Dalit women’s life narratives are important as they are the emerging voices of distress suppressed under the oppression of caste, class and gender. Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Bama, Viramma, Baby Halder and Nalini Jameela through their life narratives highlight the sufferings of Dalit women. By voicing resistance to caste, gender and class marginalization, they resurrect themselves from the “zone of nonbeing” (Frantz Fanon qtd. in Gordon 3). Life narratives by Dalit women put Dalit women into the text, into the history, and into the world. Dalit women through life narratives dispel what has been told about them and document their stories anew, that is re-present their subjective experiences and their struggle to survive.

In Dalit women’s life narratives the medium to tell a story is memories and experiences. Narrators narrate their memories and document their problems that result from their social identity, that is Dalit women’s identity. Dalit women use their past struggle as a means of resistance to injustice which help them to resurrect themselves: “…we are always in the process of both remembering the past even as we create new ways to imagine and make the future” (hooks, Black Looks 5).

Dalit women’s life narratives confront caste, class and gender tyranny: “Dissent operates in a Third space…the space where the oppressed plot their liberation…space where oppressed and oppressor are both able to come together in the mirror of each other…” (Roberts 97). Dalit women’s life narratives act as “Third space of enunciation” (Bhabha 157). However, while doing so, these life narratives also gesture “at the ways in which victims have fought, overcome and survived the event.” Hence, Dalit women’s life narratives are about the resurrection of self. The experiences presented in the life narratives “provokes a reconstruction of Dalit” (Nayar, “Bama’s,” 84) women’s self.

Dalit women in their life narratives celebrate the difference from the centre that helps in the positive recognition of themselves in the society. Baby Kamble is proud to belong to Mahar community. She exhibits the resilience and strength to break the prisons of caste, class and gender. Urmila Pawar takes inspiration from the women of her village whom she sees as symbols of strength and fortitude. Bama establishes her identity as strong Paraya Christian woman which she asserts when she leaves the church. Viramma accepts her identity as Pariah woman. Baby Halder, when asked: “Don’t you wish you
had a better past?” She replied, “All the good things that have happened to me are because of the pain that I had undergone so I don’t want to forget or wish it away” (qtd. in Meenakshi Sharma 24). She sees her marginal identity as Dalit woman a source of subjective knowledge. Similarly, Nalini Jameela asserts her desire to continue in her profession as it is the only way to break the stereotypes: “…the divide between ‘dignified’ them and ‘undignified us stays intact. However, my co-workers in the sex workers’ organization know that the divide is very thin” (Jameela, “Memory,” 174). Hence, Dalit women’s life narratives speak “the importance of acknowledging the way positive recognition and acceptance of difference is a necessary starting point…” (hooks, *Black Looks* 13) to eradicate caste, class and gender supremacy and to resurrect their social identity.

Since the social factors like caste, gender and class are intrusive in Dalit women’s lives, private space of Dalit women is disrupted by public space. Hence, the distinction between “private and public breakdown” (Nayar, “Bama’s” 90). It is because of this, Baby Kamble in *The Prisons We Broke* moves from her community, that is from public space to her personal self, that is private space. Urmila Pawar from her personal self narrates the Dalit woman’s self in *The Weave of My Life*. *Karukku* presents sufferings and humiliation which Bama endures because of the social factors. She chooses to become a nun to serve Dalit community. However, again the public space compelled her to leave the church. In *Viramma: Life of an untouchable*, Viramma through her personal life reflects the working of the social structure. *A Life Less Ordinary* narrates Baby Halder’s sufferings which too result from poverty and gender discrimination. In *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*, Nalini Jameela devotes only first chapter to her home life, that is private space and the subsequent narrative takes place in public space. Hence, Dalit women’s life narratives demonstrate how public space affects private lives of Dalit women and how marginalized women are denied private space in their lives.

Dalit women emphasize the bodily aspect of social oppression in their life narratives. They talk about female body experiences like menstruation, husband-wife relationship, sexual harassment, etc. These life narratives not only chart out “female experience of sexuality quite frankly” (Karan Singh 195) but also the coercion of Dalit
female body within the home, that is private space at the hands of male/husband and in society, that is public space as “the public is also a male space. Women who enter it, enter male spaces and have to pay for that transgression” (Gothoskar 66). This space is even more limited for Dalit women because of their caste and class, which further add to their victimization as their bodies become target of violence at the hands of the upper caste men: “…read their fate in a typical amalgam of caste and gender” (Karan Singh 63). The scars on the mutilated body are seen as the texts: “…scars are the text” (Nayar, “Bama’s” 88) that narrate violence and victimization. Moreover, in Dalit women’s life narratives, experiences are the texts that describe not only the victimization of the body but also the internal affected feelings and emotions caused due to the unfair treatment that also direct the narration in the narrative. For instance, the dirty rags and dress codes assigned to Mahar women’s bodies direct the narration as the narration of penury in the life narrative of Baby Kamble’s The Prisons We Broke. The untouchability and exploitation of the body caused to Urmila Pawar and Viramma made them aware of their marginal space as Dalits as well as women in the family and in the society. Bama, in Karukku, narrates the experiences of untouchability inflicted on her body in the public space as Dalit. She also articulates the vulnerability of Dalit female body when she left convent and was struggling all alone in the society to get a job. In A Life Less Ordinary Baby Halder recalls how her body became the site of knowledge when her outlook towards life changed after she was raped and severely beaten by her husband, besides when she nearly escaped from the claws of death during her first delivery. Being recognized as public woman, Nalini Jameela admits that her body can be worshipped as a sexual object but is unwelcomed in the so called honourable society. It is permitted neither in the private space nor in the public space, thus laying bare the double standards of society. Therefore, central to these narratives is the articulation of, as according to Anupama Rao, “hidden histories of hurt and humiliation” (Introduction 3).

Dalit women’s bodies become the site where not only the inequalities of the caste system like purity and pollution are inflicted but also the gendered inequalities are reproduced. Bodily experiences presented in the narratives exhibit how the social obstructions are “enforced through prohibitions about bodily” (Nayar, “Bama’s,” 88).
Body becomes the tool to maintain the social hierarchy whether through untouchability or through violence:

...“sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized….It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. (Butler 367)

Hence, in order to preserve social norms, the reverberation of the norms is imperative either by force or aggression which can negate the possibility of resistance from the oppressed.

The need to use power and violence on the Dalit woman’s body shows that Dalit women are not lifeless victims who obey the forced conditions silently. They resist. “That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with norms by which their materialization is impelled” (Butler 367). Consequently, in Dalit women’s life narratives, the body becomes the site of resistance: “…body emerges as a site of contestation” (hooks, Black Looks 22). Dalit women in their life narratives celebrate and express pride in their bodies which turns their bodies as “central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse” (hooks, “Choosing the Margin” 206).

The narration in the life narratives moves from first person narrative to third person narrative. Dalit women narrate their memories and experiences and “is entirely from the character-narrator’s point of view.” Hence, Dalit women’s life narratives are first-person narratives and therefore “subjective” (Nayar, Studying Literature 69) in nature. However, the narration also jumps into third-person narration when these narrators tell the stories of Dalit women as community. According to Baby Halder the use of third-person narration “…makes me imagine it wasn’t me who had gone through the experiences and that’s the reason I refer to myself as Baby” (qtd. in Meenakshi Sharma 24). In the third-person narrative, “the speaker is not directly involved in the story and is equidistant from all characters and events” (Nayar, Studying Literature 69). This distance “allows the author to make comments about all events and characters” (67). Nalini Jameela in The Autobiography of a Sex Worker uses first-person narration when she represents her life and third person narration when she voices and represents other sex
workers’ sufferings. In *Karukku* and *Viramma: Life of an untouchable* the authors plunge in second-person narration: “In this society, if you born into low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death” (*KAR* 26). In *Viramma: Life of an untouchable*, since Viramma is talking to Josaine, therefore, the narration occurs as: “If you knew the changes we see these days in our countryside, you’d really be amazed” (*VIR* 124). In the second-person narrative, “the reader is drawn into the story as one of the characters” (Nayar, *Studying Literature* 68) which makes the reader considerate. The second-person narration by Bama and Viramma draw them closer to the reader. The use of this technique makes *Karukku* and *Viramma: Life of an untouchable* distinctive from the other four life narratives, that is *The Prisons We Broke, The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman’s Memoirs, A Life Less Ordinary, The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*.

Besides, mother’s story forms the pre-text of Dalit women’s life narratives. It is the foundation of Dalit women’s life stories: “…the autobiographical project symbolizes the search for origins, for women a search for maternal origins” (Brodzki 157) when “The constitutive is reconstructed from the constituted” (158). Dalit women’s life narratives are the remake of the already constituted, that is already existed stories—the story of mother with whom a Dalit woman life narrator identifies herself and where she sees her life’s roots. Therefore, Dalit women’s life narratives are the searching of the “dark continent of the dark continent” (Irigaray qtd. in Brodzki 158). In their life narratives, Dalit women think back, that is they think of their mothers whose lives are the reflections into which they search their own identity. Mother for Dalit woman is the source of courage and motivation. Therefore, Dalit women’s life narratives symbolize exploration of their mothers. Dalit women write their life narratives with “mother milk. She writes in white ink” (Cixous 83), that is they write their mothers’ experiences and sufferings which they have only observed, felt and understood along with their intimate experiences of pain and distress. Therefore, mother show a strong presence in Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke*, Urmila Pawar’s *The Weave of My Life*, Bama’s *Karukku*, Viramma’s *Viramma: Life of an untouchable*, Baby Halder’s *A Life Less Ordinary* and Nalini Jameela’s *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*. 
Dalit women’s life narratives represent and re-present those subjects which are excluded and lie at the margins of the social structure. The speaking subaltern subjects of the narratives give voice to the lived experiences, that is individual and of those who are victims of social and literary marginalization. There is a constant movement from “the individual to the collective” (Nayar, “Bama’s,” 85) and collective to individual, that is from ‘I’ to ‘we’ and ‘we’ to ‘I’. Sometimes pronouns like ‘our’ and ‘us’ as well as community’s name, for example Mahars, Parayas, Pariahs, Sex workers, etc., are referred to indicate collectivity. For instance, in *The Prisons We Broke*, Baby Kamble’s narration goes as “I was no exception. I always loved being with my grandparents….I too had been one of them….The happy times began with the women, though….All of us young girls carried the saris in the flowing water…we repeatedly dashed the sari against rocks….We lived in filthiest conditions possible….(*PWB* 1-16). In *The Weave of My Life*, the narration begins as “WOMEN FROM OUR village….I still remember the exact point of time….“ (*WML* 1-27). In *Karukku*, the narrative starts from “Our village” and then constantly moves from collective to individual and individual to collective: “I don’t know how it came about…and we stayed in ours” (*KAR* 7). Similarly, in *Viramma: Life of an untouchable* the same sort of movement in narration happens: “I was born on a lucky day….I was given a divine name…we didn’t go to school….Our days started later….“ (*VIR* 3-4). In *A Life Less Ordinary* the narration occurs as “I thought, just because we are poor doesn’t mean we can’t be touched” (*LLO* 109). In *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* the narration happens as “I picked up the mike and said, ‘We are here for the sex workers’ organization. We want our rights to be respected….‘” (*AOS* 87). This movement proposes that Dalit women’s life narratives are “about the common (wo)man, but a common (wo)man who metonymically stands in for the community” (Nayar, “Bama’s,” 85), that is the life depicted in each of the narrative discussed in the preceding chapters re-presents and stands for the whole social group which also suffers because of the caste, class and gender oppression and strives for the interests which the narrator shares with the group, that is creation of a just society

Dalit women’s life narratives are also distinctive in nature because of the individuality of the life narrators. The individual Dalit woman narrator “highlights her individual achievements through the narrative…the narrator holds up her own life as an
example for others to follow.” She “charts the significant moments in her life.…The negated subject asserts individual agency…” (Nayar, “Bama’s,” 92). The narratives are the retrospective account of narrators’ experiences: “The sheer account of events is recorded as they occurred to her” (91). Dalit woman narrator narrates the significant individual moment and experience that helped her to elevate her awareness about herself and gave a new direction to her life. The life narrative makes her an agency by underscoring her individual achievements which make her an ideal for others to follow to break the social shackles. For example, The Prisons We Broke highlights how the Mahar women turned as an agency to transform their lives. The Weave of My Life demonstrates the individual struggle of Urmila Pawar to assert her individual choice and never let the caste and patriarchal structures to hold her back, thus emerging as the source of inspiration for other Mahar women to work towards social change. Bama who wanted to work for the Dalits, joined convent as a nun but was dejected to see caste practices in vogue both in church and convent, hence she took an independent and bold step to leave the convent, thus spreading the message to resist exploitation. Viramma understood “the capacity of the powerful for reprisals and repression (Josaine Racine and Jean-Luc Racine 311), and therefore resists passively. Baby Halder keeps her desire for learning and to change her life alive and when Prabodh Kumar gives her the chance, she grabs the opportunity to come out from darkness to light. Nalini Jameela’s life experiences make her aware that a woman needs to be self-dependent and economically independent to come out from the state of being victimized. For the survival of her children, she is forced to take up the sex work, a stigmatized profession because she was left with no other option: “In order to find work and to keep job, you have to please many people. A woman is expected to offer her body – many women have nothing else” (Jameela, “Memory,” 174). She has used her life narrative as an agency to change the perception of people about sex workers re-presenting and representing a realistic picture of the life and difficulties of sex workers unlike the glamourized portrayal of sex workers in Bollywood.

Distinctiveness is also shown up in the narrators’ names: “…name could also be taken as “the label of [a text’s] stylistic individuality”….That individuality would be understood not as personal but rather as textual, as the author’s name would refer to a literary rather than to a biographical figure” (Kerr 8). Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar
use their given name, which is an evidence of their grounded identity in Mahar community. Bama uses the pen name which shows her desire to be seen first as an individual. Viramma, however, stands for Pariah labour women but use of only her first name reflects her emergence as a unique person throughout the narrative. Baby Halder uses her natal surname, not her husband’s surname which shows her assertion of her female identity and resistance towards the patriarchy. The use of the writer’s name Nalini Jameela in *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* tells about the narrator’s individual life journey from Nalini to Jameela who takes her name from both Hindu and Muslim traditions.

The uniqueness of these Dalit women narratives is in individual perception, education, individual life journey and the influence of different persons who come in the life of the individual life narrators. All these factors influence the narration and the way the narrator presents herself in the life narrative. According to Hertha D. Sweet Wong, “…there are appropriate occasions to exercise individuality—articulating personal achievements to attest to the right to speak at a council or practicing “traditional” arts with innovations (just as storytellers may well-known stories, but with their own unique styles)” (169). In *The Prisons We Broke*, Baby Kamble’s ‘self’ is completely merged within the ‘collective selves’ of Mahar women. She focuses on the lives of Mahar women as labourers, married women, daughters-in-law, and housewives keeping them nameless. By keeping them unidentified, she intends to focus on the collective memories and experiences of Mahar women. By narrating the sufferings of Mahar women she tells her own life story as Mahar woman, hence, narration moves from public to personal, emphasizing “public is personally political” (Aida Hurtado, qtd. in Mohanty 51), that is social self cannot be separated from personal self. In *The Weave of My Life*, Urmila Pawar’s personal self is a part of collective selves of the Dalit women. By articulating her personal memories and experiences in private and public spaces and by narrating the lives of the Mahar women who are related to her as mother, mother-in-law, friends, neighbours, sisters, and cousins she becomes the collective voice of a denigrate category. Hence, the narration in *The Weave of My Life* moves from personal to public emphasizing “politics of “personal life”” (Mohanty 51), that is personal self cannot be separated from social self. Baby Kamble never opens about her personal life with her husband in her life
narrative. Urmila Pawar who is a well educated, writer and Dalit feminist activist writes openly about her relation with her husband in her life narrative. Besides both Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar, are from Maharashtra, and both these narrators extensively narrate the influence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in their life narratives, which makes *The Prisons We Broke* and *The Weave of My Life* distinctive from the rest the four life narratives.

Dalit women have used life narrative to control the interpretation of their lives, to re-present themselves and for the expression of their true ‘self.’ Through narration they are acting as agencies for social change. They are negotiating from the marginal position making the periphery as centre. These life narratives attempt to instill pride, confidence and dignity in Dalit women. These life narratives “rise to the challenge to speak that which has not been spoken” (hooks, *Black Looks* 4). These narratives plead to create a conducive atmosphere for the enrichment of the Dalit women’s lives corresponding to their interests and sensibility.

Dalit women’s life narratives have tremendous significance for the women of marginalized sections for the realization that “within the reality of our universal inadequacy, uncertainty and blindness is a limitless capacity to reach out to one another, to hold one another, a limitless energy, a limitless empowerment which is available and accessible directly in our finite limited condition” (Kogawa qtd. in Vohra, *Postmodern* 228). In order to resist social prejudices, Dalit women need to look at themselves in a positive way. These narratives are a source of inspiration to women at large and Dalit women in particular to struggle to break free and to stop being a victim. These life narratives are not only the source of awareness to women but also give them courage to speak against injustice and to resist biased social structures; to learn to live as independent women while retaining and strengthening maternal links. These life narratives act as agency to create an identity and space for Dalit women not only in literature but also in society at large. Hence, these life narratives generate Dalit women’s experiences which constitute a multi-dimensional discourse embedded in caste, class and gender traditions.