate the experience of Afro- Americans and Dalit sections who have been exploited and humiliated for centuries in the class-race conscious American and Indian caste-ridden society. Voice of revolt or resistance is observed in the Afro-American and the Dalit poetry especially Gujarati Dalit poetry. The research project focuses on the treatment of persecution, exploitation, dehumanization and discriminatory practices of class and race as reflected in the poems of Afro-Africans and concentrates on caste oppression, untouchability and Dalit sensibility as presented by Dalit poets of Gujarat. He is going to analyze a wide spectrum of Black and Dalit life as portrayed in their literary texts. Both Afro- Americans and Dalits have observed that their communities have been enslaved physically, socially, religiously, educationally, legally and mentally. They have relentlessly fought against the unjust practices observed by the dominant class of their society.
Their poetry focuses on the issues of the social equality and self-respect, caste system, abolition of caste oppression of the individuals of their sections. Class-conscious American society and caste-ridden culture that is deeply rooted in India have profoundly shaped the psyche of Afro-Americans and Dalits in Gujarat. Their struggle against race conscious and class-conscious has a long history. These poets make a fervent plea for a change of their societies. Their poetry revives the memory of pain and suffering of past generations. Thus their poetry is addressed to the basic problems of alienation and caste oppression of Afro-Americans and Dalit masses from the mainstream society.

Both Afro-American and Dalit poetry are experience based—the experience of poverty, repression, caste oppression, untouchability and revolution. The researcher is going to bring out authenticity and liveliness which are the hallmarks of their poetry. The poetry of Black Americans tries to improve and uplift their race through historical awareness and a popular culture. They wanted to subvert racial stereotypes and address the racial, economic, cultural and social impediments as faced by them for centuries. As a matter of fact, the Dalit poetry is considered to be a unique genre in modern Indian literature. These poets by using the traditionally-denied weapon of literacy are exposing the conditions under which they have lived. They are rebelling against the Hindu institution which has assured their subordination to the Varna order.

Afro-American poets have greatly criticized the oppression, cruelty and enslavement suffered by them at the hands of White Americans. Similarly, the Dalit poets have critiqued the ideology of Brahminical Hinduism and counter the socio-cultural hegemony of the upper castes and thus wanted abolition of untouchability, caste oppression and discrimination. Here, the researcher will comparatively study how the poets of different cultures and climes reflect their societies that have been discriminated on the base of caste, creed, race, ethnicity and religion. The researcher plans to study how the oppressive environment has endangered the protest and resistance in the poetry of selected major Afro-American and Gujarati Dalit poets.
The Historical Background of Afro-Americans:

Afro-Americans make up one of the largest of the many racial and ethnic groups in the USA. The Afro-Americans of the USA are of African ancestry. They are the descendants of slaves—people who were brought from their homelands by force to work for Whites in the New World. A series of violent armed raids were carried out by the Whites for capturing the Blacks and those who were captured were treated as slaves. For years Blacks had to undergo exploitation, torture and oppression just because their skin colour was black. Nevertheless, African Americans have made basic and lasting contributions to American history and culture.

According to the population figure of 2000, more than half of the nation's 36.4 million African Americans were living in the South. Ten Southern states had Afro-American population exceeding 1 million. Blacks were also living in the largest cities, with more than 2 million living in New York City and more than 1 million in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Houston, each had a Black population between 500,000 and 1 million. Before going further, it would be better to clarify how these Black people got their identity and their lables.

As Americans of African descent reached each new level in their struggle for equality, they reevaluated their identity. The slaveholder labels of Black and Negro (Spanish for black) were offensive, so they chose less offensive coloured when they were freed. Capitalized, Negro became acceptable during the migration to the North for factory jobs. Afro-American was adopted by civil rights activists to underline pride in their ancestral homeland, but Black—the symbol of power and revolution—proved more popular. All these terms are still reflected in the names of dozens of organizations. To reestablish “cultural integrity” in the late 1980s, Jesse Jackson proposed African American, which proclaims kinship with a historical land base. In the 21st century the terms Black and African American both are widely used.

If one looks back in the history, one would come to the fact that most African Americans have ancestors who were slaves. The slaves were taken from their African homelands and shipped to the Americas. English settlers brought the first African slaves to the colony of
Virginia in the early 1600s. By 1790 Black people made up nearly one fifth of the population of the United States. Most slaves lived and worked on plantations, or large farms, in the South. Many people known as abolitionists worked to end slavery. These included Black people as well as White people. Harriet Tubman, a black abolitionist, organized the Underground Railroad, which was a way for slaves to escape to the North. Thousands of slaves were led to freedom through the Underground Railroad.

The American Civil War broke out in 1861. This was a war between the Northern and Southern states over the issue of slavery. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. This document freed the slaves in the Southern states. The North won the Civil War in 1865. That year, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ended slavery throughout the United States. In 1868 the 14th Amendment gave African Americans U.S. citizenship. The 15th Amendment, added in 1870, guaranteed their right to vote.

The period following the war was known as Reconstruction. African Americans were finally free, but most of them lived in terrible poverty. In the South many worked as sharecroppers. This meant that they farmed a piece of land owned by someone else. Their pay was a share of the crops they produced. In addition, African Americans continued to suffer from discrimination and violence. Schools and other public places were segregated. This meant that Blacks and Whites could not merge in those places. The race conscious Whites kept most Blacks away from voting rights in the South. These groups also hurt or killed many Blacks.

In the late 1800s an ex-slave named Booker T. Washington became a powerful voice for Blacks in the United States. He believed in trying to improve the economic situation of Blacks by training them to work in industry and trades. He started the school and it became very successful, though Blacks continued to face discrimination. Other African American leaders disagreed with Washington. These included the historian W.E.B. Du Bois and journalist Ida Wells-Barnett. They thought that Blacks should demand the same rights that Whites had. These rights – such as the right to vote or the right to go to a public school – are called civil rights. Du Bois also felt that Blacks needed higher
education for leadership. Du Bois and others formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to help them in their cause.

Meanwhile, slowly but steadily Blacks began to move to the cities, mainly in the South. Their migration to the North was relatively small until 1915 and 1916. At that time thousands of new jobs opened up in industries supplying goods to Europe, which was then fighting World War I. But the Blacks who left the South soon found that they had not escaped segregation and discrimination. Also, their new jobs were wiped out after the war. These conditions gave birth to ‘New Negro Movement' in the 1920s. A flowering of African American creative talent in literature, music and the arts occurred in the 1920s. It was centered in New York City in the Black neighborhood of Harlem. The Harlem Renaissance, as it became known, was based on a new sense of pride among Blacks as part of the New Negro Movement.

In the early 1940s during World War II, as in World War I, there was a mass movement of Blacks from the rural South. This time, Black Americans demanded an end to racism. Through such organisations as the NAACP, working through the courts, they fought for their rights. One major success came in 1954, when the United States Supreme Court outlawed segregation in the nation's school systems.

These efforts soon turned into an organized fight for equal rights. This was called the civil rights movement. In 1955 a Black woman in Montgomery, Alabama, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger. Her name was Rosa Parks. Blacks in the city staged a local boycott of the bus system to protest her arrest. A local Baptist minister, Martin Luther King, Jr., led the successful boycott. He became the leader of the civil rights movement. Another early victory was the Civil Rights Act of 1957. This law helped protect the Blacks' right to vote. Blacks adopted Freedom Now as their slogan to recognize the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1963. The high point of civil rights activities during the year was a March towards Washington. The following year Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This law banned discrimination based on race in schools, jobs and many other areas.
King and other civil rights leaders insisted on nonviolent approaches to change the stereotyped mindset of the White people. Others in the Afro-American community grew impatient with the slow pace of change. In the early 1960s they insisted that they should use violence, if necessary, to get power and justice. He later preached racial harmony, but many continued to have a more aggressive outlook. During the 1960s the nation's smaller cities were swept by violence. Some of the issues behind the riots were police brutality, poor schools and parks, poor job opportunities, bad housing, high prices and a desire for real social change and progress. The Black power movement gained strength with the growing pride of Black Americans in their African heritage.

After the 1960s the civil rights movement broke into many separate groups. Still, African American leaders continued their work to end discrimination. In addition, many African Americans gained positions of power. On the national level, many African Americans served in presidential cabinets. In 2001 Colin Powell became the country's first Black secretary of state. Jesse Jackson ran for President several times. Although he was not successful, he became a powerful figure and a well-known African American leader in the country. In 2008 Barack Obama became the first African American to be elected the President of the United States.

In 2000 there were about 36 million Americans with African roots. They made up about 13 per cent of the total U.S. population. One quarter of African Americans lived in poverty, and discrimination against African Americans remains a problem today. Nevertheless, African Americans have made great gains since the end of slavery more than 140 years ago. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

The Historical Development of African American Literature

The Afro-Americans were brought to America from Africa in slave ships and in chains during the early decades of the sixteenth century. For the twenty-five years after their arrival, their status remained that of servants who had bound themselves to work for masters for a specified length of time in return for paying the cost of their transportation across the Atlantic. But it was not many years before it became common practice to hold a Black slave after his term had expired. By 1640, Negro slavery had gained a foothold
and the period of service was extended indefinitely taking on the hallmark of slavery. The
Blacks thus profoundly influenced the changing pattern of American life and culture.
Plantation owners systematically cut off the new slaves from tribal and familial roots.
They were sold and resold in defiance of family ties, sexually exploited, forced to take up
the name of the white oppressors regardless of actual parentage. They found themselves
isolated, not only unable to speak the language of their masters, but often unable to speak
one another as well. This brutal disconnection of all interpersonal and cultural
relationship left them bereft of legitimacy and identity.

It created harmful impact on their personality. Yet, they managed to survive.
Undoubtedly, the Black American is the only American who had made to rely on the
American environment in order to recreate his identity. The Americanness of the Black is
reflected in their literature. They had White Americans’ institutions, values, and
traditions to cling to, or modify, or rebel against. These Blacks and their descendants
have been suffering centuries of humiliation and abuse and denial of their basic rights by
terror and evasion. They have been the victims of colour prejudice and social depriva
They have continued to fight against stubbornness and sophisticated manipulation of the
Whites by various methods and their literature forms the potent weapons in their crusade
and protest against social ills. When they document their own predicaments and the
persecution of their community, their writings reflect their social and cultural context.
Black American literary tradition is multidimensional. Here is the historical development
of their literature.

During their prolonged period of slavery, the Black Americans were too preoccupied
with the demands of survival to find much time for the formal pursuit of literary art. Yet,
they did, from the onset of their long struggle for citizenship, produce an informal
literature. Initially the literature produced by them was in oral form. Knowledge about the
past and about their customs and traditions of the group was transmitted orally in the
form of tales, proverbs, songs, and riddles from one generation to another.

It must be considered the oral tradition of their cultural expression – their folklore, the
rich body of stories and songs --- that has served as the source of much of their literary
inspiration. Nearly all Black American folklore is descended from African oral traditions.
Their folklore reveals a great deal about the way they viewed themselves and others, and about the ways that they have disguised their actual feelings and opinions from the society of Whites. The exaggerated tales of humor, legends of famous folk heroes, slave stories, animal tales, spirituals and work songs developed as a result of their oral tradition. The oral tradition gradually gave way to the written tradition in the history of American slavery. The first known piece of literature written by a black American is a short blank verse titled “Bars Fight”, which was written in 1746 by a sixteen-year-old servant-girl named Lucy Terry (1730-1821). Jupiter Hammon (1718-1806), in 1760, composed a poem entitled “An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries”, which was the first known work to be published in America by a Black. Throughout this, initial period black authors depended upon a white audience. So their work often reflected the stereotypes born of white presumption.

The Black writers of the eighteenth century living in New England did not experience the miseries of southern plantation. So they wrote relatively little on the subject of race which corresponded in subject or intensity to the black protest writing of the nineteenth century. They were committed to religious themes and overlooked the obvious evils of human servitude. Phillis Wheatley (1754 – 1784), The African-born servant of John Wheatley, was given educational opportunities because of her obvious intelligence. For this reason, she became well versed in the Bible and in the English classics. Her Poems on various subjects, Religious and Moral, was published in London in 1773.

While religion provided an avenue of escape from the realities of life, literature was clearly perceived as an important weapon by the slaves. They succeeded in articulating their plight and in exhibiting an imaginative capacity to use this weapon as a potent instrument for liberation. Slave narratives are the beginning of Afro-American literature. The slaves, by the help of new printing methods which had made writing career inexpensive, undertook writing their memories and expressing their own feelings of the racial oppression for the first time. Slave narratives reveal the historical context of the US at the time of slavery. They illustrate the illogical, irrational and unfair relationship between the White slaveholders and the oppressed Black slaves.
From 1830 to the end of the slavery era, the fugitive slave narrative dominated the literary landscape of Black America. To present the true reality of slavery, a number of former slaves such as Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass wrote slave narratives, which soon became a mainstay of African American literature. Some six thousand former slaves from North America and the Caribbean wrote accounts of their lives, with about 150 of these published as separate books or pamphlets. Slave narratives can be broadly categorized into three distinct forms: tales of religious redemption, tales to inspire the abolitionist struggle, and tales of progress. The tales written to inspire the abolitionist struggle are the most famous because they tend to have a strong autobiographical motif. Many of them are now recognized as the most literary of all 19th-century writings by African Americans, with two of the most well-known being Frederick Douglass's autobiography and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs (1861).

In 1827, the first Black newspaper *Freedom’s Journal* published in New York City, and in 1831 the most famous abolitionist newspaper, William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator*, was founded in Boston. George Moses Horton (1797-1883), whose collection of poetry, *Hope of Liberty* (1829) is considered to be one of the first works devoted largely to themes of protest. Slave memoirs were the dominant literary form published by Black Americans during the nineteenth century prior to the civil war. In 1852, the most influential novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, was published. Mrs. Stowe, a white American, a product of the intellectual aristocracy of New England is an example of the White American’s interest in the abolition of slavery. Her emphasis was clearly on the evils of slavery, the fragmentation of Black families by sale and the brutality. By giving flesh and blood reality to the inhuman system, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* proved to be a touchstone for antislavery sentiment.

In 1863, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation by the last decade of the nineteenth century. The social and literary climate for Black Americans in the north had changed gradually and enough education and stability had grown within the middle class to stimulate literary expression. This period was the first to produce writers who, in spite of persisting oppressive racial conditions, were able to maintain in their writing significant artistic detachment from those conditions. In spite of these dismal and
disastrous social conditions, a number of writers emerged during this period. Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) was a gifted poet whose blackness forced him into the production of verse in dialect and it was his dialect poetry which made him the best-known Black poet since Phillis Wheatley.

After the end of slavery and the American Civil War, a number of African American authors continued to write nonfiction works about the condition of African Americans in the country. Among the most prominent of these writers is W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963), one of the founders of the NAACP. At the turn of the century, Du Bois published a highly influential collection of essays titled *The Souls of Black Folk*. The book's essays on race were groundbreaking and drew from Du Bois's personal experiences to describe how African Americans lived in American society. Du Bois believed that African Americans should, because of their common interests, work together to battle prejudice and inequity.

Another prominent author of this time period is Booker T. Washington (1856–1915), who in many ways represented opposite views from Du Bois. Washington was an educator and the founder of the Tuskegee Institute, a Black college in Alabama. Among his published works are *Up From Slavery* (1901), *The Future of the American Negro* (1899), *Tuskegee and Its People* (1905), and *My Larger Education* (1911). In contrast to Du Bois, who adopted a more confrontational attitude toward ending racial strife in America, Washington believed that Blacks should first lift themselves up and prove themselves the equal of whites before asking for an end to racism. A third writer who gained attention during this period is Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), a publisher, journalist, and crusader for Black nationalism. He is best known as a champion of Black nationalism and the "back-to-Africa" movement, which encouraged people of African ancestry to return to their ancestral homeland. He wrote a number of essays and nonfiction books. Even though Du Bois, Washington, and Garvey were the leading African American intellectuals and authors of their time, other African American writers also rose to prominence. Among these is Charles W. Chesnutt, a well-known essayist.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, extensive racial injustices gave strong impetus to protest writing. From the editor's desk of the *Colored American Magazine*,

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Pauline E. Hopkins wrote novels, short stories, editorials, and social commentary in the early 1900s that attempted to revive the fervor of the anti-slavery era. In 1912 future NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson, poet, diplomat, and journalist, published anonymously *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. By the time the United States entered World War I in 1917, Harlem was well on its way to becoming what Johnson called the *greatest Negro city in the world* attracting key intellectual leaders and artists.

The phenomenon known as the Harlem Renaissance represented the flowering in literature and art of the New Negro movement of the 1920s. *The New Negro* (1925), an anthology edited by Alain Locke, featured the early work of some of the most gifted Harlem Renaissance writers, including the poets Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay and the novelists Rudolph Fisher, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jean Toomer. The “New Negro,” Locke announced, differed from the “Old Negro” in assertiveness and self-confidence. It led New Negro writers to question traditional “white” aesthetic standards, to cultivate personal self-expression, racial pride, and literary experimentation. Spurred by an unprecedented receptivity to black writing on the part of major American magazines, book publishers, and white patrons, the literary vanguard of the Harlem Renaissance enjoyed critical favor and financial rewards that lasted until well into the Great Depression of the 1930s.

A large migration of African Americans began during World War I, hitting its high point during World War II. During this Great Migration, Black people left the racism and lack of opportunities in the South and settled in northern cities like Chicago, where they found work in factories and other sectors of the economy. This migration produced a new sense of independence in the Black community and contributed to the vibrant Black urban culture seen during the Harlem Renaissance. The migration also empowered the growing American Civil Rights movement, which made a powerful impression on Black writers during the 1940s, ’50s and ’60s. Just as Black activists were pushing to end segregation and racism and create a new sense of Black nationalism, so too were Black authors attempting to address these issues with their writings.

One of the first writers to do so was James Baldwin, whose work addressed issues of race and sexuality. Baldwin, who is best known for his novel, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*,
wrote deeply personal stories and essays. In all, Baldwin wrote nearly 20 books. Baldwin's idol and friend was author Richard Wright, whom Baldwin called the greatest Black writer of his time. Wright is best known for his novel, *Native Son* (1940), which tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a Black man struggling for acceptance in Chicago. Baldwin was so impressed by the novel that he titled a collection of his own essays, *Notes of a Native Son*, in reference to Wright's novel. The other great novelist of this period is Ralph Ellison, best known for his novel, *Invisible Man*, which won the National Book Award in 1953.

The Civil Rights time period also saw the rise of female Black poets, most notably Gwendolyn Brooks, who became the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize when it was awarded for her 1949 book of poetry, *Annie Allen*. Along with Brooks, other female poets who became well known during the 1950s and '60s are Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez. During this time, a number of playwrights also came to national attention, notably Lorraine Hansberry, whose play, *A Raisin in the Sun* focuses on a poor Black family living in Chicago. The play won the 1959 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Another playwright who gained attention was Amiri Baraka, who wrote controversial off-Broadway plays. It is also worth noting that a number of important essays and books about human rights were written by the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.

Black Panther Party (1966), led by Huey Newton and Bobby Seal also influenced the undercurrents of literature. They also supported the Black Power movement and its exponents. It stressed racial dignity and self-reliance. The Black Panther Party combined elements of socialism and black nationalism, insisting that if businesses and the government did not provide for full employment, the community should take over the means of production. It promoted the development of strong black-controlled institutions, calling for blacks to work together to protect their rights and to improve their economic and social conditions. The Black Panther Party also emphasized class unity, criticizing the black middle class for acting against the interests of other.

In the beginning of the 1970s, African American literature reached the mainstream as books by Black writers continually achieved best-selling and award-winning status.
African American writers were also accepted by academia, with numerous colleges and universities offering courses in African American literature. Among the first books to top the bestseller lists was *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley. Haley also wrote *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in 1965. In 1982, novelist and poet Alice Walker won both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for her novel, *The Color Purple*. One of the most important African American writers in recent years is Toni Morrison. As a New York editor in the 1960s and '70s, Morrison helped promote Black literature. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970. Among her most famous novels is *Beloved*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. Morrison is the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Other important writers in recent years include literary fiction writers Gayl Jones, Ishmael Reed, Jamaica Kincaid, Randall Kenan, and John Edgar Wideman. African American literature has also crossed over to genre fiction, such as the crime novels of Walter Mosley and science fiction of Samuel R. Delany and Octavia E. Butler. African American poets have also garnered attention, with Maya Angelou reading a poem at Bill Clinton's inauguration, Rita Dove winning the Pulitzer Prize.

Thus African American literature is literature written by, about and, sometimes for African Americans. Poems, short stories, autobiographies, novels and plays written by African Americans provide a unique window into the Black experience. Most slaves were denied the opportunity to learn. The achievement of literacy, and especially the publication of poetry and autobiographies, demonstrated many people that Blacks had the ability to create works of literary merit and achieve the same accomplishments as Whites. Now African American literature is accepted as an integral part of American writings. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

**Afro-American Poetry: A Brief Overview:**

Given the secondary position of persons of African descent throughout their history in America, it could be argued that all efforts of creative writers from that group are forms of protest. In other words, the intention of protest literature was—and remains—to show inequalities among races and socio-economic groups in America and to encourage a transformation in the society that promotes such inequalities. For African Americans, that
inequality gave birth to slavery. Poetry is one of the media through which writers address such issues, as there are forms of protest fiction, drama, essays, and anything else that African Americans wrote—and write. Since this category is so large, three arenas of protest poetry will constitute its parameters. The first deals with protest poetry during slavery, the second with protest poetry during the period of segregation and Jim Crow, and the third with protest poetry after political obstacles to gain equality.

Protesting against slavery came easily to most African American writers who took up pens before 1865. One of the primary objectives of Black writing during slavery was to bring about the end of slavery. Among protestor poets during slavery, scholars debate about the extent to which Phillis Wheatley, the first published African American poet (publishing in the 1760s and 1770s), should be included in that category. After him, more prominent in the poetic protest vein during slavery is George Moses Horton. By the time he published his second volume of poetry in 1845, he was skilled in the art. His first volume, *The Hope of Liberty* published in 1829 was the first volume of poetry published by an enslaved person who could not read or write. Horton also later published *On Hearing of the Intention of a Gentleman to Purchase the Poet’s Freedom*, which is more a series of reflections upon enslavement than a direct appeal. He makes his dissatisfaction with slavery clear and his hope for relief equally.

Although their poems were published following slavery, both Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Paul Laurence Dunbar had much to imagine in verse about how things had been for their enslaved ancestors. In poems such as *The Slave Auction*, *The Slave Mother* and *Bury Me in a Free Land*, Harper paints heart-grabbing pictures of the separation of families and the yearnings for freedom for which blacks longed during slavery. Although Dunbar is criticized frequently for writing in the traditional way and portraying enslaved Blacks who seem to enjoy their enslavement, he also has poems in which protest of slavery is clear.

Poets of the Harlem Renaissance take up where Harper and Dunbar leave off in the second category of protest during segregation and the Jim Crow eras. Directly addressing contemporary conditions, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, and a host
of others such as James Weldon Johnson, Gwendolyn Bennett, Angelina Weld Grimke, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Anne Spencer, and Jean Toomer comment on the social and economic conditions of a people doomed to second class citizenship by the violence that victimizes them. They also depicted the socioeconomic conditions that keep them locked in poverty, and the unwavering resentment that turns hope into resignation when they leave the violent South for what they anticipate is a more receptive and tolerant North. Hughes depicts the violence that prompts Black folk to move to the North (One-Way Ticket, Bound No’th Blues), the resistance they meet there (Ballad of the Landlord) and their resignation to inner-city living (Harlem). On the other hand McKay portrays graphic images of lynching (The Lynching), denial of citizenship (If We Must Die), an unwelcoming America (Baptism, Tiger, America, The White House), and an equally unwelcoming north (Harlem Shadows).

Countee Cullen joined Hughes and McKay in criticizing conditions for African Americans. While the general assertiveness of the 1920s showcased Blacks who demanded equal rights and supported the NAACP’s campaigns, the 1930s are officially labeled the decade of protest, probably owing to Richard Wright’s hard-hitting critical prose of the period, especially in his collection of short stories entitled Uncle Tom’s Children (1938). The thirties were less dramatic than the 1920s or the 1960s for African American protest poetry, but some poets are worth mentioning. The most prominent of them is Sterling A. Brown. His graphic depictions of sharecropping existence in Southern Road (1932) paint vividly the limits on human possibility as well as on the human spirit.

The 1940s brought the advent of Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker, both of whom wrote and published poetry for the rest of the twentieth century. Brooks concentrated on the thousands of Blacks migrated from the South to the south side of Chicago. In addition to Brooks and Walker, Robert Hayden and Melvin Tolson provide glimpses of protest in their poetry of the 1940s through the 1960s. Hayden’s poem Middle Passage looks back in its protest to the point of African enslavement in the New World. In an appealing poem of multiple voices, Hayden explores what the transportation of Black bodies meant to the transporters as well as to those enslaved.
Hayden, Tolson, Brooks, and Walker, publishing through the 1960s, joined younger poets such as Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Etheridge Knight, Haki R. Madhubuti and many others in their militant protestations during the Black Aesthetic and the Black Arts Movement. Afro-American poetry in this third period is so vehement that official segregation and other presumed barriers to inequality between blacks and whites almost ended. Baraka, who began his publishing career in the 1950s and shared poetic sentiments and acquaintances, became the iconic figure of protest of the 1960s, in a variety of genres. His most militant poem is entitled *Black Art*. Expansive in his multi-pronged attacks on a racist, capitalist society, Baraka became the poster writer of protest of the 1960s. The 1960s were perhaps the height of protest poetry in the sense of a traditional meaning of protest. Post-1960s poets, such as Pulitzer-Prize winners Rita Dove and Yusef Komunyakaa, are less inclined to overt protest.

Thus, there are hundreds of contemporary African American poets and thousands of poems, from spoken word artists to additional award winners such as Natasha Trethewey, who won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 2007. This survey barely scratches the surface of what can be considered protest poetry in African American literature. It simply highlights some of the significant poets and poems, as well as some of the subjects and patterns of protest. One place to start is with Cave Canem, a collective of young poets founded by poet and essayist Toi Derricote. Many contemporary published poets worked on their first books in workshops sponsored by Cave Canem. With their teaching and publishing records, and with individuals having passed through the workshops for more than a decade, they have had a substantial impact upon the current state of African American poetry. Another resource is the Furious Flower Poetry Center, currently housed at James Madison University. Director Joanne V. Gabbin sponsored international poetry conferences on that campus in 1994 and 2004; she has amassed a wealth of material for scholars and readers. (African American Protest Poetry n.pag.)

- **Historical Background of Dalits:**

For centuries Indian society has been the most hierarchical among the known civilizations, the literature of this country has never focused on the problems of the
‘untouchables’, one of the groups located at the bottom of the hierarchy. The pen has been in the hands of those who wielded power, while those outside the grid of authority have generally been rendered invisible, even unmentionable, in the so-called literary texts. Thus, the untouchables of India have continued to remain neglected and expelled in literature in the society.

The ancient Indian scriptures imposed a series of social, economic and religious restrictions on the lower classes, making the untouchables completely dependent on those above them. As a result, Panchamas (the untouchables as denoting the fifth varna) long lived a life full of physical degradation, insults and personal and social humiliation. They were relegated to menial occupations, lived outside the village and fed on leftovers of the high caste people. Physical contact with the untouchables was said to be ‘polluting’ and worse, even their shadows were considered ‘defiling’. Even as late as early part of the twentieth century, the untouchables had no access to public facilities such as wells, rivers, roads, schools and markets etc. The cruelest rule was that which compelled the untouchables to tie an earthen pot around their neck so that their sputum did not fall to the earth and pollute others; another demeaning practice was the compulsion to tie a broom behind them so that their footprints would be erased before others set their eyes on them. None of these issues were taken into account in the literature produced by upper-caste Hindu writers.

The term ‘Dalit’ is found in several Indian languages, and as a Marathi word, it is found in Moleworth’s Marathi-English dictionary of 1975, a reprint of the 1813 edition. It gives the meaning as ‘ground, broken or reduced to pieces generally’. It derives from a Sanskrit word meaning ‘crushed’ and is understood in all the Indian languages that are derived from Sanskrit. It has been said that Sanskrit has borrowed the root word ‘dal’ from Hebrew. ‘Dal’ in Hebrew may be used in two senses: ‘It may refer either to physical weakness or to a lowly, insignificant position in society’. When ‘dal’ is used in combination with another Hebrew root-word ‘anti, it describes an economic relationship.

But a lot of confusion prevails on what qualifying term ‘Dalit’ would or should or could mean in the context of its current socio-political and literary use. In short, Dalits are broken, crushed and torn apart so much so that they are unable to rise and be better
themselves. But journey of the term ‘untouchable’ takes turn when Britishers in the Government of India Act, 1935 used its English translation as ‘Depressed classes’ to mean downtrodden people of India who were referred as ‘Harijan’ by the grace of Mahatma Gandhi. These are the people stigmatized as ‘untouchable’ and made ‘outcast’ by the high-caste Hindus, suffering from operation, exploitation and segregation. ‘Dalit’ is now widely used in place of the word ‘untouchable’. Over the years, there have been several terms used to describe the people of untouchable community, such as ‘Ati-Shudra’, ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘exterior castes’, ‘outcastes’, ‘depressed classes’ ‘extouchables’ and so on. Dalits feel that these terms coined by the upper-caste Hindus, officials, and social reformers were abusive in nature and synonymous with derogation, domination and paternalism. As a matter of fact, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar used the term ‘Dalit’ for the first time in an opposition to the term ‘Harijan’. This is why the people belonging to this category prefer to describe themselves as Dalits, which includes all aspects of operation. Eleanor Zelliot writes:

“The Marathi word ‘Dalit’, like the word ‘Black’, was chosen by the group itself…Dali (refers to) those have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, Karma, and justified caste hierarchy.”

(Zelliot, 1)

Sensing the loaded distinction Dr. Ambedkar takes up the word to construct a new, respectful identity for the untouchables of India in preference to the term ‘Harijan’ which means the children of God. Some found Gandhi’s word derogatory as they referred to a far-fetched connotation to Devdasi system when Dalit girls were used as prostitutes by the Brahmin priests in the temples and their illegitimate children were called ‘children of God’, that is ‘Harijan’. It is sad to indict Gandhi however, as the word is used in many bhajans of medieval Bhakti poets including Meera and Narsinh Mehta with the meaning of ‘virtuous man’, ‘righteous man’, ‘God fearing man’ as against its antonym ‘Durjan’.

Gandhi indeed borrowed the term from one of the bhajans of Gujarati saint poet Narsinh Mehta. But the journey of the word ‘Dalit’ does not end there.
Over the ages especially after the post-Ambedkar era of political activism, the connotation and interpretation of the term ‘Dalit’ have been changing. For example, Namdeo Dhasal, the noted Marathi poet and one of the leaders of Dalit Panther Movement, infused the term with a leftist vision to include not just the Scheduled Castes but also the economically oppressed classes like the Scheduled Tribes, Neo-Buddhists, landless laborers, and others. Marxists like Dhasal would define Dalits in terms of class, generally including women, tribals, workers in industries and agricultural workers. Religious minorities think they were compelled to convert themselves to egalitarian religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism to escape caste operation and to seek equality and dignity in their new religions.

These are only a few instances of how the concept ‘Dalit’ has been interpreted by some Dalit scholars. Whatever may be the definition, the term refers to the conditions of a group of people who have been subjected to all forms of operation-social, political, economic, cultural and religious. Furthermore, the inhuman treatment meted out to Dalits is cosmic and are not confined to one locale or nation or period. Its connotation is everlasting.

➢ **Caste System (Varnavyavastha)**

Human history is a record of suffering and unspeakable violence caused by man to his fellow human beings. This human suffering is the common theme in literature and art as suffering is linked with human existence. Suffering is the common lot of mankind. It may be due to draught, famine, earthquakes, diseases or sudden deaths of near and dear ones due to accidents. But the suffering caused to men by fellow human beings is the most terrifying aspect of human existence. The most painful paradox of human life is that man-created suffering is far more intense and more painful than the suffering caused by nature.

Social inequalities on the basis of caste, class, race and gender is obviously a man-made phenomenon. Looking at the history of the world, it can be seen that the victorious and the strong have always exploited and oppressed and the weak ones. The wealthy and
powerful have continued to crush the downtrodden and the suppressed. The history of mankind is full of exploitation, discrimination, unequal economic and social structures. There prevails an atmosphere where religious, cultural and political violence is meted out to the poor, the exploited and the underdogs of the society. In many countries of the world such exploitative systems existed in one or the other form. The system of slavery was in Greece, Egypt, Europe, America, India and China. The Whites in America subjugated the Afro-Americans. The colonizers exploited the colonized. In India also, the laborers, servants were treated offensively and horribly. In India, the slaves or servants were reduced to lowest rung called ‘Shudras’.

In Indian society, a caste is different from class. Caste system is not based on economy or wealth but birth and parentage. In this sense, untouchables are landless, poor workers who have been exploited politically, culturally and economically in the name of religion. The Aryans who came to India were culturally advanced and their conquest over local people played role in creating the caste system. As the Aryan domination spread in India, hierarchical caste system also became stronger.

The system of Chaturvarna (four fold caste) existed in the Vedic period. According to it, the Brahmins were born from the mouth of the Brahma, the Kshatriyas from the arms, the Vaishyas from the thighs and Sudras from his feet. Thus the Brahmins rank the highest while the Sudras the lowest. The Brahmins were the proponents of this theory and they accredit it to God. They held that this system is not man-made but God-made. In Manusmriti, Manu the staunch supporter of Varnashram codified this system and made the birth and parentage the basis of caste. This rigid, irrational caste system gave birth to the outcastes and downtrodden. It seems that the scriptures have either been destroyed or misinterpreted by Brahmins and Pandits who wanted to maintain their superiority over the less educated and less skilled. Over time, the caste system was formalized into four distinct classes (varnas). At the top of the hierarchy are the Brahmins, who are considered arbiters in matters of learning, teaching, and religion. Next in line are the Kshatriyas, who are warriors and administrators. The third category is Vaisyas, who belong to the artisan and commercial class. Finally, the Sudras (Backward Caste) are farmers and peasants.
Swami Dayanand Saraswati in *Satyarth Prakash* interprets the Varnashram in the following way:

“…the function of a Brahmana is to study and to teach the science of Brahma (or spiritual truth). He performs the function as he cannot do otherwise, as is the law of his being. That secures him his livelihood, but he will take it as a gift of God. A Kshatriya will perform the function of protecting the people in the same spirit, accepting for his livelihood whatever the people can afford to give him. A Vaishya will pursue wealth-protecting occupation for the welfare of the community, keeping for himself enough for his own maintenance and rendering the balance to the community in one shape or other. A Sudra will perform physical labour in the same spirit of service.”

(Nimavat, 12-13)

However, according to Gandhiji, no varna confers the idea of superiority. He believed that all varnas are equal as the community is interdependent. In spite of reformative views of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the Brahmosamaj and Prarthana Samaj, the Indian society remained stratified and then the reformations proved to be weak and instead of focusing on the upliftment of the downtrodden and Dalits. Sanjay Saksena, therefore, remarks:

“Caste is a creation of religion or *dharma* and it is *dharma* that holds the caste system together and prevents it from disintegrating and breaking up, derives sustenance from literary productions that come into existence more than two thousand years ago and continue to (mis)guide our society. *Manusmriti*: this literary text attributed to Manu continued to be reproduced orally and in writing, believed in for centuries by the dalits as well as those who belong to the upper castes, perpetrating the notion of purity and pollution, superior and inferior due to birth in a particular caste.

(Saksena, 43)
Historical Development of Dalit Literature:

Dalit literature is considered to be one of the emerging branches of India literature, is basically a product of socio-cultural, political changes in India. Though it began in Maharashtra, with great efforts of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, gradually it emerged in the other states of India also. At present Dalit literature is written in different regional languages such as Marathi, Kannada, Gujarati, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, Punjabi and Hindi including English. Dalit literature is a field which had drawn the attention not only of Indian critics and writers but of foreign critics and writers too. A number of Dalit texts have been translated and published by mainstream publishers such as Sage, Macmillan, Penguin and Oxford University Press and their numbers are increasing day by day. Dalit literature is an established genre in literature of this century. It is unique because it expresses the reality of that experience which had remained disregarded by the mainstream writings.

Dalit literature holds an important place in Indian literature. As a matter of fact, it is the literature produced by a section or a group. The Dalit writer does not write as an individual but as a member of a social group. Dalit writings are not tales of an individual’s sufferings but of a group or section. These writings describe sufferings and trauma of the whole Dalit community. It is always marked by revolt and negativism, as it is linked with hopes for freedom of a group of people who are unfortunate groups of social, economic and cultural inequality. Dalit literature is not only a literature of protest and rejection, but also a literature of the reconstruction of the past.

The history of Dalit writers in India means an account of the rise of Dalit writers in their native country. Dalits as a matter of fact have a significant literary treasure of their own but not in written form. Unfortunately, one cannot find any account of their lives as well their people in their literature. It is also a fact that Indian literature is not comprehensive and all-embracing as it deals with life and emotions of Brahmins. It does not talk about the life and aspirations of the Shudras, especially of the downtrodden people, even if they form nearly one forth of the Indian population. Such Brahmins and the so-called literary elites in the past had never allowed their pen to depict the life of untouchables. This has,
therefore, made the whole of Indian literature, the literature of the Brahmins. Their literature is not only about the Hindu kings and queens but about the kings and queens of other religions in India. Dalits are never shown in their literature on the grounds that untouchables should be treated like that according to the orders and practices of *Manusmriti*. For ages together, they were not allowed to learn and without acquiring sufficient education it was impossible for them to write about their sentiments. The Dalit writers therefore have to start from non-existence and from total ban on their learning to beginning of learning and taking education and becoming writers. For this reason, in the vast land of India, no untouchable was literate until the mid-nineteenth century. It is very difficult for anyone to guess that whether there existed Dalit literature in written form in older times or not.

At present the term ‘Dalit’ has now reached all the corners of India and it has also attracted foreign literary scholars and academicians. Unfortunately, in its own native land, it has a dismal and gloomy name and the people still consider the Dalits as the people belonging to the lower status in society. In etymology and in the dictionaries of all Indian languages, it has a derogatory meaning, so also in the literary works of traditional Indian writers it has no place. But it was Babasaheb Ambedkar who started his writing on the tragedies and agonies of Dalits. He firmly believed that the rights and disabilities were not based on general uniform considerations. According to him, they were based on communal considerations. During all these times, even from ancient times this untouchability has been entertained and protected by the Hindu rulers as a part of their main duty of preserving and protecting Dharma i.e. Hinduism. But it was only in the British regime that the royal protection to Hinduism was discontinued and caste system challenged.

➢ **Dalit Writers in Pre-Ambedkar Period**

No Brahmin was willing to teach the Dalits, though an act of removing social disabilities made in 1850 and the Queen’s Proclamation of 1857 which proved to be an important landmark in the history of India. Then comes for their help the most courageous native, Mahatma Jyotirao Govindra Phule (1827-1890). He determined to eradicate caste system and establish social equality in the Indian society. He also became a victim of casteism as
he was Shudra, a Mali which was considered above the untouchables. He opened schools, the first one in India for the untouchable of Pune in 1851. Simultaneously, he worked for the awakening of the masses and social reforms. He is the first among the non-Brahmins in India who started the social reform movement known as the ‘Satya Shodhak Samaj’ on 23rd September 1873 at Pune. He wrote in the same period a good number of pamphlets and books. His famous books Gulamgiri—slavery, Shetkaryancha Aasud – Peasant’s Whip, Sarvajanik Satya Dharma—Universal True religion, and other bear testimony to the desire of non-Brahmins for reconstructing India on the basis of the classless society. As a writer he is epoch-making because it is he who visualized India as a democratic nation after the British. In understanding and interpreting Hindu scriptures, he stands as a unique visionary and a harbinger of the non-Brahmin and Dalit writers.

It is true that literature is a vast and unlimited field. It is and must be open to all. However, no man can acquire the art of writing unless he has freedom to learn. In India, in all periods except the Buddhist period, the non-Brahmins and untouchables have been prevented from learning. Thus because of the want of learning no writers were produced in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the second half, during the British regime in India, for the first time non-Brahmins started writing. Next to Mahatma Phuley stands Krisnarao Bhalekar who started a non-Brahmin newspaper Deen Bandhu in 1888 from Mumbai. Many more non-Brahmins and Dalits were inspired by Mahatma Phule. The movement was further led by Shahu Chatrapati, the ninth king of the Kolhapur, in Maharashtra. He is pioneer of the social democracy as Dr. Ambedkar states in one of his letters. The Shahu of Kolhapur started schools and Boarding houses for the non-Brahmins and the Dalits. He also started a movement for asserting the religious rights of the non-Brahmins, which later on converted into the ‘Brahmanettar’ movement. As a result non-Brahmins and Dalits got inspiration to express their respective viewpoints through their writings.

Slowly and steadily, Dalits started writing and publishing their agonies, hardships and inhuman treatment given to them by the Brahmins through pamphlets and small booklets from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In Maharashtra, Gopalbaba Valangkar, a Mahar by caste and retired Hawaldar from the British Army wrote a booklet bearing the
title Vital Vidhransak Pustika in 1888 and some articles about the tragic life of his people in the Marathi weekly Deen Bandhu, edited by Narayanarao Lokhande from Mumbai. Gopal Baba criticized the Brahmin superiority over the Hindus and holds them responsible for the degradation of his own people and how Brahmins have ruined them and grabbed power and prestige. He boldly asked them to understand the Brahmins and stand united to fight against them.

There had been some other important Dalit writers in Pre-Ambedkar period belonging to several parts of India. Pandit Kondiram and Kisan Phagoji Bansod from the central provinces have also attacked the Brahmins through their writing. Gopalbaba Valangkar is the only writer of those days writing in English who organized public opinion against the stoppage of untouchable youth’s recruitment into British army. Shivaram Janaba Kamble from Pune has also made sincere intellectual efforts through his writing and social reform activities. His writings are the testimony of his career as a Dalit writer of great intelligence. But overall contribution of all those Dalit writers to literature is rather negligible, as it was just the beginning of the Dalit literature.

Diversity in language is found among regional groups in India and in each of such groups the untouchables have the language of that region and sometimes their own. It is therefore always difficult to study all the languages and find out names of Dalit writers of different regions in India in pre-Ambedkar times. In pre-Ambedkar period, the Dalits remained ununified and so no movement either of the literary activity or social reform took place as it did after the rise of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar. To him, it was not Marathi, his mother tongue that helped him; it was through English language that he created a united front and a unifying force for all the Dalits in India. However, it is found from the writing of Dalits in different parts of India, that there is the same voice and expressions of agonies and tragedies under the religious slavery of Hindus. In the erstwhile Hyderabad state of Nizam, next to Bombay Presidency of that time, Dalits had started their social and literary activities in pre-Ambedkar times. In the context of India as a whole and the Dalits having their identity of their own as oppressed community in India during that period, no magnetic power of leadership existed to unite them and inspire to write and even to make them fight for their rights.
Because of the age-old sense of inferiority among the Dalits, no Dalit writer stood on all-India-level to inspire and instruct his brethren to fight against their legitimate rights both in Indian society and literary field. The Dalits still continued the life of slavery under the upper castes. For a longer period of time, they did not get their voice. There remained a tremendous vacuum in literature, an absence of the life of the untouchables. Thus, the untouchables do not have rich heritage in the literature. Even though some efforts were made by some writers, they did not grow as a live wire in the literary field. However, it is to be admitted that in the caste ridden and Brahmin dominated Hindu society, the efforts of known and unknown Dalit writers in pre-Ambedkar period have done useful service to express the aspirations of their awakened brethren.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Milestone of Dalit Literature

There is a clear-cut distinction between the literature produced in pre-Ambedkar era and after the rise of Dr. Ambedkar. Truly, Dr. Ambedkar proved to be one of the landmarks and the most influential personality who revolted against the orthodox traditions of Hindu culture. It was he who earnestly tried to free the Dalits from the Hindu orthodoxy and greatly inspired them to give up the traditional way of life and acquire the art of writing. All that Ambedkar wanted to achieve through his social and literary activities was to make Dalits assert their position as human beings.

Truly, Dr. Ambedkar was a versatile genius whose rise and life-time is the real foundation period of the all-round rise and growth of Dalits in India. Dr. Ambedkar has to his credit a very rich and unparalleled golden heritage of writings on varied subjects and more particularly on the ancient Hindu scriptures. One of the most striking features of his writing is that he has brought out the drawbacks and contradictions reflected in the Hindu scriptures and literature. Along with this, he has evolved his own theories to establish a new philosophy and even to create counter attacks. His was the main aim to create a humane atmosphere in India and to unite various social forces which the so-called Brahmins created in the name of religion and Hinduism. In addition to this, to set free the downtrodden and making them stronger enough to play their roles in the national life of India had been the most important message he wanted to give to the Dalits through his writing. He wanted to bring forth to them the unity and integrity. Even it was also his
strong wish to make India as the strong nation through social and economic revolution without the riots and bloodshed. His writings and speeches display his enormous intellectual ability and wisdom. That’s why he holds an important position in Indian literature. For this reason only, all Dalit writers regard him in high esteem as the pioneering figure of Dalit literature.

Dr. Ambedkar was also one of the pioneering figures in drafting the Constitution of India and thus honored as the chief architect of the Constitution. He inspired so many Dalit writers to emerge in the intellectual pursuits and literature. His well-known works, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, *Who were the Shudras*, *Annihilation of the Caste*, *The Problem of Rupee in British India*, *Thoughts on Pakistan* and so many others which were published by the Maharashtra Government stand as the beginning of new epoch in an Independent India. The Dalit writers had great task before them which was to carry handed to them by Ambedkar.

### Dalit Literature and Literary Movements after Dr. Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar proved to be promoter and champion of the Dalits because he was the first to break Sanatan Hindu tradition. His academic and literary achievements are the source of pride, prestige and inspiration to the Dalits. Firstly, the Dalits were considered to be ineligible for learning. But it was Dr. Ambedkar who heralded the dawn of new vistas to the Dalits and thus paved the way for writing something creatively by seeking education. Thus Dr. Ambedkar stands as an ideal for the people of downtrodden community.

Bhimrao Kardak, born in 1904 in Nasik was a poet, balladeer and a writer in his own way. He is of the opinion that it had been a thrilling experience for him to attend the public meetings of Dr. Ambedkar. In one of the poems written by him, he regarded Dr. Ambedkar as a God. Therefore, Dr. Ambedkar is more revered and is very dear to the Dalit heart. Naturally one will find the earlier Dalit writers paying their tribute and sense of gratitude to Dr. Ambedkar in their writings for his great help in their upliftment and progress. The rise of such writers comes under the first phase as it starts from the Mahad Satyagrah of 1927. The pioneering figures of this phase were Jalasakar K.K. Salri, Valangkar, Bhimrao Kardak, L.G. Salave-Vahurkar, C.B. Khairmode and many more.
A number of Dalit writers seem to have increased in the second phase. But their writings did not find chances of publication till Ambedkar started his weekly paper *Janata* in 1930. They shared common themes in their writings. The themes chosen by them are the natural outcome of their expressions. They have created their own world in all forms of literature - short stories, poems, ballads, novels, biographies, autobiographies, drama, and historical writings. Their academic qualifications vary from fourth standard to Ph.D. degrees. Their social stratus varies from ordinary farm laborers, textile mill workers, teachers, professors to university Vice-Chancellor, I.A.S. officers and advocates. Obviously, no theme of their social interests and interests of their community remains untouched by them.

One of the staunch followers of Dr. Ambedkar, Mr. Shankarrao Kharat, was given unique and recognized honor of presiding over all India Marathi Sahitya Sammelan—the annual gathering of the Marathi writers. His autobiography *Taral Antaral* is read in all circles of society. It deals with the Dalit life, especially that of Mahars in Maharashtra. Like Shankarrao Kharat, Professor Angane Lal from Lucknow was also a Vice-Chancellor and has written many books on philosophy and history. Mr. Bhagwan Das from Delhi, L.R. Bag from Jallandhar, Dr. Munshilal Gautam from Aligarh, Keshav Meshram and Dr, Gangadhar Pantawane from Aurangabad, Geeta Nagbhushan from Karnataka, Namdeo Dhasal, Raosaheb Kasabe, Vasant Rajas, Professor Parameshwar from Hyderabad, Dr. Jamnadas Khobragade from Chandrapur and many more legendary figures have created their new history in their writing.

Thus Dalit writers have created a revolutionary fervor in modern times and created their image in all the languages. In all parts of Indian subcontinent, there are Dalit writers who have portrayed the whole of the holy India through their writing and literary movements. They all are hypnotized by the thoughts and preaching of Dr. Ambedkar. They have now mastered the art of writing through which they want to liberate their people from the Dark world the so-called Brahmins and Hinduism created for ages. They want to stand by those who have suffered and are suffering from negligence, inhumanity and injustice. Many of them namely Shankarananda Shastri, Dr. Sukhdeo Thorat, Geeta Nagbhushan, D.P. Das, and hundreds of others have been recognized as established writers. Humanity
has been the central theme these writers deal with in their writings. In this reference Dr. M.N. Wankhede quotes: “The pens of the Dalit writers are ready as levers, to lift the people’s democracy out of the mud of anarchy.” (Wankhede, 53)

**Gujarati Dalit Poetry - A Brief Overview:**

Generally Dalit literature is understood as the literature produced by the Dalit consciousness. A cry and the anguish are the main characteristic features of this literature. It is believed that the Dalit literature is the literature of rebellion against the suppression and an inhuman humiliation suffered by the Dalits due to rigid monstrous framework of *Varna System*. The Dalit consciousness aims to bring about changes in their society. Though it expresses anguish and agonies, there is an optimistic tone in it. It does not project individualistic suffering but the collective plights of the untouchables who have been suffering the agonies worse than the animals in the Indian social order. A Dalit poet has certain aims, commitments, the Dalit vision and the Dalit insight. It is true that mere commitment or a sense of rebellion does not create poetry. It is the vision of the literary craftsmanship makes it artistically appealing.

Truly, Gujarati Dalit poetry has come out with such vision and has remained successful in bringing about awareness about Dalit problems among the Dalits. It has also been successful in creating awareness among them about their creative potential and strengths to conquer their limitations and bondages that kept them chained. As a matter of fact, Marathi Dalit literature was created under the influence of Dr. Amedkar and his efforts to free the untouchables from age-old slavery and humiliations. Gujarati Dalit literature in true sense came into existence around 1975. There were some poets projecting the sufferings of the Dalits under the influence of Gandhiji who had been antagonist to the system of untouchability. He considered it to be a curse of Hindu society. Before 1975, there were poets who also presented the plight of the oppressed. The mainstream poets wrote about the problems of the downtrodden out of sympathy. There had been a tone of pity. Even Gandhiji called them *Daridra Narayan* and praised the untouchables as *Harijan*. The poets like Karsandas Manek, Shridharani, Sundaram, Umashankar Joshi and Zaverchand Meghani depicted the feelings of helplessness of the oppressed.
However, the overall mindset of the upper caste Hindus had not changed even after the three decades of the independence.

Dalit poetry in Gujarat came into existence when mainstream literature was deeply involved in false beautification. All progressive writers have no doubt shown their deep concern for the oppressed people but they have failed to capture the deep-rooted helplessness and humiliation they have undergone. Dalit poets expressed their anguish and deep cry for the first time with sincerity and gentility. The mainstream Gujarati writers, poets and critics took no note of their voice for a long time deliberately. They went even to the extent of mocking it as an unnecessary exclusion of literature. They believed that it must be viewed only as a part of mainstream Gujarati literature. It has been encouraged by the medieval Indian poets like Kabir, Tukaram and political ideology of Dalit writers like Kansiram. The Dalit poets have now started reevaluating their history and mythology in their own perspective. There have been attempts to study the Hindu scriptures and Holy Books like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata from Dalit point of view. Eklavya, Shambook, Karna, Satyavati have seen as representing the humiliation in Gujarati Dalit poems.

Even it is quite noticeable that those critics who opposed the term ‘Dalit Literature’ who forget that they did not raise their voice against the terms like ‘Jain Literature’, ‘Charani Literature’, ‘Parsi Literature’, ‘Kabirpanthi Sahitya’. It shows that they wanted to be the dominating figures among the oppressed people. However this controversy instigated the eminent critics and poets like Harish Mangalam, Dalpat Chauhan, Pravin Gadhavi, Joseph Macwan, Dr. Pathik Parmar and many more who gave theoretical validity and support to the Dalit literature. Like Marathi Dalit literature, Gujarati Dalit literature also started with poetry. Later Dalit fiction writing and short stories also made their remarkable progress. Poetry became the strong medium of a sense of revolt and an acute agony of the oppressed. Modern Dalit poetry has been a conscious team work of organized and committed artists. Joseph Macwan believes that Dalit poet is fully aware what he is doing. According to him, the Dalit poet wants no borrowed titles, honors. He just wants to eradicate the age-old thorny bushes of inequality and oppression. The Dalit poet is ready to use any tool that is handy and easily accessible. His miseries are no less
than epics and his life is full of long narrative tragic poems. His is the goal to demolish the inhuman tradition that has plagued his entire community.

Poets like Harish Mangalam observe that the Dalit poets have intense social consciousness. They have worked intensively to remove the cobwebs that have enveloped the process of social upliftment. It is true that Gujarati Dalit literature was influenced by the Marathi Dalit literature in the beginning. ‘Dalit Panthers’ movement in Maharashtra strongly influenced the major poets of Guajarat in the beginning. The magazines like Panther, Akrosh, Garud, Kalo Suraj, Dalit Bandhu, Ajampo, Mukti Nayak, Disha, Naya Marg, Dalit Mitra, Dalit Mukt, Hayati have played a vital role in the development of Gujarati Dalit poetry. Chingari is the first Gujarati collection of Dalit poetry published in 1982. In 1981, Dalit Kavita was edited by Ganpat Parmar and Manishi Jani. Chandu Maheria and Balkrishna Anand edited another collection of poetry in 1982 titled Visfot. Chandu Maheria edited Asmita in 1983, Raju Solanki edited Eklavya no Angutho in 1987. Nilesh Kathad edited a collection of poems titled Manas (1992) and a collection of Dalit poems Dandubi has been edited by Dalpat Chauhan, Harish Mangalam and Pravin Gadhavi. During these years, individual collections have appeared at a steady pace. The major collections of poetry by the Dalit poets are as follows:

Kesariya Tashar nu Akash – Madhukant Kalpit (1979)
Balatkar- Suresh Baria (1980)
Taleti- Jayanti Parmar (1981)
Yayawari- Shyam Sadhu (1981)
To Pachhi- Dalpat Chauhan (1983)
Kyan Chhe Suraj- Dalpat Chauhan (2000)
Vyatha Pachisi Ek- Sahil Parmar (1984)
Atyacharo Thava Do- Babaldas Chavda (1984)
Sparsh Ni Mahek- Raman Vaghela (1984)
Bayonet- Pravin Gadhavi (1985)
Padachhayo- Pravin Gadhavi (1986)
Asavadwip- Pravin Gadhavi (1996)
Tuneer- Pravin Gadhavi (2000)
Mashal- Raju Solanki (1987)
Vishadita- Ganesh Sindhav (1987)
Angala Na Ansu- Jivan Thakore (1990)
Phool No Paryay- Shivaji Rakha (1990)
Prakamp- Harish Mangalam (1991)
Agnikan- Nilesh Kathad (1999)
Dhamma Vansh- Narsinh Ujamba (1996)
Jwala Mukhi- Samat Parmar (1999)
Sat Re Bola Nahi To Mat Bolo- Kanti Makwana ‘Katil’
Anouras Surya- Kisan Sosa (1985)
Swatantra Kaikarav- Shankerbhai Patel (1990)
Ovarana- Chandrabhen Shrimali
Mijaj- Chandrabhen Shrimali
Sankalp- Samant Solanki
Sahara Ma Sapt Surya- Kisan Sosa (2008)
Bahiskrut Phulo- Neerav Patel
Bahiskrut- Pathik Parmar

- African American Connection with India:

In 1873 Jyotirao Phule, a Marathi Dalit published his book Gulamgiri (Slavery) and dedicated the treatise to the Negroes in America as a “‘token of admiration for their sublime disinterestedness and self-sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro Slavery,’” as noted by S.D. Kapoor in Dalits and African Americans: A Study in Comparison (13). The example of the growth of African American consciousness and its expression in literature functioned as a model for Phule to resist the oppressive caste system. Phule was aware that this monstrous caste system had left the ati-shudras (the untouchables) without a sense of self-identity and consciousness in India. Phule worked hard to raise awareness among the lowest castes about their degraded condition as effected by the Brahminical
caste system. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the greatest Dalit leader, acknowledged Phule’s work by dedicating his own book *Who Were the Shudras?* to Phule. Ambedkar, who was actively involved in the national politics of India, also highlighted the comparison between Afro-Americans and the Dalits. As a graduate student at Columbia University from 1913 to 1916, Ambedkar witnessed the growing consciousness among the Blacks and their struggle to claim their identity and humanity against the white supremacist oppression. Such first-hand experience helped him develop a “framework” for the “issue of caste segregation back home” (Kapoor 15). When Lala Lajpat Rai, a famous Indian activist against British Raj, compared the inhuman treatment of Negroes in America with the attitudes of the Brahmins toward the untouchables, Ambedkar retorted that the Brahmin torture of Untouchables was never known because all “Hindus” conspire to keep their shameful and inhuman acts a secret (Kapoor 16). Ambedkar believed that the existence of an American conscience allowed the Negroes to publish their suffering in the form of narratives to expose the horrors of slavery. But in India, he argued, the “Hindus” have no conscience that prohibits them from recognizing the injustice in the caste system. (Kapoor, 14)

Along with the parallels between Dalits and African Americans, the Indian freedom movement acquired a strong parallel story to that of the African Americans in the early twentieth century. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Howard Thurman (1899-1981), and later Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) formed the pillars of the interchange of knowledge and inspiration. The Dalit identification with African Americans has continued through the late 19th century until the late 20th century.

Sudarshan Kapur in his acclaimed book, *Raising Up a Prophet: the African-American Encounter with Gandhi*, traces the history of the well-known relationship between Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* (non-violent resistance to British rule in India) and Dr. Martin Luther King’s nonviolent Civil Rights movement in the USA during the 1950s-1960s. By tracing the comparison between leaders of the African American community and Gandhi, Kapur demonstrates how the African Americans were prepared for a Gandhian non-violent resistance when Dr. King undertook the leadership. Kapur also mentions that African American press had covered Gandhi’s leadership and India’s path to freedom by
analyzing several widely respected African American journals from 1919 to 1955, such as *The Crisis, Journal of Negro Education, Chicago Defender*, and the *New York Amsterdam News* among others. Kapur also notes that several black leaders like Howard Thurman, a celebrated preacher and theologian and his wife, Sue Bailey Thurman, William Stuart Nelson, the editor of Howard University’s journal, traveled to India in the late 1930s and met Gandhi. They discussed with Gandhiji a possibility of applying his methodology of nonviolent action to the “anti-segregationist struggle” and “resistance to injustice on a mass scale in the United States” (7). Similarly, a number of Gandhian followers from India, including Lala Lajpat Rai and Charles Freer Andrews, “a British Christian missionary, friend, and biographer of Gandhi,” among others, visited the United States and communicated to the African American community the possibility of active nonviolent resistance to white injustice (7). Moreover, Gandhi’s emphasis on *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satya* (truth) struck a chord with the African American community.

It is important to note here that the way Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s leadership raises the question of elitism in the African American movement in the USA, Gandhi’s leadership had a similar elitism. The Subaltern Studies group has effectively critiqued this elitism and has led to the rewriting of history from a subaltern perspective. Ranajit Guha, one of the founders of the Subaltern Studies group, focuses on the millions who followed Gandhi but were never acknowledged as active agents against foreign rule. The elite nationalist leaders ignored the role of the subaltern masses without whom major milestones of the struggle, like the Dandi March or the Salt-strike or the opposition to the Simon Commission, could not have been achieved. Moreover, Indian historiography tends to highlight the contribution of Gandhi and Nehru against British rule without drawing attention to the domestic or internal condition of the millions under the repressive caste system.

While India won freedom and was partitioned along religious lines to form a Muslim state of Pakistan, the plight of the Untouchables became a major conflict between Gandhi and the greatest leader of the Dalits, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Prior to independence, Ambedkar insisted on a separate electorate for the Dalits, but Gandhi went on a prolonged fast in order to prevent a division among the Hindus. It was the time when the
atmosphere was full of apprehensions about dividing the country. However, since the origins of the caste system were founded in by certain Hindu scriptures, Ambedkar saw a separate electorate as an ideal solution for addressing the conditions of the Untouchables. He was sure that the general electorate would have caste-Hindus as leaders who would never pay heed to the requirements of the Untouchables (Kapoor 62).

Owing to lack of education and therefore good employment opportunities, the Dalits remained backward economically. Indian independence in 1947 granted them nominal citizenship. However, their elected educated and upper caste leaders would never address their causes or work toward their uplift because of religious sanction against such interaction. Keeping these conditions in mind, Ambedkar argued for a separate electorate on the eve of Indian independence which the outgoing British government was ready to establish but Gandhi refused. Thus, not only was India getting divided on religious lines into Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India, a “large body of Untouchables” (who happened to be primarily rural at the time) were “disenchanted with Gandhi and the Congress” (Kapur 48).

Gandhi’s own stand on the Untouchable issue was fairly ambiguous: on one hand he was deeply sympathetic to their downtrodden condition; but on the other, he refused to allow them to break free from the Hindu electoral fold which was responsible for their outcast status. However, Gandhi, recognizing their pariah status, was alive to the parallel situation of the Negroes in USA. But the African American press did not perhaps realize the contradiction in Gandhi’s stance on the Untouchable issue. Moreover, Gandhi adopted an untouchable girl as his daughter and ensured that Untouchables could enter into the political realm and made them members and participants of his Ashram communities. This principle of Gandhi was appreciated by the African American community.

Although Gandhi’s attention to the untouchability issue was praiseworthy, it was not supposed to guarantee long-lasting benefits to the underprivileged, as Ambedkar wanted. The way USA formed a policy ‘separate but equal’ policy that granted all rights, Ambedkar wanted a similar one in India. So the Untouchables would be able to claim socio-economic rights through separate electorates when their leaders would address their
ageless experience of denials and discrimination. Such leadership could only emerge from personal experience of Dalits. But separate electorates were never formulated. Nevertheless, Gandhi remained a figure of great admiration among the African Americans. Interestingly, his close associates brought to the United States both the parallel between the Indian freedom struggle and the emerging movement among the African Americans and that between the Untouchables in India and the African Americans in USA.

In 1915, while in political exile in USA, Lajpat Rai stated that there is some analogy between the Negro problem in the United States of America and the problem of the depressed classes in India. Charles Freer Andrews, a close friend of Gandhi for twenty-six years traveled to the United States and other parts of the world and spread Gandhi’s message of justice and peace. In February of 1929, after speaking to the African American community Andrews communicated to Gandhi the African American appreciation and support for his work. However, Andrews also stated that Gandhi was opposed to inter-caste marriage and dining which confused the African Americans, because it reminded them of black-white relationships in their country. Soon Gandhi publicly negated Andrews’s comments and declared that untouchability would end only when socially interactive activities could be encouraged. There were some more speakers who brought Gandhi’s message to the African Americans but it was only between 1935 and 1937 that important African American leaders mentioned above actually visited India and met with Gandhi.

Among the leaders who met Gandhi, Thurman felt that as an African American he could understand the psychological climate bred by the condition of untouchability. He also felt that despite differences in the particular experiences of the two peoples, ‘they do not differ in principle and in inner pain. Impressed with the simple lifestyle of Gandhi who spun and wore only *khadi*, a cheap cotton, Mordecai Johnson of Howard University declared that Negro college graduates should wear special brand of cheapest variety of homemade overalls. These six African American leaders discussed with Gandhi the applications of peaceful and nonviolent resistance against racial injustice, discrimination. But it was not until the start of the rise of King and the rise of television in 1955 for
nonviolent resistance to grip the imagination of ordinary African Americans for them to apply a Gandhian methodology of resistance on a mass scale. It was perhaps owing to King’s appeal to the spirituality of his community that brought the movement together.

In the post-World War II period, when most colonized countries were beginning to gain independence, Gandhi’s noncooperation and nonviolent resistance exemplified what could be achieved by striking at the heart of the colonizer’s conscience. Through 1946 and 1947, the year of India’s independence, several eminent Indian political figures visited the United States and the U.N. assembly meetings. There they repeated the notion of Indian solidarity with all colored peoples of the world, especially with those in the United States. The Indian-African American connection became even more pronounced when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. adopted the Gandhian nonviolent resistance methodology and led the African Americans toward their Civil Rights through the 1950s and 1960s. That Gandhi was opposing both the external British domination and the internal oppressive structure of casteism and untouchability was a major reason why the African Americans were drawn toward his struggle.

It is interesting to note here that these two peoples came closer in the late 1960s and 1970s. It was the time when the militant Black Panthers and their claims of Black Power motivated a group of young Dalit poets and activists to compose outrageous art in order to shatter the superiority of Brahminical ideologies. They proudly called themselves Dalit Panthers. In the late 1960s through 1970s the Black Power and Black Panther movements not only gave rise to a militant resistance to white oppression but it also witnessed the emergence of anti-white establishment art. Adapting a similar ideology, in 1972 a group of young Marathi Dalit artists in India called themselves the Dalit Panthers and embraced violent politics and aesthetics to resist caste supremacy. They were the first to use the word “Dalit” to designate their social identity and today it is the only accepted term to refer to the all untouchables.
Areas of Similarities and Divergence in Afro-American and Dalit Literature

In comparing these two literatures, it has been necessary to compare the African American and Dalit societies as well as their liberation movements. Since both societies are engaged in similar kinds of movements, examining them is an important component of the comparison of these two different communities and their literatures. It is true that the two societies are different in terms of place and time, it is understandable there should be some limitations and differences in their literatures. On the other hand there are similarities too. The similarities and contrasts between the two literatures are to be investigated so as to enhance understanding about their literatures and societies.

As a matter of fact, Africans were captured, brought to America and sold since early part of the seventeenth century. This is when the slavery of African Americans begins. Dalit society, on the other hand, has experienced slavery since ancient times. Unlike the Blacks, 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. The White settlers of America bought Blacks like cattle for farming purposes. In order to capture slaves, violent armed raids were carried out against African settlements. Those captured were gathered like animals. In order to teach the captured Black people a lesson, the white raiders subjected them to torture. The captives were beaten to death, or buried alive; they were also burned alive; they were hung by being nailed to the wall, or their ears were cut off and fed to them. Pregnant Black women suffered abortion from being assigned extremely difficult tasks. Black children, while still in their mothers’ wombs were distributed as reward. Slaves were always sold off for free so that they could not rebel if their numbers increased. Children were separated from mothers, wives from husbands, and their families were destroyed. Whites feared that if slave lived together for too long, they would get too close to each other and rebel. Slaves ran away out of fear of being sold by their masters.

In India, for centuries Dalits, branded as untouchable, remained outcaste. The Hindu varna system imposed slavery on them. They were tortured for a very long time. Such was the condition of the outcaste communities. Crime or bagging was only their means of
their livelihood. God did not ordain the slavery of Dalits and African Americans. Human beings created it. Having created slavery on Blacks and Dalits, White and savarna societies extracted labor on them. Since the past and future of African Americans and Dalits always rested in the hands of their owners, their condition became extremely serious. In 1706, the state of New York enacted a law to the effect that a Black’s slavery would not end even after conversion to Christianity. Slaves could not give evidence against free citizens. White people assigned separate educational institutes, separate eating places, separate spaces in trains and buses, and separate residential areas to African Americans. Untouchables, too, were kept outside the village. Arrangements were made for them to have separate settlements, separate river banks and separate cremation grounds. Since Shudras were denied any right to education by the Hindu caste system, the question of separate educational institutions did not arise at all. Later, during the British days, when they did begin to receive education, they had to sit in a separate corner or outside the threshold of the classroom.

African Americans since generations have ridiculed the word ‘Negro’ and called themselves ‘Blacks’. Similarly, Dalits have ridiculed the term ‘Harijan’ and named themselves ‘Dalits’. African Americans changed their names in order to give up the names received from their masters, as those symbolized their slavery. Dalits, too, have abandoned the unsuspicious and uncivilized names thrust upon them by the Hindu religion. African Americans underwent religious conversion with a view to end slavery. Dalits, too, converted due to their irritation with untouchability. If the Dalit is the protagonist of India’s boycotted society, the African American is the protagonist of Black America. Both are slaves. The African Americans have been robbed and degraded by White society, and the Dalits by savarna society. The African American was bought and sold, and some of them paid their masters to buy their own freedom. However, in the Indian social system, freedom from untouchability cannot be bought, as it is imposed from birth. The African American slave could live in the master’s house. White children could feed at a Black woman’s breast. But even the touch and shadow of the Dalits were considered untouchable by the touchables. The irony here is worth noting: while the Blacks and Whites belong to different racial groups, the untouchables and savarnas do not.
Moreover, the plight of African Americans and Dalits can be compared in number of ways. While the African Americans were slaves, they could buy their freedom with money. Though Dalits were technically not slaves, they could not even pay to rent a house. The White master was responsible for looking after the Black slave. Since untouchables were not slaves, the savarnas had no concern for them. Untouchables are societal slaves. The cause of the African American’s slavery was economic. The cause of Dalit’s untouchability is social. African Americans perform labour, but their labour is not considered undignified. Dalits do the lowest types of work, and their work is considered undignified. While African Americans cannot hide the color of their skin, untouchables can hide their caste. African Americans were brought from Africa to America, Dalits belong to India.

There are similarities in the excesses and injustices committed against African Americans and Dalits, as well as in the sentiments of resistance expressed. The language and religion of wrongdoers may be different, but their source is the same. Similarly, though the nationality and religion of those against whom injustice is done are different, their suffering is the same.

**Significance of the Study:**

The research project is expected to create awareness about the discriminatory practices observed by the dominant class and how it affects the overall development of the society as an organism. Untouchability and exploitation create an imbalance in the society and this lopsided development creates an unbridgeable gap between the haves and have-nots. So the society gets divided into different segments. These gaps and unhealthy development create chaos in the society. So the research project focuses on the root causes of all types of violence like naxalism, terrorism. This is really high time to create a just environment in the society. The researcher expects that his research may help to create a sound atmosphere in the present scenario. So he plans to work out his study in such a way that may appeal to those who have not still heard the voice of liberation of these downtrodden masses. He is planning to investigate their poems from the principle: all human beings are born equal and have rights to live with liberty, life, and happiness.
Objectives of the Study:

This research project aims at fulfilling following aims and objectives-

- To examine expression and experience of Afro-Americans and Dalits of Gujarat as reflected in their poetry in a renewed way and from different perspectives.
- To study radical voices of protest as found in their poems from historical, political, cultural and social context.
- To analyse the treatment of caste oppression, untouchability and Dalit sensibility in the poems of Dalit intellectuals.
- To discuss issues regarding the life and sufferings of Afro-Americans who were standing at the bottom of the class hierarchy.
- To critically evaluate hostile circumstances in which the downcast have been living their lives as portrayed in their poems.
- To study the relationship between Marxism and Dalit literature, specifically in terms of how the questions of class and caste overlap and conflict from the perspectives of Indian Marxists. Other post-colonial theories are also going to be applied.
- To analyze the historical, social and economic circumstances of the downtrodden communities that are described by Afro-Americans and Dalit poets of Gujarat.
- To examine the question of reception i.e. the impact of literature on the social situations faced by the untouchables and enslaved Afro-Americans and the transformative value of such literature.
- To study the Dalit and African American Poetry as a new dimension in literature as something newer than used up.
- To study the rise, growth and development of Dalits and African Americans with its consequences on society.
- To analyze the social condition of Dalits in India and African Americans in America and pointing out the present status.
• To create awareness of the torments faced by Dalits to non-Dalits in India and by Black Americans to the White Americans.
• To study the heart rendering tortures faced by both the communities.
• To understand process of shaping the consciousness of the Dalits and African Americans in specific socio-political conditions.
• To understand the nature of representation of the Dalits and Black Americans in their poetry.

✦ Scope and Limitations of the Research Project:

Literature is a vast creative force. Since time immemorial, it has been employed by humankind for pleasure as well as a device that mirrors the realities of life. In this research project, the researcher has dealt with two literary streams which have germinated from a similar cause-asserting for one’s dignity and self-respect. And this entitles for juxtaposition. African American and Dalit literature has been a debatable concern for many academicians. A comparative study between these two literary streams can be pedagogic as well as a subject of incessant scholarship. In this multidimensional 21st century, science has progressed immensely and with that there is general pressure towards assimilation among various communities of the world, however there is also an increasing religiousness and ethinification running in the minds of the people of different cultures. This thesis attempts an exploration of this not just within the American context, but also in the Indian one: Despite the difference in establishment of democratic state structures in both countries- presidential form of government in one and parliamentary in the other- it has been seen that a section of society in these countries has remained disadvantaged and has faced extreme forms of discrimination. This thesis takes up the case study of two such sections-the Dalits and the Blacks were amongst the most disenfranchised and disadvantaged groups anywhere in the world, and faced oppression based on a circumstance as irrational as the accident of birth.

Despite the scale of the problem, these issues have been relatively neglected; a comparative study of the struggles of these two most marginalized communities has never been attempted systematically. This thesis seeks to fill this lacuna and tries to draw parallels as well as contrasts between the modes of struggle and patterns of oppression in
two different contexts. The first and foremost question that this study seeks to engage with is whether 'Blacks' and 'Dalits' are comparable categories at all. Since the juxtaposition of 'race' and 'caste' has always remained a matter of serious debate within academic circles, a comparison has been attempted at the level of discrimination and social-exclusion that both American Blacks and Indian Dalits face.

The research project has a wide scope. It is exploratory in nature and emphasizes on the qualitative framework of analysis. Primarily, this study makes an effort to examine the Gujarati Dalit and Afro-American poetry from social, cultural, psychological and Marxist viewpoints. In this context, it explores to investigate various theoretical debates, e.g. the Socio-cultural studies, Black Panther and Dalit Panther, Marxist, Ambedkarite ideologies. The study endeavours to explore extent and depth of literary expressions in the Gujarati Dalit and Afro-American literature spreading through various time spans. Hence, it proposes to study various noted figures of two different nations who lived in different time periods. This has provided an opportunity to encompass a wide range of the time spans.

This research project deals only with the poetic form of this literary arena. It is yet another coincidental fact that poetry is the most dominant form of Dalits as well as Afro-American literature. Since the poetic form in these two literatures is so vast that the researcher has not touched upon each and every anthology created by the leading figures. The researcher had some limitations to concentrate on a few literary artists. So he has restricted himself only to a few of their poetry which he thought important to take into account in the research project. So there are a lot of opportunities for the future researchers to delve deep into this subject.

❖ Research Methodology:

To understand the poetry of Dalits and African Americans, it requires in-depth sociological analysis of the community, its protests, its self-articulation and movements. This study is exploratory in nature and emphasizes on the qualitative framework of analysis. So this research project follows observational and descriptive research pattern. It is concerned to specific techniques of narrative facts and style of representing
individuals or group or locality. It is based on secondary method of data collection. Since it is library research, the researcher will use primary sources, reference books, internet sources to analyze and construe their poems. For the citation of the sources, MLA’s 7th edition is followed. To fulfill the aims and objectives of the research, the following methodology is adopted:

**Phase I:** In this phase, preparation study of related reference articles (review of literature) is going to be undertaken. Apart from this, books on History of Dalit literature and Dalit movement in India, Afro-American literature, Afro-American and Dalit poets and their poetry have been collected.

**Phase II:** In this phase, the Primary data i.e. the collection of poems by various Afro-American and Dalit poets have been deeply studied.

**Phase III:** In this phase selected poems from the collection have been analyzed.

*Tools to be Used:*

It is an inter-disciplinary research, so the researcher has included field-work and library work. Since the researcher has used secondary method of data-collection, the tools are supposed to be the primary sources, various reference books, different websites, dictionaries, portable softwares, academic research papers, journals, historical records.

Works Cited


