Chapter – One
Introduction

Awakened to social responsibility, in a democratic society such as ours, every individual whether social or political activist keeps an incessant desire to speak, write about or refer to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s thoughts during his/her shared willingness towards overall betterment of society. This is, perhaps, due to the reason that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar left none of the facets of Indian society untouched during his revolutionary life. His thought still stands as lighthouse for masses that are compelled to drive through the stark ocean of caste system. This lighthouse has been pivotal in energizing the feeling of self-respect, self-help, self-assertion of fundamental rights as human beings in a democratic society. Owing to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s emancipatory clarion call, and is undeniably able to voice grievances and stand firm to claim fundamental rights in complex circumstances today.

In this regard present research aims to draw attention towards action and deeds of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar whose thoughts have left no stone unturned in his tryst to solve the dilemma of caste system. This liberator left treasure of vigorous thoughts that has been life and blood of post Ambedkar Dalit movement. Dalit movement in its forceful attempts sought after inculcating the message of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar through several means, namely- literature, folk songs, ballades etc. Thereby Dr. Ambedkar’s message has been passing from generation to generation. It made one aware about one’s fundamental rights given by Constitution of India. Having being, directly or indirectly in contact with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s message huge section of lower classes strived to read and write. This ability to read and write not only gave a chance to adopt a new
outlook towards life and also generated in them a sense of responsibility towards society. Enlightened by the revolutionary thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar many writers also tried to depict their life story. Dalit autobiographies have, in turn, become source of exploration of hidden, neglected, dilapidated world of untouchable, outcastes and wanderers, where in an upper-caste ‘civilized-educated’ individual may never venture to enter.

Thus, to name a few autobiographies like *Branded: Uchalya* by Laxman Gikwad; *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* by Sharankumar Limbale, *The Outsider: Upara* by Laximan Mane and *The Weave of My Life: Ayadan* by Urmila Pawar, have acquired popularity on account of vigorous struggle waged by the writers against caste biased society. One of the few reasons behind the popularity enjoyed by these writers and their autobiographical work is their strong belief in the thoughts and message of social awakening, self-realization, self-esteem propounded by Dr. Ambedkar. Now, when we boast of our survival in glaring technosavvy advanced civilization and when most of the Dalit writers, have attained popularity across the regional, national boundaries; when every day government seems to be hasty in announcing one or the other scheme for backward sections of society, howsoever, certain sections of society still, often directly or subtly lead a most dejected, humiliated and suppressed life in our society. Amid such grime inequality and poverty as well as after being exposed to dark fathoms of discriminatory caste biases in present society. How can one proud to be an Indian? So while envisioning a better tomorrow, one need to generate a sense of betterment for all sections of society as implied and clearly put forth by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. All the Dalit writes, in fact have forcefully tried to reconstruct a casteless society- a society based on equality, liberty and fraternity: the
gist of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s mission, message and motif throughout life. Hence, becomes pivotal as to search out for the tenets of thoughts implied in most of the Dalit writers’ works who tried to depict what a life means for such a section of society.

Roots for dehumanized condition of Dalits in India can be traced back to the social stratification in the form of caste system. This stratification rigidly recognizes popularly called Chaturvanas. Dalits are the erstwhile Shudras, Outcastes, Atishudras, Untouchables, unapproachable who form the lowest stratum of Hindu society across Indian sub-continent. Untouchability and allied oppressive practices are manifestations of this long-drawn-out hierarchical classification. As decreed in Manusmriti, one of the wholly scriptures of Hindus, shudras were completely denied of a normal life otherwise what would mean in its full enjoyment of liberty, equality, individual justice, education, fraternity in a civilized society.

Wretched condition of untouchables in Indian sub-continent during last two centuries reached its unparallel zenith, when human civilization on the other hand reached highest steps of material advancement. Unfortunately huge section of Hindu society is still reeling back with severe social disabilities. They are deprived of social, religious and civic rights. Therefore untouchable Hindus lived the life of a bygone and dead age and social segregation. In short they were born untouchables, they lived as untouchables and they died as untouchables. Clearly, prevailing caste system in Hindu society is mother of all evils inflicted upon Dalits. This picture can still be seen in villages and small towns. Urban areas have now by and large overcome this narrow-mindedness. One wonders this perishable condition must have passed away with political freedom. Surprisingly not! Every day one or the other newspapers covers news of
Dalit youths or women atrocities or Dalits being forcefully or subtly alienated from the benefits conferred under Constitutional provisions.

Many noble hearts challenged caste-system in order to drive away the untouchability in society. They supported humanism and rationalism in their own way. Right from the early revolts like Buddhism and Jainism down to the Bhakti movement in the medieval age, we can find articulation of opposition to the caste system appeared in the form of religio-ideological expressions. This trend in fact extends well down to modern times that mark a new awakening among oppressed castes and the birth of the contemporary Dalit movement. Social reformers in India made energetic efforts to free Hindu society from the evil system that has separated a huge group of untouchables from mainstream. Social reformation movements in India began in the early nineteenth century under the British rule. Introduction of English education by British rulers brought about a great change in social and religious outlook of the people. It vitalized the ideas of individual freedom, human rights, equality, rationalism, secularism and democracy. It instilled in the minds of the educated persons a spirit of enquiry into the basis of their social system which was in a state of stagnant condition. Even the socio-religious revival inaugurated by Ram Mohan Roy further inspired many learned men to work voluntarily towards betterment of Hindu society in general. These include namely, Atmaram Dadoba Tarkhadkar and Bhaskar Dadoba Tarkhardkar’s ‘Prarthana Samaj’, Mahadeve Govind Ranade, Swami Dayanad Saraswati, Swami Vivekanad, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Ram Mohan Lohiya and Vithal Ramji Shinde. They challenged current beliefs, customs and evil social practices of superstition, child marriage, widow burning and most importantly untouchablility. These individuals pioneered social reforms in India. However, being the
members of the orthodox upper castes in Hindu society, their ideas and social work spelled limited influence in the contemporary society. On this background the social reforms undertaken by Mahatma Phooley characteristically differed in its rebellious nature.

Mahatma Phooley played elementary role in awakening the downtrodden class to their deplorable conditions. He along with his wife started first schools in India for the untouchables and girls who were the doubly segregated section of Hindu society. He founded the Satyashodhak Samaj (Society of the seekers of Truth). Phooley revolted against caste, as far as caste denied ordinary human rights to all the members of Hindu society. He was the first man who inspired self-confidence in the masses. Among the Indian Princes it was Shri Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda who started schools for the Untouchables. Untouchables in Maharashtra, too, showed sign of stirring from their age-long slimmer. Gopal Baba Walangakar, who followed Mahatama Phooley in his struggle, raised a banner of revolt against caste system and strove to remove the stain of untouchability. Similarly, treading on reformative lines of Mahatma Phooley, Shivram Janaba Kamble and Kisan Faguji Bansod played a significant role prior to Ambedkar’s Dalit movement in Maharashtra.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkars’s entry into the public life was an epoch making episode in the fight against rigid caste system in India. Born in an untouchable family background he was highly educated and possessed moral qualities. He started the most important movement against untouchability in 1920s in Maharashtra. In the early 1930s, Ambedkar realized that the only way of improving the status of the untouchables was to give up the Hindu religion. He asked his caste brothers, ‘you have nothing to lose but your religion’. In the early 1950s, he sought out that
Buddhism was suitable as an alternative religion for the untouchables. He favored Buddhism above all because it was ‘an indigenous Indian religion of equality; a religion which was anti-caste and anti-Brahman’. With large number of his followers he converted to Buddhism in 1956. The conversion turned the untouchables more militant and self-asserting and accelerated Dalit consciousness in Maharashtra and rest of the India.

The greatest achievement of the Dalit movement led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was his success in creating socio-political awakening and self-confidence in the minds of Dalits who gradually got educated only because of educational and reservation safeguards offered by Indian Constitution. Having liberated huge population from the shackles of rigid caste system and embarking upon new religion of equality, fraternity and justice, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar became the driving force behind Dalit literary movement. It was in the 1960s that little magazines started challenging the urban-biased and excessively individualistic mainstream wrings. Some of these had grown up in the poor quarters of Bombay, others had moved from their rural locations to the fast growing metropolis. And most were attracted to trade unions or left parties. Annabhau Sathe, Baburao Bagul, Yashwatn Manohar, Namdeo Dhasal, and Narayan Surve Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav, Shankaraao Kharat are the most significant among these. The beginning of an aggressive Dalit Panthers movement in 1972 brought the Dalit literary movement to the notice of the Marathi literary circles. It propagated their ideas through literary expressions such as poems, stories, plays and autobiographies which protested against the Hindu intellectual tradition, the Hindu religion and Hindu ethics. The poems used language exactly as it is spoken by these unfortunate young men and women leading a life of misery in Bombay. Namdeo Dhasal, on the other hand, wrote poetry closer to the modernist
sensibility but with unmistakable stamp of the anger of a rebel. A blend of pathos and protest has by now become the defining feature of Dalit literature.

The elements of rebel against social injustice can be observed in Dalit autobiographies. It allowed writers to bring forth lives of oppressed classes to which the mainstream reader are unknown. Autobiographies have been instrumental in breaking the long silence. Such literary expressions are the blazing desires seeking freedom from the cultural clutches trapped for centuries unknown. The major Dalit autobiographers include Daya Pawar, P. E. Sonkamble, Laxman Mane, Shankarao Kharat, Sharankumar Limbale, Laxman Gaikwad, Kishor Shantabai Kale and Narendra Jadhav. Similarly Dalit women too have written and published their life account. Some of these are: Kumud Pawade, Shantabai Krishnaji Kamble, Baby Kamble, Janabai Girhe, Vimal More and Urmila Pawar.

All the above cited authors whether male or female suffered equally or more than that of the male authors as they were exposed to the caste ridden system and by the patriarchal order of the society. These are some of the Dalits who traded on the footprints of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and unquestionably gained self-respect and acquired genuine sense of their fundamental rights. The above mentioned autobiographers in a way reflect fact file about their unpleasant past which was deliberately neglected in mainstream literary trends in recent past. Studying their autobiographies would make readers to cast an eye on disgraceful past of Dalits. This research attempts to interpret the factors behind the autobiographers’ struggle that equipped them to attained self-respect and dignity in society. Thus, this anticipates that personality and thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar would guide backward sections of
society. For the mere reason that this backward sections of society, just to meet their immediate needs, succumb to bargain individual rights in democratic society, thus perpetuating age old social disorders in its newest forms.

This research is divided into five chapters. The first chapter addresses the conditions of Dalits in India, the concept of caste system, various social reform and revolutionary movements up to Dalit Panther. It also deals with the emergence of Dalit literature in which the genre of autobiography is give a special attention. The second chapter deals with Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Person and Thoughts whose contribution in ameliorating the condition of Dalits is unparallel. He is most revered leader from oppressed community who aroused a sense of self-dignity to throw away shackles of caste system. The third chapter interprets the selected four autobiographies namely, Laxman Mane’s *Upara* (Outsider) published in 1980, Laxman Gaikwad’s *Uchalya* (The Branded) published in 1987, Sharankumar Limbale’s *Akkarmashi* (The Outcaste) published in 1984 and Urmila Pawar’s *Ayadan* (The Weave of My Life) 2003. The forth chapter sums up the impact of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s personality and thoughts in social, educational, intellectual, psychological terms. The fifth chapter draws conclusion from the point of view of prospect of dalit literary movement and increasing relevance of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s thoughts in world’s biggest democratic society.

**Social Survey of India Up To 18th Century**

For general reader, reading Dalit autobiography is peeping into the lowest strata of Indian society: indeed an unpleasant experience of witnessing rejected-ostracized lives fated to live in caste-ridden hierarchy for hundreds-nay-thousands of years. Almost every Dalit autobiography enlists degraded experiences of the writer. Moreover, having reads
newspaper reports one can assume that condition of Dalits in contemporary society seems nothing to do with circumstances. For instance atrocious treatment inflicted towards Dalits across India becomes clear with following reports. ‘Dalit woman resists rape, set ablaze in Punjab; Four posing as Cops gang-rape Dalit girl in Andhra Pradesh: - The Hindu; Pregnant dalit woman gang-raped in Bhopal: - The Times of India; Dalit woman gang raped in Maharashtra; Police insensitivity again comes to fore Gang raped migrant women approach Delhi Police for justice in Haryana:- The Tribune.¹ One more incident in case of an educated Dalit holds proof of rampant discrimination practices in Indian judiciary. “Judge's complaint proof of deep-rooted untouchability in society”²

In ancient India acquiring and giving knowledge was almost monopoly of certain communities who enjoyed all the privileges of coming upper most layers of society. The same system seems to emerge in its new forms. Amide, only that class will reap benefits of higher education and technology which is not deprived of better means of livelihood. Advancement in information and technology seems to be exploding every now and then in the world. Conversely, one can observe a huge section of society lurching in darkness of ignorance. Social disparity, poverty and illiteracy: the legacies of by gone centuries have persisted in this century too without failing. Owing to internet a dynamic system emerged to get connected with people from remotest part of continent. But at the same time the evil caste system still detaches man from man. Hence, without reviewing the history of social discrimination or condition of Dalits during last centuries and predicting better prospect for twenty first century one cannot put forth all-inclusive transformation of society.

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Dalits are also referred as Shudras, untouchables, depressed classes and an all-inclusive oppressed class in Indian society. Many historical, anthropological as well as socio-religious studies have been undertaken by scholars from many perspectives to explore the survival conditions of this section of society. Dalit literature is concerned it reflects lower strata of society: the characteristic Hindu social organization being followed from ancient age which has perennially subjugating its lower section to lead an inhuman life. Claiming to be at same time a memoir of individual and society while exploring the unseen, unbelievable conditions no other social document would help than Dalit narrative to survey their conditions in its crude state. For the purpose this chapter is divided in three parts. The first part explore the conditions of Dalits-formerly identified untouchables ever since ancient age; the second covers reformative and revolutionary movements undertaken to advance their conditions and finally the third accounts the instrumental role played by Dalit literary movement in verbalizing the concerns of Dalits at world level through their autobiographies.

Social Structure of Indian Society

To understand the causes of their conditions it is customary to know the organization of Indian society i.e. the caste-system. Pointing at these sections many explanations have been put forward by scholars. Some based their arguments on the sacred literature of the Hindus and arrived at different conclusion; but all agree in ascribing to caste extreme antiquity and regard the system as the artificial product of the Brahmanic hierarchy. It was the Brahmic or priestly class which created the India caste system popularly known as Varna system. We shall see how the untouchable classes survived in caste system and continue to suffer up to
the recent times, which directed Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to take on a rigorous line of contemplation and great efforts.

One wonders what wrong must have gone with the Dalits in society that even while being highly educated they have to suffer discrimination in every walk of life. According to Justice A. S. Anand, NHRC chairperson, “despite elaborate provisions in the constitution and other laws, it is an unfortunate reality that social injustice and exploitation of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other weaker sections persist. There are reports in the press about atrocities against persons belonging to these groups and the frequency with which they occur is a cause for disquiet. The humiliation which persons belonging to the scheduled castes in general and the Dalits in particular suffer even today, more than half a century after India proclaimed itself to be a republic, is a matter of shame.” Perpetual ill-treatment towards Dalits can be traced back in the social disabilities conferred by the Hindu society ever since ancient ages.

Caste System

Indian society and culture is characterized by its caste system. The word ‘caste’ is taken from the Portuguese word ‘casta’ a word for ‘jat’. Krishna Kumari defines it as, ‘a rigid social system in which a social hierarchy is maintained generation after generation and allows little mobility out of the position to which a person is born.’ This system originated almost 3000 years back as it necessitated forming a social order in ancient India. It dates back when Aryans migrated from the north to India around 1600BC. In Vedic age the Aryans classified society into four different classes or Varnas with an objective to ‘regulate smooth and ordered life in society.’

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**Varna**

*Varna* is characteristic functional division of a civil society. It is one of the four large caste groups namely *Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishay, and Shudra* from which most *jatis* or castes are believed to develop. These four categories of *Varna* groups were created from the various part of the body of the primeval man, which *Brahma* produced from clay. They are described in the ninetieth Hymn of the Tenth *Mandala* of the Rig Veda known as *Purusha Sukta* which denotes how the four *varnas* as well as whole of animal kingdom emerged on earth.

“The Brahmana was his [Purusha] mouth, the Rajanya was made his arms; the being called the Vaishya, he was his thighs; the Shudra sprang from his feet.”

During the Vedic times, the four ‘varnas’ (literally meaning “color”) were originated from the four parts of the almighty man: Bramhmin, Kshatriya, Vaishay and Shudra. In the beginning it was mainly an occupational division, like trade guilds. But this division of class or labour guilds turned into rigid caste in due course of time. This division was rigid and one’s birth became the sole determinant of one’s identity. The first three ‘varnas’ were supposed to designate the light-skinned Aryan origin while the fourth and last one would imply the darker-skinned Dravidian origin. Below the four *varna* lays a fifth group-the untouchables. It is supposed to be considered outside of the society and of no caste. It was deemed unclean and polluting. Their role in life and society is to carry out unskilled, undignified jobs. It becomes clear that the Rig Vedic *varna* system holds first instance of labour division. This classification soon became rigid. As Jatava writes:

The Brahminic literature is a proof that the priestly class or the Brahminas were the intellectual and spiritual leaders. It was believe that learning and spiritual knowledge were esoteric virtues and their cultivation
needed exclusive attention. Manual labour, therefore, became taboo for the Brahmans. It also became taboo for the Kshatriyas, with whom the Brahmans shared power and who were their rivals and equals. The aristocratic order of the Kshatriyas could not be sustained by mere force. So, the Brahmans framed elaborate rules laying down not only the status and grade of the various social and cultural groups but also prescribing distinct rituals and ceremonies for each.

The ninth book of Rig Veda also makes it clear that the organization of castes was fully developed at the period of Brahmanas and is codified in the laws of Manu. The institution of caste formulated by Rig Veda is exclusively Indian phenomenon. “It was just to maintain the gradation in Hindu society, to broaden the scope of enslavement and serfdom. It was purely an Aryan concept, nowhere found in the world. Brahmans have argued that the primary object of the caste system was to protect and maintain purity of blood.” In true sense it was much contemplated conspiracy to divide the society. In this case the Brahmanas, the Sutras, and the Puranas all played the role of degrading and suppressing the self-employed class of artisans and agriculturist. Through religious renewal the Brahminism regained and put hold on its power and position for nearly five thousand years.

“The Brahmanas deal with the ritualistic aspect of Vedic social life. They have combined Vedic philosophy with rituals and sacrifices. Brahmanas accepted the divine authority of the Vedas for the guidance of social behaviour…In the age of Brahmanas there was emphasis on sacrifices, supremacy of the priest, an eternity of the Veda and observance of Varshashram Dharma…[In this system] Shudras could not revolt against this Vedic Brahmanic theory of social injustice, and were crushed for raising any voice.” Meanwhile, the Rig Vedic division into the Aryan and non-Aryan (Dasa) was replaced by that of Daivay (godly)
and Asuray (of Demons). The Brahman was supreme and represented
divine Varna, while Shudra was the lowest in the social order and thus
Asur. The Brahmans established themselves ‘Veritable Gods on Earth’
and contrarily Shudras were condemned to an inauspicious, damned
persons and ‘were not to be seen.’

As observed by K. L. Chenchreek, the Kalpa sutras deal with the
Vedic sacrifices, household ceremonies and social laws. Life in the Kalpa
sutra was same as it was in Vedic period. He further says, the first three
castes were allowed to perform upanayan- the sacred thread tying
ceremony, where as the Shudras had no right to celebrate the same. It
becomes clear that during this period there was great emphasis on the
purity of the Varnas. Shudras were neglected in social and cultural
functions organized by the Brahmans, which were more religious and
ritualistic. Shudras were only allowed to watch.

Moreover, the legal institutions were all based on Dharam Shastras. The Brahmans had the power of legislation and codification of
rules. Thus, without failing they fully supported the Vedas. They enjoyed
almost divinely status in society. Without Upanayan, which was not more
than an oppressive signal, an individual of low caste was doomed to
social degradation, ignorance and poverty. This was the actual state of
Shudras. In this regard Jatava, D. R. says:

In the Karama theory, the doctrine of transmigration is an
essential part which has close relation with Varna social
system. They should transmigrate according to the acts of
an individual. Therefore it gets the birth, for which it
deserves. This was totally a misconception to prove that
Shudras in their previous birth have not done good acts
and have deviated from Dharam. Because of their past
sins they have a wretched life in the present times. The
Dharma sutras stated explicitly that good acts lead to
higher birth and evil deeds to a lower one.¹¹
Similarly in the Epic age, the *Ramayana and Mahabharata* the two greatest epics of the Hindu society, uphold the supremacy of Brahmanism and divine order. ‘The epics seem to have imposed varna system as originated by the gods themselves. The theory of Karma…combined with Varna Vyavstha is the central doctrine of the epics.”  

So far, the foregoing discussion relates us with origin of Varna system in Vedic period and legalization through scriptures that the Hindu society hold dear till date. Thus, the earliest Hindu society in common was composed of Brahmans or the priestly class; the Kshatriyas or the military class; the Vaishyas or the merchant class and the Shudras or the artisans and menial labour class who bore the fruits of their past acts and thus were led to serve the rest of the *varnas* or castes in due course of time.

Caste system has, thus been commonly believed by scholars, either imposed upon the submissive population of India by law-giver or grew out of society needed one such institution. In Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s opinion, “caste existed long before Manu. He was an upholder of it and therefore philosophized about it, but certainly he did not and could not ordain the present order of Hindu Society. His work ended with the codification of existing caste rules and the preaching of Caste Dharma.” Manu advocated the caste system and perhaps reformulated them to suite his surroundings. He codified the principles to be observed under certain circumstances. By codifying the behavioral patterns and moralizing over the caste Dharma, the caste system consequently became rigid among ignorant general public. In due course of time, this system gave rise to sub-castes. In the opinion of Dr. Ambedkar, “this was essentially a class system. Individuals when qualified could change their class, and therefore classes did change their personnel. In the history of Hindus, at some time,
the priestly class socially detached itself from the rest of the body of the people and through a closed-door policy became a caste by itself. The other classes being subject to the law of social division of labour underwent differentiation, some into large other into very minute groups.”

Viashya and Shudra were the original undeveloped classes who formed the sources of the numerous castes today whereas Kshatriyas being warriors and administrators there was very little sub-division. Owing to its sub-castes, today we claim India to be a multi dimensional society with it hundreds, nay thousands of castes ‘surviving’ in one society.

Now it becomes necessary to discuss what this division of society meant for general public. In other word what is the relevance of caste in the life of a common man in respect of determining his status in a particular caste. For that purpose let us take into consideration some of the characteristics attached to the caste. As put forth by many scholars it highlights the nature of caste and what it meant to be caste in Hindu society as whole.

The entry of foreign races in India created many racial, political and social tensions in earliest period of history. Varna system gradually became a tool of oppression in the hands of the dominating castes. *Varnashraman Dharama* is envisioned division of Hindu society into four categories, as has been noted earlier, in Vedas and Dharam shastras. In the beginning Aryan society was not so rigid. Jawaharlal Nehru in his book *Discovery of India* says that, caste system, “brought degradation in its train afterwards, and it is still a burden and a curse…caste began with a hard and fast division between Aryans and non-Aryans, the latter again being divided into the Dravidian races and the aboriginal tribes.” With the passage of time it resulted into a complex caste system. It becomes
difficult to arrive at precise definition of the caste as unit. According to A. N. Shah “caste system operates by twin principles of separation and order. In other words the principle of separation denotes splitting up of Hindu society into a number of groups and sub-groups with certain features. The principle of order refers to a graded division of high and low.”\textsuperscript{16} However, E. A. Gait explained caste as an “endogamous group of a collection of such groups bearing a common name, and having the same traditional occupation, claiming a common descent from the same source, and commonly regarded as forming a single homogeneous community.”\textsuperscript{17}

Sir Herbert Risley defines caste, “as a collection of families bearing a common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling and [are] regarded by those who are competent to give and opinion and forming a single homogeneous community.”\textsuperscript{18}

Having read above definitions of caste it becomes clear that caste is a nomenclature referred under Varna system that bears identical characteristics for an individual being member of a caste. To sum up, in present condition caste is perpetual phenomenon of group consciousness in Indian society. It is without failing, transferred by members of a caste from one generation to another. The group being part and parcel of India society, an individual member of the caste is terribly aware about one’s caste group: higher or lower caste and whatsoever privileges are attached to his/her caste. Directly or indirectly one obeys or is compelled to follow caste consciousness. Thus, caste is undeniable mark of a group consciousness in Indian society, a mind setup to identify one person from the other.

Here, it becomes pertinent to note down views of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the greatest scholar who minutely studied Indian caste system
while he was in Columbia University. Today his study is regarded as the most authentic document of caste. He meant caste in India is, “an artificial chopping off of the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy…Endogamy is the only characteristic that is peculiar to caste.”¹⁹ He further says that it is by studying how the endogamy is maintained one can arrive at how caste evolved and how it operates in day to day life.

In Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s opinion caste system evolved in itself in the social, economic, cultural and political frameworks of governance of Hindu society. Since 1916 he was indulged in interpreting the nature of institution of caste and untouchability in order to understand results which barred Shudras from society. Through his works Dr. B.R. Ambedkar explained the everyday phenomenon of caste system pointing at its origin and growth. Further he elaborately studied the origin of untouchability, Shudras and wrote number of essays to air his views on caste system and the institution of untouchability.

He summarized the features of caste system. This system divides Hindu population in social groups called castes. The castes are then made endogamous, restricted laws to conduct marriages within the caste. It gives civil, cultural, educational and economic rights for each caste and maintenance by heredity having no freedom to alter. This conferring of unequal rights is unequal and hierarchical in nature for higher to lower castes. It further provides a mechanism for enforcement of the system in terms of social ostracism through a provision of social and economic prohibitions including social and economic prohibitions. Finally, caste system also draws justification from some elements of Hindu religious
philosophy such as making the divine origin of the caste system and its linkages with the concerned of karma and rebirth.

**Shudra**

Ever since the ancient age, the Vedic Aryans excluded the Shudras from the mainstreams of social, cultural and religious life. Their economic powers and activities were restricted. There were discouraged to adopt Vedic faith and denied education. There is no doubt the practice of untouchability was encouraged by the Aryan society to oppress and exploited the unskilled class in a planned and premeditated manner. Aryan race accepted many invaders who were later submerged into Hindu society but treated the untouchables as slaves. Hence the principle of graded inequality became the order of Brahmanic or Hindu social order.

Further, in ensuing centuries, as we shall see under the heading ‘Manusmriti’ in this chapter the institution of Manu established laws which socially and economically had been denouncing millions of Shudras for centuries. This organized form of slavery in the form of social stratification named caste system along with the disgusting untouchability was not found in any other institutions carried out in civil societies of the world. Every field of knowledge and power was monopolized by a single ethnic group. Kshatriya and Vaishayas supported the ideological base of the Brahminical order to keep alive the feudal landlordism, exploitation and the institution of caste discrimination, the worst form of social degradation and slavery ever since Vedic period. Undoubtedly, the roots of such detestable caste system, practice of untouchability are alive since Rig Vedic period.

**Manusmriti: The Code of Conflicting Conduct**

In order to understand the Ethics and the religion of the Hindu it is highly essentially to say a few words about Manusmriti. “The Manu
Smriti is said to be divine in its origin. The name Manu had great prestige in the ancient history of India and seeing the prestige he enjoyed the authorship is attributed to Manu. The code is itself is signed in the family name of Bhrigu as was the ancient custom. The text composed by Bhrigu entitled as ‘The Dharma Code of Manu’ is the real title of the work.” The name Bhrigu is subscribed to the end of every chapter of the Code itself. We have therefore the family name of the author of the Code. His personal name is not disclosed in the Book. All the same it was known to many. The author of Narada Smriti writing in about the 4th century A.D. knew the name of the author of the Manu Smriti and gives out the secret. According to Narada it was one Sumati Bhargava who composed the Code of Manu. Sumati Bhargava is not a legendary name, and must have been historical person for even Medhatithe the great commentator on the Code of Manu held the view that this Manu was ‘a certain individual’. Manu therefore is the assumed name of Sumati Bhargava who is the real author of Manu Smriti. It was precisely composed in a very short span of time. According to scholars Sumati Bhargava must have composed the Code which he deliberately called Manu Smriti between 170 B.C. and 150 B.C. The Brahminic revolution by Pushyamitra took place in 185 B.C. Hence, Manu Smriti was new Code of law taught for the first time during reign of Pushymitra - one who revolted against Maurya Empire and stirred society against Buddhism.

In order to understand what moral standards and religious notions or Code of Laws are there for Shudras, in particular, it is worthwhile to note here some of the Smritis, for the simple reason that these moral codes have moulded psychology of the Hindus and determined their attitude towards the Shudras. They are set out below under separate heads
so that it gives an idea of the status given by Manu to the community of Shudras.

Manu asks the householders of the Brahmanak, Kshatriya and Vaishya class:

IV 61. Let him not dwell in a country where the rulers are Shudras. A Shudra is not to be deemed as a respectable person.

For Manu enacts that:

XI. 24. A Brahmin shall never beg from a Shudra property for (performing) a sacrifice i.e. for religious purpose. All marriage ties with the Shudras were proscribed. Marriage with a woman belonging to any of the three other classes was forbidden. A Shudra was not to have any connection with a woman of the higher classes and an act of adultery committed by a Shudra with her was declared by Manu to be an offence involving capital punishment.

VII. 20. A Brahmana who is only a Brahman by decent i.e. one who has neither studied nor performed any other act required by the Vedas may at the king’s pleasure, interpret the law to him i.e. act as the Judge, but never a Shudra (however learned he may be.)

VIII. 272. If a Shudra arrogantly presumes to preach religion to Brahmins the King shall have poured burning oil in his mouth and ears.

In the matter of acquiring learning the knowledge Manu ordains as follows:

III. 156. He who instructs Shudra pupils and he whose teacher is a Shudra shall become disqualified for being invited to a Shudra.

IV. 99. He must never read the Vedas…in the presence of the Shudras.21

Law givers after Manu farfetched the legacy of caste system with its utmost unkindness and towards Shudra. For instance, laws regarding studying the Veda, the Katyanaya lays down that if a Shudra happens to hear the Veda or tries to utter a word of the Veda the King shall cut his tongue and pour hot molten lead in his ears. Concerning Rights of property for Shudras, Manu says,
X. 129. No superfluous collection of wealth must be made by a Shudra, even thought he has power to make it, since a servile man, who has amassed riches, becomes proud, and, by his insolence or neglect give pain to Brahmins…

The Shudras can have only one occupation, this is one of the inexorable Laws of Manu. Says Manu:

I. 91. One occupation only, the Lord prescribed to the Shudras, to serve meekly these other three castes (namely Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishyas)

X. 121 If a Shudra, (unable to subsist by serving Brahmans) seeks a livelihood, he may serve Kshatriyas, or he may also seek to maintain himself by attending on a wealthy Vaishaya.

X. 122. But let (Shudra) serve Brahmins, either for the sake of heaven, or with a view to both (this life and the next); for he who is called the servant of a Brahmana thereby gains all his ends.

X. 123. The service of Brahmans alone is declared (to be) an excellent occupation for a Shudra for whatever else besides this he may perform will beat him no fruit.

X. 125. The remnants of their food must be given to him, as well as their old household furniture.

A Shudra is required by Manu to be servile in his speech and manner towards the other classes.

VIII. 271. If he mentions the names and castes of the (twice born) with contumely, an iron nail, then fingers long, shall be thrust red hot into his mouth.

As far as outcastes are concerned Manu has special set of laws. He says that a person who is excommunicated by his caste is an ‘outcaste’. Accordingly an outcaste is to be treated as he/she was actually dead.

Further he gave rules for the Outcastes.

XI. 183. The Sapindas and Samanodakas of an outcaste must offer (a libation of) water (to him as if he were dead), outside (the village), on an inauspicious day, in the evening and in the presence of the relatives, officiating priests, and teacher.

Manu will not allow the outcaste to live in the family house. Manu enjoins that
XI. 189… Clothes, food and drink shall be given to them (i.e. the outcastes members of the family), and they shall live close to the (family) house.

III. 92 Let him (i.e. the householder) gently place on the ground (some food) for dogs, outcastes, chandals, those afflicted with diseases that are punishments of former sins, crows and insects….

Further Manu declares that having social intercourse with an outcaste is a sin. He warns the Snataka

IV. 79… not (to) stay together with outcastes.

IV. 213… Not (to eat food given) by outcastes…

Manu ordains a social boycott of the outcaste by penalizing those who associate with him.

XI. 181. He who associates himself for one year with an outcaste himself becomes an outcaste; not by sacrificing, reading the Veda, or contracting affinity with him, since by those acts he loses his class immediately, but even by using the same carriage or seat, or by taking his food at the same board.22

Such are the laws of Manu for an outcaste or the person who had despoiled the caste barriers. The rigorousness of the penalties prescribed against him excludes him/her from all social intercourse, to suspend from every civil function, to disqualify him for all offices and to disable him from inheriting any property. Under these pains and penalties the outcaste might as well be dead which indeed Manu considers him to be, directing libations to be offered to the manes as though he was naturally so. This system of deprivation and indignity was imposed on those who tried to associate with an outcaste. The males and females were both subject to the law of the outcaste. Even their progeny was subject penalty. The law was extended to the son of the outcaste. Born after excommunication he lost his right to inherit, i.e. he became an outcaste along with his father. It is clear that the laws of Manu regarding the outcastes are of devoid of justice and humanity.
It becomes clear that any atrocious conduct inflicted upon Shudras or outcastes the above mentioned laws of Manu protected the offender especially upper caste members. Upper caste members enjoy full authority to exercise will and wishes inflexibly upon lower castes as sanctioned by their Shastras. In that case they do no harm to their Dharma, in fact they help and regulate it: as had been through ages. This legalization under Manu Smriti plays havoc in the lives of untouchables and outcaste. How one can expect the untouchables and outcaste to behave as civil gentleman. Often, criticizing the communities the caste Hindus reproach the untouchables for not able to live sophisticated life on account of personal qualities or merits. Amid the enforced aforesaid rules who would dare to cross his caste boundaries. And even if one does so, it is as mentioned above noting but summoning one’s own death before naturally vanishing into soil. Thus, the erstwhile Shudras, untouchables and outcaste succumb to a subjugated life accepting what so ever fate had nourished them before entering into this world. Dhananjay Keer summarized their condition aptly under the title ‘twenty-five hundred years’, which seems to be persisted until twentieth century. According to him, their social disabilities were specific and sever and numerous. Their touch, shadow and even voice were deemed by the caste Hindus to be polluting. So they had to clear the way at the approach of a caste Hindu. They were forbidden to keep certain domestic animals, to use certain metals for ornaments; were obliged to wear a particular type of dress, to eat a particular type of food, to use a particular type of footwear and were forced to occupy the dirty, dingy and unhygienic outskirts of village and towns for habitation where they lived in dark, insanitary and miserable smoky shanties or cottage…these untouchables Hindus were denied the use of public wells, and were condemned to drink any filthy water they
could find. Their children were not admitted to schools attended by the caste Hindu children. Though they worshipped the gods of Hindus, observed the same festivals, the Hindu temples were closed to them. The caste Hindus, who fondly threw sugar to ants and reared dogs and other domestic pets and welcomed persons of other religions to their houses, refused to give a drop of water to the untouchables or to show them an iota of sympathy. These untouchable Hindus were treated by the caste Hindus as sub-human, less than men, worse than beasts. This picture is still true of villages and small towns. Their miseries did not end at this. As they were illiterate, ill-treated and untouchables for ages, all public services including police and military forces were closed to them. Naturally they followed hereditary occupations. Some of them plied trades of a lower and degrading order such as those of street-sweepers, scavengers and shoemakers. Some skinned carcasses, tanned hides and skins, worked in bamboos and cane and mowed grass. Other, who were more fortunate tilled the land as tenants, worked as labourers in fields, a great number of them subsisted on food or grain given to them as village servants and also are carrion. Thus being deprived of social, religious and civic rights, untouchable Hindus lived the life of a bygone and dead age, dragging on their miserable existence in insufficient accommodation, insanitary surroundings and social segregation. In short they were born in debt and perished in debt. They were born untouchables, they lived as untouchables and they died as untouchables.

**Untouchable and Untouchability**

The practice of Untouchability can be traced back to fifth century in India “as an out come of struggle for superiority between Buddhism and Brahmanism.” Dr. B. R. Ambedkar used the word untouchable for lowest castes in the Hindu social system. In Pre-independence era they
were referred under the term *Depressed Classes*. In 1935 it was replaced by Scheduled Castes when the castes were placed on a Schedule so as to enable those getting special rights from the government agencies.

In caste system the community is stratified on the basis of their earning sources. Brahman engages in imparting knowledge; Kshatriya rules the state; Vaishya finds trade and commercial activities and Shudra serves the rest Varnas. This stratification in a society labeling the occupation gradually turned out to be birth right of that caste to go with that occupation without the freedom to choose any other profession for generations to come. One born in the shudra ‘varna’ or caste has to bear the profession of only serving other three varnas. With the changing time and pace this thinking was disagreed and resented by shurdas. The Untouchables showed disrespect for rules or code of conduct enforced under varna system that the ‘touchable’ or other three varnas. Implicitly the same practice can be sensed in the behavior of upper castes towards downtrodden classes known as ‘Savarna’. The people who rejected the laws of Brahmins were termed as *Avarna* i.e. men not belonging to four varnas and gradually were treated as “untouchables”. Shorn off every possible living means and respect in society the untouchable or outcastes deliberately excluded from village, day-to-day dealing and functions. This modification in social structure occurred for some of the people had started questioning the system.

Untouchability towards the excluded shudras or outcastes was forcibly executed in India. Manusmriti deliberately conspired to put the outcastes out of the mainstream society and literally banned educational access, amassing property and arms to protect and protest. Thus the ‘untouchables’ adopted menial works to survive: carrying and burial of dead bodies, the acts considered to be malicious and hated by any person,
obviously for its filthy nature. This type of jobs, occupation resulted into most tedious life literally shorn off from any type of ornaments, education, hygienic food. An intense kind of hatred followed as the Brahmin and rest of the castes considered outcasts as un-hygienic, filthy people. With pace of time the outcaste generations started claiming themselves to be outcasts as legacy of past generations alike other castes and began to lead a life of real outcastes. They turned out to be ‘un-civic’, un-educated and illiterate. Their habits led the generation to degeneration of all untouchables to come. Thus the casteism gave rise to untouchability in society. Its credit goes to Aryans, the Sunga king and priestly caste Brahmins. In ensuing centuries the untouchables were, again, inhumanly forced to fall pray to the rules of Manusmruthi during the rule of Peshwas in Maharashtra. During the Peshawas, the untouchables were expected to not to enter into the town from 9.00 am to 12.00 pm and 3.00 pm to 6.00 pm. since in the meantime the shadow of the untouchable would fall on others passerby’s body and hence get impure due to untouchables. Moreover, the untouchables’ entry was restricted without tying a earthen pot or broken coconut bowl around neck, so as to collect ‘spit’ that may pollute the path of the Brahmins. One of the most heinous acts was that to tie the brooms around the waist, that touched the ground to swipe their foot prints; hold a stick tied with bells in order that the people be aware of arrival of an untouchable in the public areas. Such was the fate of untouchables in Indian society up to eighteenth century. With social reformers’ efforts they were termed with different names and lables such as downtrodden, untouchables, oppressed classes, Dalits and of late as the Indian constitution identify them under Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, Other backward classes etc.
At present the condition of Dalits or untouchables is surveyed by International Dalit Solidarity Network one of the Denmark based organization, observing human rights all over the world. It depicts the conditions of Dalits in gloomy explanation. The IDSN conducted a survey in the year 2006 to study the untouchability in rural areas in India. It selected 565 villages from 11 States. It disclosed its results in which it found that untouchability even after officially banned under the 1950 Constitution continues to be reality in daily life for lakhs of Indians. The organization displayed alarming facts for a democratic society like ours who boost of social mobility and equality. The organization disclosed the livelihood of Dalits of India as such:

[Untouchability]...in government services
Despite being charged with a constitutional mandate to promote social justice, various local institutions of the Indian State clearly tolerate and even facilitate the practice of untouchability.
37.8% of the villages: Dalits made to sit separately in government schools; 27.6% of the villages: of Dalits: prevented from entering police stations; 25.7% of the villages: of Dalits: prevented from entering ration shops; 33% of the villages: public health workers refuse to visit Dalit homes; 23.5% of the Dalit villages: don’t get mail delivered to their homes; 14.4% of the Dalit villages: Dalits not permitted to enter the ‘panchayat’ Local Government building; 12% of the Dalit villages: Dalits denied access to or forced to form separate lines at polling booths; 48.4% of the Dalit villages: denied access to water sources.

...in market access
35% of villages surveyed: Dalits barred from selling produce in local markets; 47% of villages with milk cooperatives prevent Dalits from selling milk, and 25% prevent Dalits from buying milk.

...in work
25% of villages: Dalits paid lower wages than non-Dalits, work longer hours, have more delayed waged and suffer
more verbal and physical abuse; 37% of villages: Dalit workers paid wages from a distance to avoid physical contact.

...in religion and rites
64% of Dalits: restricted from entering Hindu temples. Almost 50% of villages: Dalits prevented from accessing cremation grounds.

...in the private sphere
73% of villages: Dalits not permitted to enter non-Dalit homes; 70% of villages: Dalits and non-Dalits cannot eat together; 35.8% of Dalits: denied entry into village shops. 25

Above stated conditions of Dalits- erstwhile untouchable would seem too odd for high class individual to consider in an era of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. Some, even claim that the caste system is nowhere to be found and it is ridiculous to clamour against discriminations based on caste which, as they mistakenly presume, is not so. As has been mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, the news reports hold ample proof the infallible nature of caste system in society. Despite revolutionary movements, educational benefits and more or less enforced welfare schemes by government of India, caste system hasn’t stopped operating in its subtlest mode, because considerable educated Dalit population even after rescuing themselves from cyclic tradition of degradation is suffering due to casteism in every walk of life. As S. K. Paul notes, in contemporary India Dalits have kicked, raped and burnt, refused minimum wages, their properties have been destroyed and they have been killed. His study reveals that the Dalits are discriminated against with reference to living wage, share-cropping, money-lending, drawing water from public wells, entry into the temples, service of tea and snacks in the hotels, service in the grocery shops, services of the barber, washer man, cowherd man, priest,
community fests and marriage with caste Hindus. Last decades of nineteenth century was characterized by various state welfare policies, which, apparently proclaimed to have created more opportunities for the Dalits in public domain. Through educational and job opportunities and various welfare schemes, the state claimed to bring Dalits out of their ghettos and exclusion from various social domains. Some Dalits, indeed, benefited from these policies and some were even co-opted to positions of power. Amid modernization, urbanization, and industrialization a new dalit middle class emerged. They found to be in double alienation: alienation from their own castes as well as their new found social class. They did not want to show the upper caste middle class people that they belonged to lower castes from which they have detached themselves. The upper caste-upper middle class communities, of which they tried to be a part, never really accepted them because of deep rooted caste biases. Thus they were in a state of hung up between two social strata. As far as the working class Dalits are concerned, the majority of Dalits in poor urban slums and rural areas were left to fend for themselves. Despite relatively having access to education, but this did not bring about a significant change in their social and livelihood. The professions some of them had adopted during the pre-independence period such as petty contractors, traders and peddlers continued and many worked as landless agricultural wage labourers or small farmers with just two or three acres of lands. Some acquired government jobs, but gave low-prestige, low-earning jobs because of lack of technical and educational qualification for advanced studies.

Strong prejudices would not allow them to have a real sense of equality and freedom as well as citizenship right. In the cities, they were employed mainly in low earning
and low prestige menial jobs life scavenging, and lived in
inhuman conditions in the countless slums in big cities
like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Kolkata. Modernity
did not do away with the old prejudices, beliefs,
traditions or the existing inequalities.27

Last but not least, atrocities on Dalit women, the problem of
ugly outlook of educated women and advanced Dalit women towards
non-educated women poses great concern from recent past. Gender
misconceptions boost the practice of caste discrimination. Dalit
women face dual discrimination in all spheres of life. They are
tortured by poverty, and a greater part of them had to bear physical or
sexual violence from dominant castes. Women are intentionally used
to prolong the oppression of the Dalit community. In fact the Dalit
woman is a Dalit amongst Dalits. She has suffered much and is still
enduring suffering. She has to make her way out through the flaming
desert of casteism in search of shelter. It is the casteism that Dalit
women are being dishonored and molested.

Social Reformers

Untouchability and ensuing social, political, intellectual
harassment of Dalits had been a benumbing reality observed by a
sensitive soul while surveying Indian society. Though, efforts have been
made so far by enlightened men to amend the dark gulf of communal
disparity experienced by Dalits in the form of voluntary movements,
organizations to bring forth the unjust treatment and find solutions to the
problems of Dalits in Indian sub-continent. Owing to which we can
observe continual awareness general public and the Dalits so as to
convince the general masses to alter their conventional approach towards
the Dalits and let the Dalits assert their identity, their due share in social,
political sphere. Following discussion attempts to cite various efforts in
the direction of amelioration of pitiful conditions of Dalits and the
movements and organizations brought up in India to restore the place of untouchable as civilian.

Dilemma of Dalithood is a stark reality of Indian society suffused with discriminative practices legalized by Hindu caste system. Unbearably this disturbing caste system had been challenged by several worthy sons of India through their energetic efforts to free Hindu society from evil system. It is a system that forces the Dalits to live in a sub-human social survival in a submissive economic, religious and political powerlessness. Social reformers tried to release Dalits from psycho-economic pressures of social traditional values which had degraded, segregated and devitalized them since time immemorial. Their enlightened rational outlook compelled them to launch movements and form organizations to draw attention to and find way out of the problems of the oppressed class. As a result we can see a continuous increase of alertness among the Dalits. Gradually, they started claiming their place in society and trying their due share in power. This section attempts to give an account of diverse reform movements and organizations in India initiated ever since ancient era.

Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, the kingly, mighty and first thinker and reformer of dialectical thinking in the Indian social history, Buddha rocked caste system to its foundations for a considerable period by letting the untouchables into his religion. In history of India, the Buddha (623 B.C. – 543 B.C.) is known both as a path finder as well as great social reformer.

According to Chanchreek K. L., “His [Buddha’s] voice was strong against the Vedic and Upanishadic thought. He boldly denied the authority of Vedas in social life, divinity of gods and priest craft… He laid down a practical simple code for ethical norms for the
transformation of the society and reconstruction on the democratic principle of social equality and justice.”

Thereby, Buddha brought tremendous change in the social thinking and outlook of the people. “It gave three principles in combination which no other religion does [Hinduism, in particular]. Buddhism teaches *prajna* (understanding as against superstition and supernaturalism), *karuna* (compassion) and *samta* (equality).” The Shudras, homely women, Chandals, the fallen men and women were all initiated by him in his religion who all proved to be the noble souls after initiation, and became perfect Buddhist monks.

Jatava, D.R. confirms that, “Buddha was the inaugurator of a social critique. He was opposed to the political and social alienation of man that implied in the caste system and particularly in the dominance of the Brahmans.” Buddhism, a religious discipline was open ended religion: very liberal and accommodating. It practically acknowledges the dignity of man as human being. In sixth century B.C. Buddhism acquired a reformative religious order against caster prejudices. Alternatively it was movement against superstitions, social odds, including untouchability and all sort of human sacrifices as well as animal sacrifices in the *Yajanas*. When we go through the pages of history, we learn that nearly 2550 years ago Buddha emerged as a savior of the Shudras who were oppressed and overlooked by the Brahminacal order. Buddha embraced the outcastes and submerged sections of the society, and initiated them into his Dharma. He asked them to join him, his Dharma and Sangha. Even women were allowed to enter his Sangha.

Thus, Buddhism not only awakened the social degraded people and voiced against social injustice, caste system and untouchability
were the main percepts of the Hindu social order. He turned down social gradation on the basis of caste and rejected Vedic philosophy.

In later period around 185 B.C, Samavedhi Sunga Brahmin known as Pushymitra one of the commanders in Magadha Empire killed the Buddhist king Brihadratha Maurya and seized his throne. He established the Sunga Dynasty founded on Braminical religious convictions which revived series of autocratic rules. During this period *Mansumrithi* was encoded. Buddhist Memorials, *Sthoopa’s, Vihara’s* and *Chithya Bhoomis* were submerged to ground. Buddhist Universities were burnt out killing Buddhist monks mercilessly. General public who had adopted and supported Buddhism were captured, dragged, in streets and burnt alive on wooden piers. It was the most in human persecution unparalleled anywhere in the world. About these events the Babashaheb Ambedkar said, “Pushymitra’s revolution was a political counter revolution engineered by the Brahmins to overthrow Buddhism, the Brihadratha Maurya killed by Pushyamitra sunga such a revolution is great revolution than French revolution. After decline of Maurya dynasty, Pushyamitra restarted the Brahminical regime with infamous Manusmirti. And whole tyranny of caste system continued uninterrupted until second half of the twentieth century with its most wicked laws against Shudras as discussed in earlier part of this chapter. In the history of India, Dr. Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism along with massive crowd of follower in 1956 was probably the second religious revolution against Vedic dharma after 2550 years ago. It marked revival of Buddhism with its ‘all inclusive liberation’ massage on Indian soil. It vitalized Dalit masses and its socio-religious impact on their livelihood shall be discussed in later in this chapter.
After complete decline of Buddhism and terrible blows to Hinduism from Islam during 8th to 16th centuries, the Natha tradition and Niruna-Saguna Bhakti movement flourished in north India. Meanwhile the common masses tired of wars, attacks, conversions and lootings the Bhakti poets preached the policy of communal harmony, co-existence, mutual trust, liberalism, universal brotherhood. They also condemned ritualism, caste hatred and preached for unity as all were the children of one formless god. In its earliest stages its nature was purely religious. In the medieval age with the emergence of Kabir, Ravidas it became a movement of social change. Religious dedication marked the Bhakti cult but side by side it voiced against social evils, caste system, and untouchability.  

In Bhakti movement in Maharashtra we find essential part of protest against untouchability and exploitation of the oppressed. Chokhamela was born in second half of 13th century. He is revered one of the figures in Warkari Sampradaya with the pilgrimage to Pandharpur. Chokhamela was Mahar- an untouchable caste in Maharashtra. He offers models for protests against untouchability. The essence of his abhangas, according to Chanckreek K. L. is, “the abhangas [devotional songs] which do refer to untouchability are full of protest as he was probably not satisfied being born as an untouchable Mahar. He complains to God why he has become cruel and given birth in the lowest community. In another Abhangas he plainly speaks to god how he can serve being as untouchable.” His abhangs are mainly devotional poems expressing his deep devotion and love for Lord Vitthal. They reveal his deep piety and sense of resignation as true bhakt or devotee. There are some suggestions of protest against untouchability. In Abhanga 76, Chokhamela speaks

“O god, my caste is low; how can I serve you?
Everyone tells me to go away: how can I see you?
When I touch anyone, they take offence.
Chokhamela wants your mercy”

In above lines he expresses his acceptance of low caste; there is also a clear hint of complaint. Even though he admits his low status in caste system and maharness, he is fully certain that for his worldly fellowmen he might by an untouchable but for God, he is His beloved. The shortcoming of the body, lowliness of the caste is all outside thing. Even the unattractive, the distorted and externally abandoned can be sacred and adorable to God. In Abhanga 52, Chokhalamela exposes his inner grief in his philosophy of the polluted and the non-polluted. He says

“Cane is crooked, but its juice is not crooked,
Why be fooled by outward appearance?
The bow is crooked, but the arrow is not crooked
Why be fooled by outward appearance?

Above lines makes it clear that though Chokhamela used as abhangas to give voice his feelings being thwarted to offer prayers to god, his protest is subdued and overshadowed by his devotion for lord Vitthal. Perhaps he had accepted the limitations of his caste but the gist of the entire body of his abhangas is that people rejected Mahars as untouchables but his devotional power made brought him close to people.

Marathi Bhakti cult in Maharashtra began and was inspired by Dnyneshar during 13th century. Dnyneshwar himself was an outcaste Brahman, Namdev was contemporary of Chokhamela. In 16th century Eknath appeared as an important saint who although Brahman dined with Mahars and allowed the untouchables into his Bhajan assemblies. Marathi Bhakti cult, poet saints influenced the social behaviour and corrected social odds through their devotional song. They proved to be a social force who preached equality in daily life, discarding caste distinctions and practice of untouchability as well as exploitation. Kabir as spiritual,
rebel poet both in religious and literary history of India hold important place. Kabir lived in the time of Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517 A.D.) He refused to recognize caste rules. He left behind many Hindi verses containing the truth he preached. In modern day India, his devotional songs and verses provide light to the entire community. His fearlessness, straightforwardness in handling issues of caste, orthodox priests, attest that he was a social thinker, philosopher, poet and reformer. Kabir aggressively rejected caste and creed that permitted discrimination and exploitation. Kabir’s influence on society is reflected quite clearly as his songs and verses deny distinguishing upper caste or creed from the point of view of general man. Ravidas, a medieval saint-poet born in the caste of Chamars, his caste was of removing carcasses of and tanning the hides of these animals for shoemaking. He was never ashamed of his inferior social at bottom of caste system. He openly opposed institutionalized inequality Varna system, and practice of untouchability like other saints-poets.

Ravidas tried to awaken self-esteem through his verses. For Instance: apno paras aap! i.e. Be thyself parasmani – the mythical stone that alters anything into gold that comes in contact with. In other words, you need not have to crave for the mysterious touch of your oppressors but yourself will have to try for your salvation. Don't think you are untouchables. You too have all the capacities of a human being. You require no touch rather than yourself, to turn into gold. His verses explore foundation for socio-religious equality before God, for which his creed known as Ravidas panth became popular throughout the country among the lower classes as Ravidas travelled across northern India, to spread his message of pure Bhakti, social unity, dignity of labour.
Bhakti movements assumed importance and preserved its teachings of social equality in oral literature. During Muslim rule, because of growing influence of Islamic culture and Sufism, and the low origin of the Nirgun saints and caste ridden society, the Bhakti movement sidelined to secondary importance by the Brahmans and the dominating classes. “This movement freed God from the clutches of priests. They not only emancipated people’s spiritual outlook but also contributed to the social and cultural evolution of the country. Idolatry, caste system meaningless rituals etc. were denounced and instead, a passionate feeling of love of God was preached. Devotion through singing, dancing and reciting the scriptures in popular language were the means adopted to bring about social solidarity.” Their belief that devotion or Bhakti could bring personal salvation for anyone gave self-respect and position to all classes of people who had been debarred from religious enlightenment and full participation in religious life under orthodox Brahmanism. “As social reformers too, these saints preached fervently against caste exclusiveness and against the subjugation of women.” The Bhakti cult was, thus, a new explanation of Hinduism. Influenced by Bhakti movement many low castes members devoted their entire life in praise of god irrespective of hatful treatment by upper caste authorities. These devotes later came to be known saints on account of their relentless service and passion for God, however their abhangas, vanis, dohas express inquiry spirit against unjust treatment carried out by orthodox Hindu society.

Worshipping God through devotion and personal communication is Bhakti. All devotees are considered equal before God. Two traditions were developed within the bhakti movement after the 15th century - saguna and nirguna. The first had faith in the outward appearance of Vishnu or Shiv, concerning the Vaishnavite or Shaivaite traditions. It
urged equality amid all the castes. Despite it agrees with the *Varnashram dharma*: Hindu caste order. On the other hand the devotees of the *nirguna* for example Ravidas and Kabir believed in a formless universal God. They partly resisted the Brahminical hierarchical order. Soon it became famous with the Dalits in urban and rural areas in the early twentieth century, because it made available the opportunity of salvation: social equality.

The nineteenth century experienced an unprecedented social awaking in India. It was this period when the emancipatory movement were undertaken on India soil to promote most devote human values of humanism, democracy, individual freedom, scientific attitude and release from social and religious restrictions. The then learned generation realized the importance of education and social reforms. Education is then only means to ceaseless social reform. So, every sensitive learned soul, inspired by notions that education nurtures human beings and it brings equality in society, aspired to plunge into social activities in Maharashtra.

In early nineteenth century followed the waves of the socio-religious revival inaugurated by Ram Mohan Roy and reformers in India who initiated modern outlook among Hindu society. Opening of Socio-religious movements in India in the nineteenth century was an outcome of coming into to contact of two different societies: European and Eastern. They were completely different from each other in respect of ideas, taste and more importantly they had unequal political relationship with each other. Although Westerners had arrived in Indian sub-continent in sixteenth century, the impact of Western ideas became noticeable in the early part of the nineteenth century during the British rule. With the arrival of British imperial rule,
India came in contact with an alien civilization far advanced in material sciences as well as in political and economic thought. The new ideas and the new ways of life that the British brought with them stirred the Indian society to its depths and created an intellectual ferment in the minds of the thinking people. English education introduced by the British rulers both about a great change in social and religious outlook of the people. It gave the ideas of individual freedom, human rights, equality, rationalism secularism and democracy. It instilled in the minds of the educated persons a spirit of enquiry into the basis of their social system. They began to challenge current beliefs, customs and social practices. These individuals were the pioneers of social reform movement in India.\textsuperscript{38}

The marked feature of India society during nineteenth century was numerous restrictions on individual as well as social behaviour. Each one in the Indian society was bound by one or the other rule and restrictions of family, caste or community. Thus to free the individual from age old, oppressive and illogical restrictions was the primary task at hand in front of social reformers. The social reform movements advocated changes in these rules because they were convinced that the changes they proposed were beneficial to the betterment of society and thus they strived to convince others to modify or transform their ways of behaving.

The social reforms undertaken by awakened individuals in India were directed at three levels. First, family system, especially marriage institution, child marriage, polygamy, dowry system and prohibition of widow-marriage; Second, setting free the rigid caste restrictions, inter-dining, inter-caste marriages, idea of pollution and untouchability; and the third was in connection with the evil practices in society such as purdha system, denial of education to women, shaving of widows’ heads, infanticide, animal sacrifices, hook-swinging etc. rampant inhuman practices.
There were various social forces, native as well as foreign at work which intended for social reforms in India. The native forces comprised the English educated elite who had imbibed the new spirit generated by the impact of the West. On the other hand, the foreign forces were the Utilitarians and the Evangelicals in England and Christian missionaries. The Utilitarians tested their theories through the instrument of the Government of India. They estimated that a fundamental transformation of Indian society by releasing its people from superstition and tradition as a result of firm government, sound law and application of scientific principles of political economy. They believed that society could be reformed by proper laws.\(^{39}\) Due course Bentinck, Macaulay, Metcalfe and Dalhousie, who represented India in Britain advocated speedy alteration in India. During the period of Bentinck, as Governor- General of India abolition of Sati, suppression of child sacrifice, measures against infanticides were some of the important reformative policies. The important feature of his policy was the direct attack on practices of coming into conflict with the universal moral law.\(^{40}\) One of the most important steps in this direction was the introduction of English as the medium of instruction in India.

According to Sunthakar, it was mainly due to Utilitarians that the government of India became the instrument of social reform early in the nineteenth century. Some of the measures the British introduced encroached upon the rights and privileges of the high castes. The principle of equality before the law brought their entire subject on equal level irrespective of caste and creed. Of the decisions of the British courts swept away Brahmin supremacy. For instance, the Bombay government ruled in 1858 that outcasts could no longer be barred from admission to schools. However, after the revolt of 1857, the government gave up its
policy of reforming the India society; thence the Indians were left to reform themselves in their own way.

The other force was Evangelicals in nature escorted by William Wilberforce. This force of change sought its practice in India through the British Parliament and the Christian missionaries in India. They wanted to Christianize India and lead them to the path of salvation through the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is the Christian missionaries who first level harsh criticism at the Hindu society. In early decades of nineteenth century they began to question a wide range of social practices such as Sati, prohibition of widow-remarriage, child marriages, polygamy, infanticide, animal sacrifice etc. and tried to impart western ways of life in India through schools.

They [missionaries] were the first to impart education to lower and lowest castes in India. Their system of education was ‘less religious’ in approach and its emphasis on ‘equalitarianism’ challenged the institution of untouchability... Exclusive caste practices did not have approval of the Judiciary in regard to public facilities which as schools, wells and roads. Indeed the prevailing legal system made no distinction on the basis of caste, nor did it provide for any special consideration to a caste like Brahman which was excluded from capital punishment under Hindu kingdoms. Conversely, it brought into existence institutions which were not governed by the traditional norms of neither caste society nor run by the caste Hindus. As such they provided the alternative structure of authority to which members of depressed classes should turn for help and relief from the oppression of the traditional society.41

Obliviously, the expansion of the foreign factors: Utilitarian and Evangelicals produced an atmosphere. But soon it was perceived as grave threat to traditional patterns of society since the lowest castes were more attracted to wards conversion owing to torture by dominant castes. The conservatives opined that ‘Government was alleged to have violated
the sanctity of caste by bringing the highest and lowest castes together in schools, in the ranks of Army and in the railway carriages. Meanwhile, Brahmans as the customary protectors of Hindu way of life completely recognized this threat to Hindu religion and their privileged status owing to spreading out of British authority. The spread of education, systematic policy of Christianizing the depressed classes and the legal protection given to the converted people generated serious Brahmanic reaction in the country.

On this backdrop many native social reformers emerged with dual motive: first to revitalize Hindu society from its evil practices and establish Vedic model of society and on the second level aimed to nab the spread of influence of Missionaries in day to day life of India, especially Missionaries’ attempts to lure the depressed classes to get converted into Christians. Hence, to re-establish the original purity and simplicity reform moments were carry out. They tried to revive glorious history and established institutions, organizations to awaken conscience among the general public.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (177-1833) was the pioneer of Renaissance in India. In 1828 founded Brahmo Samaj which inspired for social reformers in India. He was the man behind abolition to the Sati or widow burning practice in Bengal. Due to his efforts the British passed Act against Widow burning in 1829. In Maharashtra Balshastri Jambhekar (1812-1846) was the pioneer of renaissance in Maharashtra. He was the first to take up to concerns of social reform through his journal- Mubai Darpan. He supported female education, widow re-marriage, liberation of caste formalities and readmission of Christian converts to Hinduism. At the same time many trends in the social reform movements were active namely, Dadoba Panduran Tarkhadkar who sought reforms from the point
of view of humanism; Gopla Hari Deshmukh (1823-1892) known as Lokhitwadi, sought all round reform movement and Jotiba Phule (1827-1890) represented the Populism or Bahujansamajwadi.

Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar is the first known humanist in Maharashtra. He founded Manav Dharma Sabha at Surat in 1844. Later it continued in the name of Parammhapsa Sabha at Bombay in 1848. Dadoba realized that caste system was one of the major hurdles in the progress of Hindu society. Thus, he began to preach One God, One religion and One Caste for the whole of humanity. Main feature of Sabha was its universalism based on rationalism. Emancipation from caste and caste restriction was the distinctive mark of the Sabha. A member of the Sabha was required to sign a pledge not to observe caste distinctions.

As a symbol of renouncing the caste, a ceremony of eating bread prepared by a Christian baker and drinking water at the hand of a Muslim was observed at the weekly meetings. The Sabha worked secretly. One of the weaknesses of it was that Dadoba never attended the meetings of Sabha, but sat in an adjacent room. After 12 years the Sabha was disbanded in fear of betraying its secrecy.

Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823-1892) pioneered thought current of the all-sided reform. He sponsored reforms embracing all aspects of life-religious, social, political and economic. He tried to enlighten his fellow countrymen through his Shatapatre (Hundred Epistles) published during 1848-49 detailing his tirade against follies of Hindu society. He was the first to challenge the age-old authority and time-honoured traditions of the Hindu society. He criticized dogmatism, superstitions and fatalism. He condemned the Brahman class for their foolishness, ignorance and blind superstitions. He judged social questions from a rationalist as well as utilitarian point of view. He wrote in one of his Shataptre No. 29,
“Whatever is not accepted by reason should be rejected.” G. H. Deshmukh advocated widow-remarriage and supported the cause of emancipation of women. He condemned the caste system as an evil practice responsible for degradation of Hindu society.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) much more leaned in the Hindu scriptures sought to revive Hindu society. He stood for restoration of the Vedic Aryan society with all its ancient institutions and practices. He wanted to solve the problems of life in accordance with Vedic cannon. He established Arya Samaj to air his views in 1875. The Samaj followed a set of principles as follows: (1) brotherhood of man; (2) equality of sexes; (3) absolute equality between man and man; and (4) Equal opportunity for all. Arya Samaj preached Vedic religion was open to all and anybody would adopt it by purification.

Jyotirao Govindrao Phule, also known as Mahatma Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890) was one of the few social reformers whose practical efforts matched his pronounced resolutions. More importantly he was revolutionary social reformer. Born in a family belonging to Mali, an inferior caste he identified himself with masses and their traditions, he strove entire life to ameliorate the conditions of women and lower castes, Shudras and ati-shudras.

Influenced by Islam and Christianity in his earlier life Jotiba Phule entered in public life 1848 with critical views on Hindu religion and customs. He was completely disillusioned with Brahmin orthodoxy. “Drawing his inspiration from Orientalist cannon, Phule presented the Aryan invasion as the destruction of a purer indigenous civilization of which the lower castes were the heirs…the invaders were Brahmins who subjugated the autochthons, reducing them to the rank of lower castes.” As a result he proclaimed that “all the non-Brahmin castes- ranging from
Marathas to Untouchables—represented a non-Aryan, older and superior culture epitomized by King Bali." He stood against contemporary reformers Vishnubuwa Brahmachari, Dayanand and rejected the whole gamut of Aryan Sankritic culture. He took rational and equal and proclaimed entire caste system, family system based on Hindu philosophy along with superstitions, traditionalism to be completely rejected. He analyzed the society and rejected Chaturvarnya system. In his view society was based in the Brahman and the shudr-atishudra. Jyotirao Phule thrashed the Hindu religious texts. He intended to overthrow the Brahmanical ideas and beliefs, and establish a more unbiased order. He rejected the principle of pollution i.e. the notions of pure and polluted, touchable and untouchable, and so on. The most important purpose was to subvert exploitative and authoritarian nature of Brahmanism. In short, he was a social reformer in revolt.

Jotirao Phule recognized that only education is an effective medium for the development of society. In that case he primarily focused education of women and the lower castes. He started his mission by opening a school for the children of the low castes and the untouchables in 1848. Simultaneously, 1851 he opened a school for girls at Pune. As no lady teacher was available, he first of all educated his wife to teach in the school. In 1853 he established the 'Pune Native Schools' and the 'Society for Promoting Education for Mahar, Mangs'. Thus, to Jyotirao goes the credit of being the first Indian who opened education for women. In 1863 he started a ‘Home for Prevention of Infanticide’ which was intended to protect illegitimate children of unfortunate widows and unmarried girls. Then he opened his well in his house to the untouchable boys and girls for drinking water.
To pursue his mission he acquired all means to spread and convince general public. He authored many books—prose and poetry works. Amongst his literary works are: *Tritya Ratna* (1855), a drama; *Pawada Chatrapati Shivaji Bhosale* (1869), a folk song; *Brahmanach Kasab* (1869); *Gulamgiri* (1873); *Shetkayrancha Asud* (1883); *Satsar*-issue – 1 and 2 (1885), *Ishara* (1885), *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak* (1891) and *Akhandha*, poetic works emulating *abhangas*. In 1865, Jotiba Phule republished *Jatibhed Viveksar* (reflections on the institution of caste) by Takaram Taty Padval. This book turned out to be the fountain head of non-Brahmin movement. In this book Padval asserted that Brahmin class created confusion in the Hindu religion by introducing rigid caste system for their own selfish ends. He reproached caste system for degradation of Hindu society and asked to annihilate caste system in order to improve the Hindu society. This book provided a basis for Jotiba Phule’s activities for purpose on 24th September, 1873 he founded 'Satya Shodak Samaj' (Society of Seekers of Truth). The main objective was to unite the lower castes and untouchables. The organization strived to release the Shudras and Ati-Shudras and to put a stop on their mistreatment by the Brahmins.

The Samaj introduced simple wedding ceremony by excluding Brahman priests and dropped rituals performed in marriages. According to M. R. Lederele, “In [Phule’s view] the ideas of enlightenment and liberalism were joined with deep sensibility about injustice, an urge for social service, and a practical, seeing the downtrodden shudras and outcastes as members of one human family, endowed with equal rights by the one creator of all, and destined to live as brothers in equality, liberty and happiness...Phule worked for new social structure built on equality and rationality”.

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Gradually the Samaj turned more Maratha dominated organization. Phule strived hard to establish Shivaji as an inspirational figure for all the lower castes, and argued that they were the descendents of the autochtons who were majority in Maharashtra before Aryan invasions. But the emphasis on the defense of peasants- mostly Marathas, gathered more members from Marathas and the organization turned into a dominant group of Marathas opposing Brahmins. As Gail Omvedt remarks the logic of caste also revealed its deep roots through the persistence of mechanisms of Sanskritazation.\textsuperscript{51} owing to which Marathas tried to win recognition as Kshatriya- one of the upper caste.

In his book \textit{Sarvajanik Dharma Pustak} published in 1891, expressed his views on religious and social issues in dialogic form so that common man can understand. He strongly contended that both men and women were entitled to enjoy equal rights and it was a sin to single out human beings on the basis of gender bias. He emphasized unity of man and envisioned a society on foundation of noble principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Jotiba Phule’s movement gained support in rural areas. A group of Satyshodak Samajists including Krishnarao Bholekar, Navale, N. M. Lokhande, Mukundrao Patil and others organized the movement in Maharashtra. By 1890 the Samaj had taken roots in the villages in the Pune-Mumbai region. It was strong in Ahmednagar, Junnar, Khed, Purandar and Indapur. Phule’s movement became source of inspiration to the movement of untouchables and depressed classes. Social reform undertaken by Phule shook the foundations of established social customs. With his wife Savitribai, the couple strived to eradicate superstitions, hypocrisy, poverty and slavery out of society through their entire life.
despite atrocious treatment by the orthodox upper castes. He diverted all his thinking and striking social service at common man in society.

The social reform movements flourished in the latter half of the nineteenth century under the flagship of Justice Ranade, G.G. Agarakar and others. Justice Ranade promoted reform in all aspects of life. In 1887 he established the National Social Conference at Madras with D. B. Raghunath Rao and Sir T. Madhavrao. The Conference attracted attention from all over the country. The main objective of the conference, as Ranade explained, was to broaden the sphere of free thought and action of the individual to enable him to think, feel and act for himself. Ranade sought social reform movement as spiritual duty. He believed the objective of reform is to purify and perfect the whole man by setting free his intellect, elevating standard of his purpose to survive on this earth. By reformation he meant casting society into a new mould for which a reformer must have his family, village, tribe and nation recast into other and new moulds. Hence, for him, as a social reformer it is obligatory duty and not mere pastime which might be given at pleasure. Ranade’s method of reformation was persuasion rather than force. He convinced people by appealing to their conscience, for he believed that to achieve reformation ends the inward man, his thought and ideas had to change.

At the same time several controversies were raised regarding social reforms. First, in 1887 issue of widow remarriage at Pune aroused great debate. The agitations were carried out in Bengal and Maharashtra. In Bengal, due to untiring efforts of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Dalhousie’ government passed the Hindu widow-remarriage Act of 1856. The Act legalized and legitimized the widow remarriage which received severe criticism from orthodox Hindus. Accordingly the first widow remarriage took place in Maharashtra in February 1860 and next month at Pune
which was sponsored by Jotiba Phule. Second debate came to front in 1886 regarding repayment of marital rights of woman. It was famous Rakhamabia case whose husband, Dadaji, brought a suit in the court of law to force his young wife to live with him which she refused. The High Court accepted the Dadaji’s claim to his wife and in case she refused, the court ordered her imprisonment. With this verdict there ensued great controversy between social reformers contending for women’s rights and conservatives. Ranade and others supported women’s cause and Lokmanny Tilak stood against the reformers. Ranade’s contention was that the law about remarriage was equally applicable to men and women and that there should be no punishment for enforcing husband and wife to live together. He pleaded for amendment of the marriage law. The third debate revolved around Age of Consent Bill in 1891 regarding Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood. It was brought forward by Behermaji Malbari, a Parsi reformer. In his ‘Notes’ pleaded for measures to check infant marriages and urged the government to take up legislation to protect the interest of Hindu women. Taking note of his ‘Notes’ the Indian Government introduced the famous Age of Consent Bill in 1891. It proposed that the age of girls for marriage be raised from 10 to 12, below which sexual relations with them should be regarded as rape. Social reformers, especially Bhandark, Telang, and Agarkar strongly supported the Bill. On the opponents were conservatives like Tilak who objected to the right of a foreign government to interfere in social reforms. These controversies led to basic issue of debate between the social reformers Bhandarkar, Ranade, Telang and conservative opponent Tilak in last decade of nineteenth century. Tilak emphasized political reforms first and Agarkar pressed for social reforms. The controversy after the Congress Session at Pune in 1895 moved away into a nationalist school on the one
hand and the social reformers on the other side. However, the forceful politics led to the ascendency of political motives, thereby reeling back social reforms.

Gopal Ganesh Agarkar was a different social reformer for his radical views on social reforms and national movement. Influence by Auguste Comte, Charles Darwin, J. S. Mill and Spencer he was the first to accept the principles from the West. He was a disciple of Utilitarian school of England. This school of thought believed in rationalism, secularism, individual freedom and equality, education for all, simplicity in living and thinking.

Up to the emergence of Agarkar on social scene, social reform was regarded as a sacred duty. Sanctions of the Shatras were sought for every item of social reform. Agarkar was different from such reformers. After clashes with Tilak, Agarkar aired his views through a journal named *Sudhark* (Reformer) in 1888 to promote his ideas. He pointed out social ills and evil practices and suggested solutions to remove them by adopting good things in the Western civilization. According to him the time was more positive for social reform. He urged social reformers to be alert for the cause of victims of social evils unnoticing it would lead to desperate conditions in society as whole. Further he argued that it is the society which should try to remove its drawback. If it fails, then the law may enter. Agarkar based his ideas and ideals influenced by Western civilization, whereas Tilak looked to the ancient heritage of India and was not prepared to move away from the long lasting tradition of Indian civilization. B. R. Sunthankar summarized Agarkar’s ideology as follows:

1. Rationalism and individual freedom were basic tenets for him.
2. Secularism and this-worldliness were the foundation of his ideology. Progress of society depends upon this worldly happiness of the individual.
3. All human beings are equal. Injustice between man and man must be removed…
4. Individual should have choice to follow his own course of life.\(^{56}\)

Agarkar, thus was radical reformer who based his ideas on western thinkers. Though he was not followed in later period but his ideas spread in the society with irresistible force. His impact was observed in Maharashtra on Marathi literature.

Vithal Ramji Shinde (1873-1944) known as Karmveer, was social and religious reformer. A staunch supporter of the depressed classes he worked to ameliorated their condition and eradicated the evils of untouchability. Influenced by J. S. Mill, Spencer and Agarkar he became devoutiest and joined Prarthana Samaj and later Brahma Samaj. IN 1906 Shinde established Depressed Class Mission of India at Bombay with the help of N. G. Chandvarkar. The Mission sought “to work among the Mahars, Chamars, Parihas, Nam-Shurdas, Dheds and all other classes treated as untouchables.\(^{57}\) Primary objective of the Mission was to spread education among untouchables, seek to provide employment for untouchables, strive to remove social restrictions imposed by society, and impart religious teaching in order to make them better citizens. Depressed Class Mission of India tried to bring about material and moral improvement in depressed classes. It maintained several educational institutions in Bombay and Madras provinces. With almost 14 centers across India it organized seven conferences of the depressed classes until 1914. Through these conferences he gave vent to the grievances of depressed classes. Shinde was a through nationalist and in later years he joined freedom struggle under the leadership of M. K. Gandhi.
Influenced by Jotiba Phule's social work, Chatrapati Shahu Maharaj, His majesty, Kolhapur too undertook social service for the welfare of downtrodden classes in his province. He opened hostels for poor and even provided them with scholarships. He was displeased at the sight to deplorable condition brought by against caste system and untouchability. He was the first ruler in India who initiated reservation scheme in governance for downtrodden classes. Despite criticized at the ‘King of Dhed’ Shahu Maharaj attended every conference summoned to address the issues of depress classes.58

Gopal Baba Walangar from Dapoli in the Ratnagir district was the first untouchable to raise the voice of the depressed classes. After retiring from British army in 1886 he devoted his life to cause of untouchable through an organization named ‘Anarya Dosh Parihar’. The organization tried to create self-consciousness and a sense of self-reliance among the untouchables. He wrote a book titled Vital Vidwansan (Destruction of Touch Pollution) in 1899 in which he boldly criticized Brahminism and the caste system. When Walangar came to know that British army has banned untouchables in army, he along with Mahatma Phule and Baba Padmaji forwarded a request to the British government. In it they said, “Untouchables should be recruited in army. Every time and again untouchables have proved their bravery in war being with British army. Hence, the British government should not ban recruiting untouchables in army.” 59 After Gopal Baba Walangkar, Kisan Phagu Bansode and Shivram Janba Kamble plunged themselves in social service to promote concerns of untouchables. Addressing the issues such as tension amongst untouchable sub-caste, inter-dining and inter-caste marriage, preventing them to each carrion and generate sense of organization they strived to eradicate the discrepancies downgrading the untouchable communities.
The opened schools, hostels, libraries and took lead in organizing conferences, assemblies. Voicing the concerns of untouchables they even started journals and wrote books. Kisan Phagu Bandsode started social service from 1900 onwards. In 1907 he opened a school for untouchable girls ‘Chokhameal Kanya Shala’ and established ‘Antyaja Samaj’ organization. Meanwhile, most of the Mahar community members had left the traditional occupations and sought employment in railway, road construction and mills. Consequently majority of them turned labourers. Here too, unjust treatment left its inhuman mark on untouchables in form of mill owners and upper caste contractors. Kisan Phagu Bandsode played lead role in solving problems of labourers in mills. Along with others during 1988 to 1922, he started ‘Majdur Patrika’ journal to voice grievances of labourers. Bandsode carried out his service through extensive writings in the form of poetry, articles, folk theaters and dramas to given vent to plight of untouchables.

Shivram Janba Kamble summoned a conference of Mahars from 51 villages at Sasvad in the year 1903: it is the first known organized and legitimate effort to claim rights of untouchables in Maharashtra. He started ‘Somvashiya Mitra’ monthly journal in 1908. In 1910 he organized another Mahar conference in which he pleaded his fellowmen to abandon superstitious practices like ‘Murali’. Through writings he thrashed superstitions among untouchables and similarly drew attention of British government toward the unjust treatment of upper castes.

A general review of the social reform movements reveals its limitations. Sunthankar summarized the limitations of movement led by elitist class:

Instability in functioning of their organization was another of its weakness. It lacked the continuity in its efforts that the Indian National Congress could achieve.
The leaders of the social reform movement failed to act up to their precepts. Ranade’s second marriage with a girl of eleven years and marriage of Telang’s daughters at the age of ten and eight are instances in point. Such instances were a set-back to the movement and gave a handle to their opponents to damage the cause of social reform. The persistent question was the annihilation of caste and caste system.\textsuperscript{61}

With the above quotation one can deduce that most of the nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements were, first of all, undertaken owing to western influence, and tried to save Hinduism from degrading. They sought to restore certain legitimacy to Hindu practices and especially draw on the caste system. For instance, the ‘Araya Samaj’ founded in 1875 by Dayanand Saraswati criticized idol worship and caste. But argued that these were latter day corruptions of the earliest Vedic model, since during that period ancient Indian society had rejected polytheism and \textit{jati}, and relied only on non-hereditary varnas. Dayanand Saraswati believed that varnas are classified according to qualities. So he did not seek to disturb the \textit{varna} system. He denounced Brahmins but aspired to bring back Vedic golden age in which caste had important role. In other words he merely wanted to replace \textit{jatis}, which seen from Western outlook had not place, with merit based vanras: the other name for organized hierarchical line of division based on qualities. Thus he doesn’t want to hurt the moral of caste system and recommended his believers to observe endogamy within in Varna.\textsuperscript{62}

The main emphasis of the movements was confined to the upper castes. It was more or less a selective peoples’ movement. Their leaders showed more concern for the emancipation of women, reforming the institution of family than for the elevation of lower castes. It was limited to the upper strata of society and was for the most part Brahman-led, worked in urban areas.
In the first decade of twentieth century social reform movements in Maharashtra out reached into different strata of society. Jotiba Phule led movement that concerned middle strata of society. It was peasants dominated and rural based. It aroused revolt against the Hindu social system, but later became anti-Brahman movement. Then it became movement of untouchables led by Gopal Baba Walangekar, Kisan Phagu Bandsode and Shivram Janba Kamble, which started to stir the lowest strata of society. The unique and democratic values of Western thinkers played important role from second decade of twentieth century arousing leaders from untouchable caste, in particular Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

The entry of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar into the public life is characterized as the revolutionary phase in the emergence of Dalit movements before and after his life. Being untouchable he himself suffered the pangs of caste system right from childhood to becoming a highly qualified account officer in Baroda State, even though he had acquired higher educational qualification from world’s top most educational institutes in USA and England. Grieved to the bottom of heart he joined movement against unjust treatment to untouchables and gradually became most favoured leaders of depressed classes.

Committed to his caste, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar appeared before South Bourough Commission in 1919, attended the All India Depressed Classes Conference held at Nagpur in 1920, and started a Marathi newspaper, Mook Nayak, in 1920. In July 1924 he established Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha to advance the cause of untouchables. During this Dr. B.R. Ambedkar closely observed the behaviour of caste Hindus and came to the conclusion that unless untouchables themselves fought for their rights, there was no chance of deliverance from mistreatment by upper caste leaders. In 1927 declared that untouchability was a stigma on Hindu
religion and Hindus should remove it. In the same year he started his newspaper, *Bahishkrit Bharat* and gave clarion call to Dalits to break their chains as they were human beings and as human being they possessed certain natural rights. So it is duty of every untouchable to win them back. In March 1927 he started Mahad Satyagraha and made it clear that he was doing so to free untouchables from slavery and to liberate caste Hindus from their low morality. The Satyagraha generated unprecendented enthusiasm in the minds of the depressed classes. It followed by temple entry Satyagraha at Kala Ram Temple, Nashik. Through these Satyagrahas, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar sought to make Dalits militant and self-respecting. Thus he was successful in creating political awakening and self-confidence in the minds of Dalits. In late twenties the British government appointed a committee under the leadership of Jon Simon to consider the question of devolution of powers to India. Dr. Ambedkdar presented the case of untouchables before commission. The commission recommended separated electorates for untouchables and reserved some seats for them. On the contrary, the Nehru committee did not take the problems of untouchables seriously. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar decided to press his demand for the separate electorate for the depressed classes at the Round Conference held at London. The demand is known as Communal Awards of August 1932, and was accepted by the British government, Gandhi, however opposed it. Thus, untouchables were given rights to vote for the Hindus as well. This fact became the principle of political strategy of Dr. Ambedkar.

Gandhi was not happy with the Communal award, especially about separate electorate for the depressed classes and launched fast unto death. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar relented and separate electorate for the untouchables was scrapped. Meanwhile, he observed that there seems no end to
torturous treatment from Hindus. So, instead of bringing change into Hindu mindset, he decided to abandon the Hindu religious itself and in 1935 declared his intention that it was not his fault to be born as Hindu, he pledged, however, not to die as Hindu. In the same year the government of India Act was passed and the provincial autonomy was granted. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar realized that the depressed classes could bring about basic change in their condition by occupying important positions in the state power structure, since they had no economic power to build their power center. In Politics, however, they could acquire through political party. Therefore he launched own political party- the Independent Labour Party in 1936. As the Second World War began Gandhi declared historic call for ‘do or die’ and launched ‘Quite India movement’ in 1942. Observing the circumstances Dr. B.R. Ambedkar did not failed to gather that if India gets freedom, the Hindus shall control the government; there seems no guarantee of safeguards for untouchables in free India. Therefore he sought to bring all the depressed class leaders across India and established All India Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942. After the end of the War, elections to state legislative assemblies were held in 1946. The Scheduled Caste Federation failed miserably. India got freedom in 1947. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar became the first Law Minister in independent India. Then the Constituent Assembly appointed him as chairman of drafting committee which engaged for framing out constitution for India. Ambedkar put in an immense expertise designing the Constitution. Alternatively he got a chance to bestow Dalits with legal safeguards which helped them to cope within the democratic society. He embraced Buddhism on 14 October 1956 at Nagpur with thousands of untouchable fellow beings, with this Ambedkar provided spiritual basis to
the Dalits’ self-assertion of being free human being, self-respect as Buddhists, and true son’s of soil.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was the epoch maker in the history of Dalit liberation. Greatest achievement of the Dalit movement led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was that it successfully secured its share in political power. Dalits acquired self-confidence and militancy due to his relentless mass movement that no other social reformer could yearn for downtrodden classes. He is prime mover of self-assertion and dignity in the minds of untouchables as human beings.

Many social reformers, who, of course would have grieved at the sight of most despicable, disgusted untouchables in society but the service rendered by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for downtrodden classes is unparallel. History hold ample reasons displaying dissimilarity in their service and Dr. Ambedkar’s. As recorded earlier, most of the social reformers belonged to upper castes or elitist class. Their primary aim, thus, was to point out surrounded evil practices that became shameful to acknowledge among upper class, for example inhuman practices related to women and superstitions followed by their caste fellows. Such an outlook among learned social thinkers was more or less because of Western education and rational ideas that they bought from USA and Britain. For instance, men like Ranade sought to reform society on the lines of Western Protestantism, which in its homeland had rejected the intermediary role of priests, but he was not successful in his motive. Dr. Ambedkar, though acquired higher education in USA and London like others, and was influenced by Western educationists but never tried to uproot the long standing spiritual tradition in the name of social reform in Hindu society. He selected least harmful method of converting to Buddhism as it was the oldest religion in India.
He was rather stimulated to know the reasons behind heartless treatment being conferred towards untouchables, outcastes in India which he realized was beyond comprehension of general, illiterate and superstitious masses in society. He showed most hastiness in getting aware with roots of untouchability and the disgraceful life appended in Hindu society while he pursued higher studies in foreign countries. Banned from learning Sanskrit in homeland he himself mastered it and interpreted Hindu scriptures such as Veda, Upanishdas, Manusmriti, Purnas, Mahabharata, and Ramayana along with other religious texts from the point of view of social stratification, humanism, social harmony and caste system. Thus, he used the acquired knowledge in convincing the downtrodden classes that their salvation rests within their reach if they boldly assert their fundamental rights that a most civilized society has brought up.

Another important difference between other social reformers and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was that they tried to reach out untouchable habitations but were never succeeded in breaking caste system. Rather, for them enquiring into or touching the issue of caste system posed grave threat of being thrown out of society and termed as outcastes, hence, they showed least interest towards upliftment of downtrodden classes. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar himself belonged to untouchable caste and thus had experienced what it meant to be neglected, tortured and humiliated simply because born in lower castes. Therefore, to him first and foremost mission in his life was to secure dignity being a Hindu. But again when disillusioned by the fact that upper caste Hindus like M. K. Gandhi can strive fast unto death to maintain caste system, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar strategically moved his emancipatory motives by embarking separate political party, conversion to Buddhism, and recommended reservation
safeguards in Indian Constitution. He was more loyal to his society. Due to his dedicated, well mediated, strategic struggle against caste system, it took no time in contemporary society to proclaim enlightened men like Shatrapati Shahu Maharaj, that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is the most capable leader to break shackles of caste system in the lives of untouchables.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar created havoc of self-respect in the deadening spirit of untouchables. Owing to his energetic struggle, the hungry-poverty stricken Dalits put on revolutionary ideas to confront the caste system. He stirred their conscience to be alive and exist through constant conferences, meetings, civil disobedience and informal gatherings throughout his life span. By running newspapers, journals, political party, organization and social service he waged relentless war against caste system. His speech and writings, his life and mission, his conversion to Buddhism and legal expertise, his movement and demands in the interest of downtrodden masses generated unprecedented awakening among Dalits in post-independence period that gave birth to Dalit movement and Dalit literature. The next section of this chapter covers the emergence of Dalit literature, discussing in particular the genre Dalit autobiography.

**Dalit literature and Dalit Autobiographies**

With emergence of Dalit literature, considered to be off-shoot of Marathi literature in Maharashtra and often paralleled with Black literature at international level, one can perceive complete alteration of outlook towards erstwhile shudras, untouchables, depressed classes, downtrodden lowest section of society, outcastes, unapproachable, unseeables, oppressed Classes and to use often quoted an umbrella term ‘Dalit’ in democratic society today. Therefore it becomes imperative to highlight the term ‘Dalit’ from Dalit literary perspective.
Many scholars have expressed their notions behind such expressions like Dalit, Dalit literature, Dalitness before they used it. The Marathi word ‘Dalit’ denotes a process of getting crushed, or grinded. So, all those people who got crushed, suppressed in the Caste System or Chaturvana system are ‘broken men’ or ‘ground down [community]’.

Owing to different trends in initiated by Phule-Ambedkar movement, Marxist ideology, awareness among majority of the public in the post independence period and sense of self-realization etc. At this juncture it is necessary to understand the continuing evolution and the explanation of the term ‘Dalit’ before advancing to any discussion of Dalit literature. The literary personalities and social thinkers have come up with the concept of Dalit literature. They gave in depth illustrations over the word ‘Dalit’ from their respective stands while defining individuals writing from lower classes. Some of them defined it by connecting it with fourfold caste system, whereas others extended it in broader perspectives. Thinkers who extended the meaning and scope of the term Dalit, tried to cover lowest strata of society who are economically, psychologically suffocated individuals including upper caste women, and revolutionary stance taken by them to rise from that condition. In this regard prominent Marathi thinkers’ views ‘on who is ‘Dalit’ are taken into consideration here as under to highlight the people about whose autobiography has been the core issue of this research work.

In general, Marathi dictionary defines the term Dalit as ‘ground’; ‘broken or reduced to pieces’. The clearest definition of Dalit in contemporary usage has been given by Gangadhar Pantwane, the professor of Marathi and founder editor of Asmitadarsh. It asserts:

“To me, Dalit is not a caste, he is man exploited by the social and economic tradition of this country. He does not believe in god, Rebirth,
soul, Holy books teaching separatism, fate and heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution.”  

Wankhede defined a Dalit saying that, ‘the word not only related with Bouddhist or backward classes but it is also connected with labour classes who had been exploited, hence all are ‘Dalit’.  

Baburao Bagul in this regard says, “Dalit is one who is inclined to blow up the caste system and its pervading ideological foundations. One who has acquired fundamental knowledge, which can bring devastate foundations of established society through modern armory of education, is the ‘Dalit’.

Discussing on the same line, Sada Karhade opines that, “taken together the threads of economical and social perspective a complete Dalit community emerges. It includes labourers, agricultural labourers, even untouchables who undergo hardship for sustenance and are being exploited are ‘Dalits’.”

One thing to note here is that, seen from Marxists ideology base, Karhade assumes Dalit as a class. The above definition underlines the class consciousness subsumed in the word ‘Dalit’.

Bhalachandra Phadke, a noted Dalit literature scholar disagrees with the above extended meaning to class consciousness around Dalit. He says, “It would not feasible to define Dalit in such a broad terms because the word carries important conceptualization. To whom the Hindu religion and society had abandoned, but Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s liberation movement endowed him/her with new zeal and at last he got opportunity to express his/her invaluable experiences; this Dalit was considered as dumb and invisible man.”
In Laxmmanshastri Joshi’s views, “a social class which has been lagged behind and relegated in human development process is Dalit.”\textsuperscript{73} G. M. Kulkarni says that Dalit community is one which “is trapped in lowest deprived stratum of society.”\textsuperscript{74} Whereas Namdev Dhasal views Dalit, is one who belongs to “scheduled castes, Buddhist, labourers, workers, landless agricultural labourers, poor farmers, nomadic tribes and tribes etc.”\textsuperscript{75} Waman Nimbalkar, a noted Dalit writer, critic, identifies a Dalit as under:

“A Dalit is a person who is considered untouchable, harassed, distressed or afflicted, weak or feeble, exploited, Buddhist, menial worker or labourer. [Consequently] A Dalit is a victim of poverty, slavery, sycophancy, illiteracy, ignorance, injustice and atrocities etc. The meaning of the word Dalit is the same as that of Shudrasvaran put in the mouth of God in the religious scriptures right from olden times. Thos who have been stamped as Shudras and Astishudras in the Manusmriti, Gita, Gyaneshwari and other Hindu religious book are Dalits. These include various castes and tribes like Mahar, Mang, Chambhar (cobblers), Dhor, Bhangi (Sweepers), Gond, Bhilla, Korku etc.\textsuperscript{76}  

All the above definitions around the word ‘Dalit’ highlight the characteristic appalling condition of lowest class in Indian society. It becomes clear from the above definition that the meaning of ‘Dalit’ has gone under complete change. Owing to new meaning imparted to it, it encompasses almost every section of society who has been one or the other way being dehumanized in the name of caste system. To sum up ‘Dalit’ is an untouchable, an outcaste, who is deliberately kept out of Hindu society owing to baseless conceptualization of pollution and impurities. Therefore, he is the most harassed, exploited individual from social, economic, religious and cultural aspects. As a result he/she is blocked from all round development having negated to exercise most
revered human values of equality, freedom, fraternity and justice just because these values are recommended only for upper caste Hindus. However, with passing of time the Dalit movements- political as well as literary- played instrumental role in clearing out the dark shadow of bruised past. In recent decades Dalit assumes social, political and literary awakening. He redefined his/her posture by himself/herself getting rid of old ideas and concepts. Dalit started boldly denouncing the god, soul, religion, reincarnation, rituals, miracles and superstitions. Instead he/she strives if not possible somehow extends support, in bringing about ‘samyak’ revolution thereby putting hold on caste discrimination in day to day life. While enacting scientific objectivity, rationalism and ethical conscience he gained such self-confidence that equipped with knowledge power, legal expertise and more importantly embarking upon legacy of Dr. Ambedkar, if finds right reprehensive in political, social spheres, is ready to strike blow howsoever the supreme authority it may act as dominant force.

Nature of Dalit assertion that culminates in political and literary endeavours from lowest stratum of society which can be summed up in one phrase i.e. Dalithood. Above paragraph discusses in its earlier part conditions of people under in untouchable, outcaste communities who had been grind in the complex mill of deafening caste system; the later part asserts the same position and makes it own identity. Apt word describing such a condition would be ‘Dalithood’. One thing from the above discussion makes clear that Dalithood awakens individual from lowest society, irrespective of his despicable socio-economic conditions. He/she aspires to arise from that status. In recent times Dalithood assumes literary stance to expresses grievances. Hence, nature, authenticity and reflective power of Dalithood in the form of poetry or
prose especially autobiography, forms the focal point of this research study. Before we proceed with nature and characteristics of Dalit Autobiographies it would be helpful to know the traces of Dalit literature.

Roots of Dalit literature can be traced in Tathagat Gautam Buddha, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Karl Marx and primarily the life and message of Dr. Ambedkar. Bouddha’s philosophy attracts social revolution and transformation. It is based on parameters of rationalism and commonsense. Apart from this its significance lays in individual freedom, peace, non-violence and ultimate truth. “In Karl Marx’s views all men and women can attain development by embarking communism. For the purpose, they have to stand against oppressing class. One of the tenets of revolt and rejection in Dalit literature emanated from the strife to realize model society projected by Karl Marx. Main reason behind majority of depiction of poverty and hunger in Dalit literature is the recognizing ideology of Karl Mark by Dr. Ambedkar.” 77 Mahatma Phule generated revolt against psychological, social nature of slavery in Hindu society. In other words it was revolt to gain education, equality and opportunities for all.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar traded on the same lines from his entry into public life beginning in 1920 to his nirvana in 1956. This period is overwhelmed with his presence: thought provoking speeches; illustrative, analytical writings, and hands on social service became guiding force for untouchables in contemporary society. He pulled out grievances of untouchable from rural sphere to Round table conferences held in Britain. He aggressively moved demands of equal human rights to claim water from natural resources and worship gods like normal Hindus, thereby he divulged entire dalit community.
In order that the Dalit student should get opportunities to pursue higher education conveniently, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar opened Siddharth College in Mumbai and Milind College in Aurangabad in the years 1946 and 1949 respectively. Passing out earlier generations from these colleges were overwhelmed with the thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar. Naturally the youth for these generations began to put down their experiences on paper. For instance, the annual magazines published by Milind College alternatively turned out an open platform to pen down their enlightened views.

Dr. Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism gave Dalit literary activities a new cultural tradition. With his message Dalits began to deny presence of god, soul, customs, Hindu spiritualism, and colour and caste system. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar forced them to throw away Balutedari (occupational system in contemporary system that is based on goods for service system) and lead a life of free individuals. Guiding force of his movement were liberation, freedom, equality, fraternity and social justice for all that generated a sense of self-dignity, self-confidence, and self-reliance among downtrodden classes. According to Vasudev Mulate, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar believed in the religion that, “encourages strengthening present conditions, that generates hope in saddened state of mind, in true sense such religion is acceptable. In fact a religion which prohibits development of man is not liable to be termed as religion at all.”

Gist of the religion propagated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is in the principles of democracy, socialism and rationalism. Therefore, the reasons behind realizing the huge impact, that runs between every line of experience in Dalit literature, stems from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s philosophy of liberation and self-assertion as human beings in Hindu society.
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s religious conversion followed by his passing away had significant impact on Dalit society in general. His absence created ‘cultural vacuum.’ Dalit leadership dispersed into several groups, while graph of Dalit atrocities, harassment increased giving out unending bitterness in the minds of Dalit youths who had been just getting the fruits of education. A sensitive Dalit writer was not exceptional in such circumstances?

Dalit writers came forward glorifying thoughts and outstanding social service of Dr. Ambedkar: he turned out to be the expression of voiceless Dalit communities. Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts and emancipatory mission first ever inspired them to realize its servitude and raise voice against injustice being inflicted from time immemorial. According to Arjun Dangale, “His revolutionary ideas stirred into action all the Dalits of Maharashtra and gave them a new self-respect. A literature is nothing but the literary expression of this awareness.”  

For instance, ‘Jalsaj’—open cultural gathering, poems, dramas and autobiographies enlivened oppressed classes with Dr. Ambedkar’s life and message. Writings by Dalits features awakening massage for downtrodden masses. Noteworthy proponents of this epoch making writings were Bandu Madhav, Shankarrao Kharat, N.R. Shende and Annabhau Sathe.

In earlier phase, often the upper caste publishers refused and reel back to publish works by Dalit writers. But who can dry out the ink pots of enlightened desires among Dalit youths? Meanwhile, on 2 March, 1957 in the Begnli High School at Dadar, the Dalits writers organized first ever Dalit Literary conference. They passed a resolution that the literature by Dalits be given due consideration as part and parcel of cultural ethos.
Inspired by educational reforms by Dr. Ambedkar, more and more number of Dalit youths gradually acquired education in post-independence period. They learned the importance of organization and agitation for self-assertion because of disillusion they faced in spite of Indian Constitutional provisions to address the problems of society. Due course, on the one side Dalit community was getting boost of awakening to its fundamental rights by gaining knowledge, scientific attitude, and legal rights and on the other side it was brutally slashed out by poverty and caste system. With spread of education, force of mass movement, and resistance against provided atrocious circumstances Dalit youth opened up the deep seated restlessness and anger through pen and paper. Thus, the literature suffused with discomfort sensations that explode with bold verbal artifices came to be termed as Dalit literature. Dalit literature has been defined by many thinkers, literary analysts, critics and authors. A review of such definitions highlights the nature of Dalit literature. Dalit literature is not a literature of vengeance. Dalit Sahitya is not a literature which spreads hatred. Dalit Sahitya-first promotes man’s greatness and man’s freedom and for that reason it is a historic necessity.  

Arjun Dangle, the editor of Poisoned Bread, a collection of Dalit writings writes: Dalit literature is not simply literature; it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of new society and new people.  

Lakshamanshstri Joshi says, “Dalit literature is that literature which in an artistic manner shows the agony of the Dalits, their painful perplexity, family deterioration, poverty, humiliation and impoverished condition.”

“Dalit literature considers man as its nucleus. It becomes one with joys and sorrows of human life and takes it forward to Samyak
revolution. It preaches a group of human beings that forms, society, equality. It considers man noble. Dalit literature spread love and not enmity among human beings.”

“The tears that spring up in the eyes of a person in anger while protesting against injustice are most precious. It is agonized feeling or waspish cursing in the parlance of others. A sublime expression of that waspish cursing is Dalit literature.”

“Dalit literature is the literature of victims of class and Varna. This is the literary conflagration of Dr. Ambedkar’s speech. These are the creative expressions of those neglected hearts and brain whose stomachs and minds have been kept hungry by culture. In womb of this literature, an embryo of human centered civilized age is growing with stormy determination.”

Dalit literature is inimical to untouchability, slavery, inequality and pain. As long as there is untouchability and slavery in this country, Dalit literature will definitely exist. Dalit literature is that literature which advocates human liberation glorifies man, opposes stanchly the supremacy of lineage, race and caste.

Formulating what comprises Dalit literature, Limbale says, “Dalit literature is precisely that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. This literature is but a lofty image of grief.”

According to Darshan Trivedi, Dalit literature discards Western theories like Psychoanalysis, structuralism or deconstruction, and also Indian theories of *rasa* and *dhawni*. In this case, in Dr. C. B. Bharti’s views “since the aim of Dalit literature is to protest against the established system which is based on injustice and to expose the evil and hypocrisy of the higher castes. There is an urgent need to create a separated
aesthetics for Dalit literature, and aesthetics based on the real experiences of live.” By 1970s sizable Dalit literature emerged. As Arjun Dangle observes, ‘thinking Dalit critics started theorizing Dalit literature and its role. Dalit literature is not simply literature… Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change… At the very first glance, it will be strongly evident that there is no established critical theory or point of view behind them; instead, there is new thinking and a new point of view.”

Above definitions throw light on Dalit literature. Dalit literature emerged out of Dalit consciousness; it raises voice against castes system and casteism; it records graph of progress of in individual in Dalit community; its emphasis is on enlightened notions such as equality, liberty, fraternity, justice, Pradnay (intellect), Sheel (modest personality) and Karuna (kindness) towards fellow beings and animate-inanimate surroundings; to promote these notions it gathered into literary movement keeping pace on the social, political awaking initiatives undertaken by Phule-Shahu-Ambedkar and later by Dalit Panther; it assumes challenging role against social, economic disparity, injustice and atrocities on Dalits; depicts poverty, slavery, sycophancy as it is; tries to exposes fallacies underneath Hindu rituals, customs; it forcefully reflects insurgency, protest and outburst of people to make them free from all odds; it appears in the role of socialist, moralist and more importantly today it has become prominent trend Marathi literature which for seven hundred years had denied entry into it: that is Dalit literature.

Motives behind creative process of Dalit literature revolve around not only to entertain but to strive to release oneself and his/her society from clutches of traditions. As a result generally it has least place for emotional clarifications. Instead, it gives priority for expressing thoughts;
perhaps it is this thought process that turns out to be emotions. The
miseries of Dalits are not limited to an individual and of a certain time
limit; it engulfs numberless Dalits experiences alike, spanning for
thousands of years. For that reason, it comes out as collective
consciousness. The tortures suffered by an individual did not claim to be
of one ‘self’ or in that case related to isolated ‘I’; it entails typical
consciousness of banned communities. Therefore, the unbearable
expressions in Dalit literature acquired communal character.

In Dalit literature readers come across the wretched life of Dalits.
But having depicted Dalits lives or written by Dalits and hence to be
termed as Dalit literature is not sufficient to accept it as Dalit literature.
For, uniqueness of a certain literary endeavour emerges out of its
expressive mediums and sensations; Dalitness in literature acquires its
unique features by entirely depending upon its reflections, the urgency of
expressions. Here, one should note that thrilled with the creative
sensations of a writer, invariably compels one to be a witness to his/her
real life experiences. In this regard views expressed by Bhalchandra
Nemade. He says that, “Basically there exist wide disparity between the
pattern of real life experiences of Dalit writer and non-Dalit writer. Non-
Dalit writers write out of conceived experiences whereas Dalit writers
write out of real life sensational experiences. Dalit writer’s writing is a
lively experience, conversely written work by non-Dalit writer doesn’t
appear lively, expressive. Therefore Dalit literature takes shape. Its world
created by Dalits; it is their own; they have suffered in it; they grew in it.
Dalitness in Dalit literature does not belong to one particular caste he/she
is belonged to or related to narration of a certain communal livelihood or
taking a particular stance at; but it is in accepting the liberation of
mankind, glorifying the dignity of man. Therefore, it is strictly against
caste, clan, and colour supremacy.” According to S. K. Paul, “Dalitness is essentially a means towards achieving a sense of cultural identity. The inferiority complex based on ‘to be Dalit’ has now disappeared. Now Dalitness is a source of confrontation. This change has its essence in the desire for justice for all mankind. Dalitness is a matter of appreciating the potential of one’s total being. While appreciating one’s potential we must consider the value system of life that enables us to realize importance of living beings. It guides us through moral patterns of behaviours and hence a plain thinking process. Showcasing clarity in thoughts and behaviour in life, perspectives, in certain stand points or beliefs defines Dalit sensations. Dalit literature stands apart with its new group consciousness: it is nothing but dealing with Dalit sensation, Dalit perspectives and Dalit mind-set. Dalit consciousness is bounded by society because, from optimistic point of view, its focal point is comprehensive change in livelihood. This research is primarily concerned with selected autobiographies of Dalit writers. Hence it becomes customary to throw light on the genre autobiography with due regard to the Dalit literary sensibilities.

The word autobiography is combination of multiple senses that underlie Greek words ‘autos’ stands for ‘self’, ‘bio,’ stands for ‘life’ and ‘graphien’, stands for ‘writing’, giving on the whole meaning ‘self-life-writing.’ In Western literary criticism, the term autobiography was first used by Robert Southey in 1809 when he was describing the work of Portuguese poet, Francisco Vieuta. The term autobiography in the field of literary studies have been, as Linda Anderson writes, “recognized since the late eighteenth century as a distinct literary genre and as such important testing ground for critical controversies about the range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and division between
fact and fiction.” Ever since the eighteenth century several scholars have tried to ‘locate’ the word in the articulation of individual experiences alike other literary genres. According to Smith and Watson, “Autobiography is the story of one’s life written by himself”. By mentioning ‘himself’ in the definition implies that in the autobiographical discourse ‘I’, ‘me’ ‘my’ life experiences are more important from ‘my own’ perspective. Similarly, Lejeune, Phillip enlarges the personal point of view “the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence with emphasis on his life and especially upon the history of his personality.

However the ‘classic’ texts- Confessions by Augustine and with the same title by Rousseu, Essais by Montaigne, Letters by Plato’s seven Epistle, Pensees by Pascal Memoir, Life display extra ordinary lives of ‘great men’ forms the basis of model of autobiography given by modern critics during 1960s and 1970s that rests upon autonomy, self-realization and authenticity; alternatively reflect their respective cultural values. While recognizing deep human desire to write an autobiography, James Olney, gives more importance to ‘creative achievement of individual men and the relationship of those achievements to a life lived’ that everyone shares with the writer in his unique social, political, psychological experience. It implies that an individual ‘self’ can go beyond social and historical differences. According to Karl Weintraub, “We are captivated by an uncanny sense that each one of us constitutes one irreplaceable human form, and we perceive a noble life task in the cultivation of our individuality, our ineffable self.” Assuming that ‘we’ represents everyone, then as individual we are above society and beyond understanding. So there is no difference between realizing self and representing self. In this process of realizing and representing self,
according to Roy Pascal, “autobiography is historical in method and at the same time [it is] the representation of the self in and through its relations with the outer world.” In other words an autobiography is prominently concerned with representation of the great men’s accomplishments and experiences in life. Roy Pascal characterizes what an autobiography consists of. He contends that only a noble personality attempts to represent in his/her writing a ‘worthwhile life’ through a ‘graph linking the experiences.’ Here, merely depicting linked graph of experiences would not be sufficient because ‘value of an autobiography depends ultimately on the quality of spirit of the writer.’ Meanwhile the indulgent writer reveals ‘new stage of self-knowledge and a new formulation of responsibility towards the self; it involves mental exploration and champ of attitude.’ This turns out to be an art that deals with the insightful grasping of unparalleled extensive experiences. It becomes clear from above discussion that ‘true autobiography can be written only by men and women pledged to their innermost selves…beyond fastened truth, beyond the ‘likeness’, the autobiography has to give that unique truth of life as it is seen from inside, and in this respect it has not submitted or rival.’ To conclude writing an autobiography is a presentation of the pleased state of personality by isolating from other literary articulations such poems, essays etc. Here revealing self-knowledge becomes primary purpose of any autobiography. In other words reading an autobiography makes us familiar with the psychological insight of the writer in development stages of a ‘self’.

In Indian context, considering the above discussion about autobiography, M. K. Naik identifies few autobiographies by Indian writers in his *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982). He classifies
Indian autobiographies in several sets. First set comprises autobiographies before independence primarily by D.K. Karve's *Looking Back* (1936); N.C. Banerji's *At the Cross-Roads* (1950); Barindrakumari Ghose's *The Tale of My Exile* (1928), B. K. Sinha’s *In Andamans: The Indian Bastille* (1939); General Mohan Singh’s *Leaves from My Diary* (1946) and the first of its kind are Dhan Gopal Mukerji's *Caste and Outcaste* (1923). As well as autobiographies by prominent Hindu philosophers, scientists and other noble men: Swami Ramda’s *In Quest of God*, (1923); Purohit Swami’s *An Indian Monk*, (1932); Sitanath Tattvabhushan’s *Autobiography* (1942); *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* (1932); P.C. Ray’s *Autobiography*, (1958); G.K. Chettur’s *The Last Enchantment*, (1933); Bhola Singh’s *How to Climb the Service Ladder*, (1933); and Chimanlal Setalwad’s *Recollections and Reflections: An Autobiography*, (1946) are some of the pre-independence autobiographies. The second set covers autobiographies by distinguished personalities from political and public life: Mirza Ismail's *My Public Life* (1954); M.R. Jayakar's *The Story of My Life* (1958); Morarji Desai's *The Story of My Life* (Vols. I-III, 1974, 1979); CD. Deshmukh's *The Course of My Life* (1975); V.V. Giri's *My Life and Times* (1976); M.R. Masani's *Bliss Was in That Dawn* (1977), K.M. Panikkar's *Autobiography* (1978); M. Hidayatullah's *My Own Boswell* (1980) and Hiren Mukharjee's *Portrait of Parliament: Reflections and Recollections 1956-77* etc.

Autobiographies by women writers: Vijayalakshmi Pandit’s *So I became a Minister and Prison Days* (1936); Krishna Huthee Singh’s *With No Regrets* (1944) and *We Nehrus* (1968); the Maha Rani of Cooch Behar, Sunity Devi’s *The Autobiography of an Indian Princess* (1921); Cornelia Sorabji’s *whose India Calling* (1935) and *India Recalled* (1936); and a Khoja Muslim Isvani’s, *The Brocaded Sari* (1946)—also published
under the title, *Girl in Bombay*, London, 1947). All these autobiographies are published before the Independence. After independence: Savitri Devi Nanda’s *A City of Two Gateways* (1950) a portrayal of childhood in a Punjabi elite family; Sita Rathnamal’s *Beyond the Jungle* (1968) a absorbing description of tribal life; Kamala Das’s *My Story* (1976); Maharani of Jaipur, Gayatri Devi’s *A Princess Remembers,* (1976) and Durgabai Deshmukh’s *Chintamani and I* (1980) is an interesting depiction of the career of one of the most eminent duo in modern India. (Nayak, M.K., *A History of Indian English Literature*, New Delhi: Sahithya Academi, 1982, pp.139-140)

Above enlisted autobiographies are by renowned Indians who follow a specified style, content and form of the genre. In the Indian context, caste factor plays a significant role but there has been no mention of it in these much-admired autobiographies. In a caste based society any individual can rise to success or determined to fail as ordered by his/her caste. Surprisingly, one encounters no such a caste factor blocking their ‘self’ from gaining reputation in life. Caste has nothing to do with their achievements. All writers have represented their experiences without even mentioning other castes. Some of them like Gandhi and Nehru who were socially and politically conscious either trivialized the caste or intentionally overlooked it. Instead, autobiographers like Gandhi have given a fascinating picture of their upper caste reputation and chauvinism. Gandhi brought forth caste history to which he belonged. Having done so, he has revitalized the feeling of being Hindu and resolutely advocated Hindu nationalism in the course of his social and political carrier.

In fact, Gandhi’s writings and nationalism became well mediated force boosting Hindutva beliefs. Gandhi has strongly resisted and distorted demands put forward in the interest of Dalits or untouchables.
To cite an example when Dalits were converting themselves having fed up with brutality of caste system as one of the few social emancipations Gandhi displayed dejection towards conversions by Dalits. As he writes in his *My Experiments with Truth*:

> When I was a youth, I remember a Hindu having become a convert to Christianity…These things got on my nerves…I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.\(^{102}\)

M. K. Gandhi views expressed in his book autobiographical work typify the mind set of mainstream society channelized by Brahminical set of ideas. From earliest autobiographies at national level by eminent personalities including M. K. Gandhi to modern Marathi literature in Maharashtra the orientation of their content was to depict the Hinduism that serves contemporary interest of the mainstream society without mentioning caste and deliberately ignoring allied issues. Thus, we can find wide difference between dalit sensibilities and upper caste writers’ depiction of Indian society.

As has been quoted in a news article in first part of this chapter, injustices inflicted upon a Dalit ‘Judge’, how we can say that transformation in society brought up an end to untouchability or caste system: instead it persists in its subtlest forms. In this regard mere apparent change in a society is not sufficient. It requires complete transformation at social, political, economic, and most important at psychological levels; and to begin it there seems no alternative other than rebel. Therefore, Dalit literature assumes revolutionary stance: a revolt against those who claim to be protectors of humanity; but ironically they wring it out in case of depressed classes. Highlighting the same nature, Sharankumar Limbale says,
‘Rejection’ and ‘Revolt’ in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalits’ pain. They are directed against an inhuman system that was imposed on them…this rejection is aimed at the unequal order which has exploited Dalits. Its form is doubled-edged-rejecting the unequal order, and demanding equality, liberty, fraternity and justice. To use legal concept, the rejection in Dalit literature constitutes a ‘just remedy’…Revolt is the stage that follows anguish and rejection. ‘I am human, I must receive all the rights of a human being’-such is the consciousness that give birth to this revolt. Born from unrestrained anguish, this explosive rejection and piercing revolt is like a flood, with its aggressive character and an insolent rebellious attitude.103

This revolt and rejection has other reasons too. Arjun Dangale, opines, “Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism, since it is closely associated with the hopes of freedom by a group of people who, as untouchables, are victim of social, economic and cultural inequality.” 104 In Janet A. Contursi’s view although “literature plays a significant role in the social movements of oppressed people,” Dalit literature has been sidelined from mainstream literary spheres. He asserts:

...Until recently, scholars have tried to derive knowledge of subordinate groups from texts written by elites and have ignored the texts and ideologies that subordinate groups create to define their struggle and empower themselves.105

This is true in case of literature by non-Dalit writers in Maharashtra. Non-Dalit literature takes note of lowest sections of society, but only in the context of a communicating ‘sympathy’ and ‘compassion’ towards worsened conditions of Dalits.

Such a treatment is not limited to Marathi literature alone. Critics besides Limbale have been troubled by the treatment of Dalit characters in the writings of such prominent writers as Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand. In their view, these representations do not show Dalits as they are, but as helpless and child-like
make their own decisions, or take actions. In Anand’s novel, Untouchable, for example, the protagonist, Bakha, instead of opting for radical action, submits to Gandhi’s pacifism, and is thus contained.  

Obviously, it is heart wrenching when a protagonist turns out to be submissive despite suffering inhuman treatment. Something new was expected in writing; Dr. Ambedkar’s message catalyzed this change in the bold, aggressive nature of protagonist in poetry, drama and autobiographies by 1970s. While tracing the history of Marathi Dalit literature Limbale notes one of the marked features of Dalit writing as rejection of writing standards established by Sanskrit literature in Maharashtra. However they followed the tradition of Buddha, Kabir, Phule and Ambedkar.

Ancient Marathi literature concerned more about spiritual aspects of existence; therefore confined to ‘desire and devotion’. Obviously there was no place for realistic portrayal of actual life and struggle of Marathi people rather than illusory depiction life of saints, romantic aspects of Sanskrit and English literature. “Contemporary Marathi literature began after Mardhekar, since then it depicted Dalits from Middle class point of view. It has, as sighted above, mere sympathy for Dalits from reformist-liberal standpoint. “It lacked in realistic representation of Dalits in their writing and image of Dalits with self-pride…Marathi literature began to assume new face as a result of Second World War…the form and disposition of the new literature seemed different…new literature’s revolt was limited to changing literary values, its content persisted in revolving around middle class life.”  

In these circumstances it was unexpected that untouchable person should assert dignity in powerful words. Consequently, emergence of Dalit literature caused great uproar in
Marathi literature. However, Dalits began to write unconcerned about any established literary standards.

One of the major forces behind Dalit literature in the post-independence period was Dalit Panther movement. Before beginning the discussion on Dalit autobiography, one more point has to be made clear i.e. the emergence of Dalit Panther. The reason behind is that, after passing away of Dr. Ambedkar, it was the only Dalit movement which acquired massive support from oppressed classes, for the Dalit Literary movement became mouth piece of Dalit Panther. Working as militant, aggressive voice of oppressed classes, Dalit Panther strived, demonstrated and presented factual circumstances upon which Dalit literary movement thrived up to 1990s. Because, as Janet A. Contursi rightly observes, “this is especially true in the case of Untouchables, who historically have been defined from the perspective of caste Hindus. The Untouchable movement, beginning in the 1920s under the leadership of Ambedkar, has allowed Untouchable authors to correct the elite image and history of caste relations in India.”

After passing away of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1956, for about a decade the Dalit movement appeared to have clogged; with Dalit Panther coming to the light it again quickly grasped pace. Education, Scientific attitude, law, legacy of Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts and movement was continuously instigating a sense of self-respect among Dalit youth. Republic Party of India, a political front founded by Dr. Ambedkar, was almost shattered to pieces due to power, selfishness, compromise and interest grouping. Alternatively, it was need of the hour to annihilate the caste system but no such separate organization was active at this juncture to wage struggle against burgeoning question of caste.
In the late 1960s, Dalit youths who aspired to get higher education in college was connected with political organization directly or indirectly by opening a branch of Republic Student Organization. Limited in scope, but they strived to challenge social issues. At the same time Dalit youth in almost every city-town had established branch of Republican Party of India. But educated Dalits after getting out of society observed that Dalit community was continuously falling prey to upper caste oppressions and due to ineffective Dalit political movement, no other organizational efforts were under taken to raise voice atrocities in community. Such frustrating conditions even after conversion to Buddhism and two decades of independence became background in the establishment of Dalit Panthers. Disillusioned by tyrannical condition of Dalits which showed no sign of lessening down, educated Dalit they began to give vent to their anguish and frustration in writings, particularly poems. Their writings appeared in Marathi literary magazines such as *Vidroh, Magova*, and *Aamhi* became their platform to confront the monopoly of high-caste Hindus in contemporary literature. These Magazines in a way surfaced non-Brahman writers of Maharashtra. Notable feature of poetry that appeared in Little Magazine Movement was a new language. Filled with Dalit resistance to power and oppression it soon acquired tone of public discourse, thus, appeared a new trend in Dalit politics. Every Dalit who aspired to join politics being educated became poet before becoming an activist. Inspired by the Black Panthers of America on 9th June, 1972 a group of Dalit poet-activists gathered in Siddhartha Nagar, Bombay and named their movement Dalit Panthers. They called themselves "Dalit," meaning downtrodden or ground down, because it was a casteless term that both acknowledged and challenged their history of caste oppression; and "Panthers" because "they were supposed to fight for their rights like
Namdev Dhasal, Raja Dhale, J. V. Pawar and Arun Kamble: poets from Bombay expressed their disappointment through irritated, repulsive, impolite, but poetic language.

Dhasal used the street images of prostitutes and pimps on Faulkland Road to contrast the miserable life of Untouchables with the privilege of Brahmans; Keshav Meshram cursed the "mother-fucker God" of the Brahmans for laughing shamelessly in the face of Untouchable despair; and V. L. Kalekar inverted varna ideology by speaking of the "economic, social, political, mental, religious, moral and cultural pollution" of caste Hindus.

With deep faith in Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s thoughts, unparalleled compassion for Dalit community these writers-activists in Dalit Panthers soon became popular as fire-spitting response to injustice inflicted on Dalits across Maharashtra. Dayanad Mhaske, Ramadas Sarote, Latif Khatik, Avinash Mahatekar, Arjun Dangle, Ramdas Athavale, Arun Kamble, Gangadhar Gade, Bhai Sansare, T. M. Kamble worked for the Panthars movement far and wide in Maharashtra. Apart from above poets, more or less other writes like, Baburao Bagul, Daya Pawar, Laxmna Mane, Laximan Gaikwad, Sharnkumar Limbale got influenced and incorporated with Panther movement. Clamoring demonstrations, open critique of Hindu deities, massive protest rallies, battering, agitations, and police cases became talk of the town. In an exhausted society after Dr. Ambedkar, Dalit Panther turned out a new revolutionary organization.

In the beginning, Panther movement partly claiming to be Buddhist had no specific ideology. Panther Movement had complete faith in the ideology of B.R. Ambedkar. Due course as the Panthers became more popular and ordered organized force, they began to address the issues of economics and class along with caste system. In 1973, Namdev Dhasal
and Sunil Dighe- a Naxalite activist jointly issued a manifesto jointly. For mixing the Marxist ideology with Ambedkar’s philosophy Raja Dhale rejected the manifesto.

The Panther manifesto confirms that the Panthers have "recognized the revolutionary nature and aspiration of the masses"; it equates Congress rule with Hindu feudalism; it calls for the redistribution of land and for the elimination of "the varna system, caste system and class system"; and it criticizes the opportunist politics of the parliamentarian left and the corruption and casteist politics of the Republican Party of India.112

This alienating Ambedkarism with the Marxism created faction among Panthers. Some of them found Dalit Panther supporting the Marxist ideology. At last Dalit Panther Movement split up and Raja Dhale dispersed the movement. In 1974, some Panther leaders again came together and continued the Dalit Panther Movement under the leadership of Arun Kamble, Bhai Sangare, Ramdas Athwale, S. M. Pradhan, Waman Nimbalkar, Dayanand Maske, T. M. Kamble, Yashpal Sarvade etc.113 They advocated problems of Dalit community such as reservation and other concessions granted to the Dalits in various parts of the country. Thus even after splitting up the core of Dalit Panther or in other words Dalit movement had been mobilizing the general Dalit public at large. The autobiographers, whose autobiographies are undertaken for discussion, shared more or less active participation in Dalit movement. While interpreting it will be clear that how with Dalit Panther movement they nurtured themselves taking led from Dr. Ambedkar’s life and mission. Being direct or indirectly contacted with Dalit movement, particularly Dalit Panther and then Bharatiya Dalit Panther mostly in between 10 to 20s, they boldly penned own each and every word echoing stomach-churning experiences that a civilized society has meant for the lowest sections of democratic society to cope with.
Dalit community realized its servitude due to Dr. Ambedkar’s revolutionary thoughts and social service. If fact, it enabled them to voice their struggle. The rejection, rebel encoded in Dalit literature is outcome of afflictions they have gone through: it completely denies the social system that birth to inhuman practices. The nature of this rejection is moderate in nature because it demands society to be established on equality, freedom, justice and fraternity. But, one must keep in mind that deliberately ignoring agitations in the long run ultimately culminates into massive revolts. Such revolts emerge out of strong sense that ‘I am human being, I too must enjoy rights.’ The Dalit writers began their serious work in the 1950s. Although most of the writes have come out of the Buddhist movement, one of the earliest, Annabhau Sathe, who belonged to the untouchable Mang caste, was deeply influenced by Communism. In the sixties, the flow of Dalit literary writing increased. Conferences were held almost every year.

Dalit writer embarks upon a responsibility towards his/her society. It expresses deep loyalty and vigour of social activist that a society must change it value system, the mainstream society must take not of their trials and tribulations. He/she writes by gathering into a movement as social activist-cum-artist. Baburao Bagul’s ‘Jenhwa me jat chorali,’ a short story collection; Namdev Dhasal’s ‘Golpitha’ a collection of poems; Datta Bhagat and Premanand Gajwi’s dramatic works; Raosaheb Kasabe, Gangadhar Pantavane’s critical thoughts; Annabhau Sathes’ Phakira’; Ashok Vatkar’s ‘Melele Pani’, Uttam Bandu Tupe’s ‘Zulwa’, N. M. Shinde’s ‘Jatitil Jat Vairi’ and Namdev Kamble’s ‘Raghav Vel’ etc. novels draws attention towards Dalit community as whole from realistic outlook.
In the 1970s, individual volumes of poetry began to publish by the Maharashtra Buddhist Literature committee, *Asmitadrsh Press* or the *Marxist Magova Press*. Dalit writes deliberately strived to develop Dalit literary movement. They established literary organizations such as: Dalit Literary Assemblies, Dalit Literary Conferences, Bouddha Literary Conference, Dalit Natya (Drama) Conference, Phule-Ambedkar Panchayat, Gramin-Dalit-Adivasi Sahitya Mahasabha (Rural-Dalit-Tribal literary mega-meetings), Purogami Vichar Manch, and Praivartan Sahitya Mahamandal. Apart from this by organizing Dalit Literary Conferences, Bouddha Sahitya Sammelan (seminars), Asmita Darsha Sahitya Melave (Fairs), Dalit Natya Sammelan, Ambedkarite Sahitya Sammelans etc. worked as boost in the rapid development of Dalit literary movement.

‘Asmitadarsh’ and ‘Sugava’ started by Gangadhar Pantavane and Vilas Wagh likewise played significant role in encouraging Dalit literary movement. By organizing ‘Asmitadarsh Lekhak-Vachak Melava’ (Asmitadarsh writers-readers festival) the magazine worked as bond between writers and readers who share Dalit sensibilities owing to which Dalit literary movement rapidly spread its message of transformation. Dalit literature has changed the face of Marathi literature and inspired similar literary creativity in Gujarat and Karnataka. Journals, magazines, occasional journals, Dailies, weeklies, monthlies, Special editions, symposiums, lectures, and more important books promoted Dalit literary movement far into the corners of India. In Maharashtra, there had been a steady stream of pioneering autobiographies from Mahars, Buddhists, Chambhars, De-notified tribes and other Dalits. Prominently Daya Pawar’s *Baluta* (1978), P. E. Sonkamble’s *Athwaniche Pakshi* (1979), Laxman Mane’s *Upara* (Outsider) 1980, Shankarao Kharat’s *Taral Antaral* (1981), Nanasaheb Zodge’s *Phanzar* (1982), Rustum
Achalkhamb’s *Gavki* (1983), Parth Pokale’s *Arbhan* (1984), Sharankumar Limbale’s *Akkarmashi* (The Outcaste) published in 1984, Pandurang Umaji Jadhav’s *Mharuda* (1986), Bhimrao Gasti’s *Berad* (1987) Laxman Gaikwad’s *Uchalya* (The Branded) published in 1987, Balasaheb Gaikwad’s *Khristi Mahar* (1990), Kishor Shantabai Kale’s *Kolhyatach Por* (1994), apart from these other noteworthy autobiographies are: R. K. Tribhuvan’s *De dan Sute Girhan*, Vaijanath Kalse’s *Eairanichya Ghana*, Pralhad Chendwankar’s *Tach*, Narendra Jadhav’s *Amcha Bap ani Ahmi*, Gautam Kavle’s *Bavalt*, Bhimrao Jadhav’s *Atmakatha Kateri Tarechya Kumpanachi’* and Chandrakanth Jadhav’s *Dhaga Adcha Chandra* etc. Two more autobiographical work cannot be neglected namely Ram Dotonde’s *Rapi Bolu Lagate* which is in poetic form and the other one by Keshav Meshram’s *Hakikut aani Jatayu* which is partial novel in poetic form. Apart from these a large number of Dalit women writers have written and published their life account. Some of these are: for instance Kumud Pawade’s *Antshphot* (1981), Mukta Sarvgaud’s *Mitaleli Kavade* (1983), Shantabai Krishnaji Kamble Mazya Jalmachi Chittarkatha (1986), Baby Kamble’s *Jina Amucha* (The Prisons we Brock) published in1986, Janabai Girhe’s *Marnkala* (Pangs of death) published in 1993, Vimal More’s *Teen Dagadanchi Chuul* (A stove of three stones) and Urmila Pawar’s *Ayadan* (The Weave of My Life) 2003 etc. are few autobiographies which have taken Marathi Dalit literature across the borders.

All that popularity Dalit literature enjoys today rests on the selected Dalit writers- Namdev Dhasal, Baburao Bagul and autobiographers namely Daya Pawar, Laxman Gaikwad, Laxman Mane etc. Even while belonging to different lower caste communities they found solution to their emancipation in the stands taken by Dalit movement, alternatively
Dalit literature. In initial stage most of them adopted poetry as an exhaustive means to project unease in mind but gradually they preferred more elaborate and extensive literary expressions such as autobiography.


Today, in India Dalits have reached a stage where they are no longer willing to fight for their cause with weapons. Having realized the power of pen they use words to attack evils attached to caste biases. In this regard Razi Abedi observed what a Dalit would equip himself by reading books, ‘For every *trishul* that the forces of Hinduism distribute, we will distribute 100 books to Dalit children. Dalit Literature has the power to change the Indian social structure, but India society is yet to recognize that power.’

This unique increase in Dalit writings is the result of incessant desire to speak out the uneasiness of gloomy past that Dalits were in search to release. Their writings, which had been for hundreds of centuries reduced to unimportance as nonessential, offer
challenge to mainstream literary aesthetics, which with its caste and gender bias have for long been wearing a veil of universal authority.

In the history of literary expressions none of the trends rise all of sudden and without individual and social concerns. Certainly, behind it there is foundation, purposes and patterns. In this regard, of course, underneath there lays the shifting literary outlooks, literary values; similarly changing lives, their context, political and social events too shade light on the ongoing literary tendencies. Whatsoever may be the happenings that time may infuse into daily affairs; literature captures it as it is. In other words, literature cannot sideline itself from decoding the outcome of observable facts, instead it, more or less, mirrors the times.

Dalit literature, in this regard, played important role giving platform for muffled voices that conceived great humanitarian concerns from the point of view of general masses. Although Dalit literature appeared almost all genres, the autobiographies are the most popular. It is quite natural that when a group of people who kept silence for centuries, in fear of cutting down tongue if uttered sacred scriptures, will search an outlet to tell their own stories.

As far as the first Dalit autobiographies are concerned in Maharashtra, in the year 1948, Vittha Babaji Palwankar’s autobiography ‘Krida Jeevan’ is an account of cricket player and his contribution to the game. Being Dalit, he commented on the life of Dalits, but gave very little representative picture of society in general. Another autobiography by S. N. Suryawanshi entitled ‘Aga je Kalpile Nahi’ in the year 1975 gave partial portrayal of dalit community. Suryawanshi was Dalit converted Christian, but he had undergone inhuman treatment like Mahars in society. In this autobiography he narrated his life experiences in revolting tone.
Dalit autobiographies have to be traced on the same tone and manner. In this process, one finds first ever seeds of Dalit autobiography in the annual magazine of Milind College, Aurangabad. In this college magazine most of the Dalit students gave vent to their feelings having acquired education. Meanwhile, P. E. Sonkamble’s ‘Vatadya’ a autobiographical article appeared in the annual magazine of Milind college in the year 1964. This article has been taken as the beginning of Dalit autobiographical writings. In P. E. Sonkamble’s words such an attempt proved highly beneficial for Dalit writers, because he says, “When I barely exposed my hardship and terrific experiences in my dialect most of the teachers expressed their overwhelmed response and asked me to write it down further. In fact, they asked me give vent to all those feelings.” This followed number of articles detailing grim experiences suffered by P. E. Sonkamble. All these articles were published in book form under the title ‘Athavaniche Pakshi’.

Autobiography is primary testimony to Dalit communities at present conditions, whereas a news reporter would have deliberately edited an atrocious event against Dalits to suite its requirements. It reflects the self of the community on the whole. Dalit autobiographies are deemed as the literary mode of social denunciation and practices. Sarah Beth states that Dalit autobiography transforms an experience of pain into a narrative of resistance. Dalits have used autobiography as a means of assertion against untouchability.115 In her view Dalit autobiography fights back both the basis of caste bias and repudiates caste for it’s no longer functions as a social force in modern India. Thus Dalit autobiographies try to contest social system within larger socio-historical processes underpinning literary ethos and cultural milieu in India. Evidently, autobiography became an important genre, and why most of the Dalit
writers choose it to articulate their unique experiences in it as narrative agenda.

On the other hand Dalit autobiography has been instrumental in uniting with a larger Dalit community to create a powerful group to collectively fight against caste prejudices because their autobiographies represent life-stories of ordinary or representative Dalit individuals who are silenced by caste oppression from generation to generations. Hence imbibing subjectivity in Dalit autobiography becomes a sign of writer’s desire to re-establishing deeper attachment with the people around them in Dalit community who sail in the same boat. In this manner Dalit narratives can be viewed as a proof for writers to re-instill a sense of attachment among community members. In this process, portraying their story with a claiming separate Dalit identity, Dalit writers have been able to emerge as powerful group that helped them collectively face caste prejudices boldly putting forth their lives.

Dalit writers emphasize the experience of discrimination and Dalit identity as two necessary criteria for both writing and critiquing Dalit autobiography. Kancha Illaiah in his *Why I am not a Hindu* (1996) views that narratives of personal experiences are the best contexts that enables to compare and contrast the social forms and personal experiences. He further argues this method of examining socio-cultural and economic history is central to the social sciences; significantly, the method of narrating and deconstructing experiences has been used by feminists. Further, Indian Dalit-Bahujan thinkers like Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar Ramaswami Naicker have also used this method. Instead of depending on Western methods, Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar spoke and wrote on the day-to-day experiences of the Dalit-Bahujan castes. Ilaiah further argues that writing personal narratives is possible and
indeed the most authentic way in which the deconstruction and reconstruction of history can take place.

Autobiography serves as a means for Dalit writers to reclaim narrative authority over the construction of the Dalit itself. While dominant Indian society has identified Dalits as inferior and polluted, Dalit writers through their autobiographies re-write selfhood in their description of their life and the life of their community.

Watching the community continually oppressed by the upper castes, the protagonist of the Dalit autobiography does not experience his pain passively, but rather pain incites him to unite with his community in a fight against caste discrimination. The autobiography serves the additional function of re-affirming and strengthening the link between the individual Dalit writer and the larger Dalit community. Sarah Beth argues Dalit autobiography is considered a form of political assertion for a number of reasons. Besides giving Dalit entrance into a public space through identity-based narrative authority, the autobiography provides a space for Dalit writers to regain control over the constitution and meaning of Dalit selfhood and join in a show of strength with the larger Dalit community.

The autobiographies are the burning desires for freedom from the cultural clutches binding for centuries. A large majority of population in India have been kept subjugated number of conventions which are forced upon them without any faults of theirs. All the above cited authors whether male or female suffered equally or in fact the female more than that of the male authors as they were exposed to the caste ridden system and by the patriarchal order of the society. Those who have followed in the footprints of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar have surely gained self-respect and a sense of rights to be enjoyed by
themselves and others are coming forward to revolt against the system claiming his/her equal human rights which are not only endowed upon the constitution but natural rights as well. Any social odds they come across are strongly tackled by the ones who think and act.

Dalit autobiographers hold mirrors to the entire backward community. Depiction of courage in picking up education and liking for Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts continues to motivate the coming generations in order to stake their rights and live with self pride and dignity. Considering the notion of injustice in the life the Dalit the question of justice goes much beyond the narrow limits of distributional aspects like reservation or compensatory discrimination when one realizes violence, powerlessness, fear, cultural identity etc. experienced by the Dalit writers.

Having equipped with expressive devices, such as painting, music, sculpture and alphabets or letters, every individual would desires to tell his/her agonies, gladness one or the other time in life to someone else. Naturally, it is an urge to express his/her deep down ceaseless, bursting and overflowing experiences that are stored in inner recesses of mind which one feels to be conveyed to others. Passing on such experiences meant that the person feels somewhat relaxed after putting across the pleasures, sufferings and the mental, emotional, contemplation and physical tension caused while going through. In fact, all that the individual has taken pleasure into or suffered the agonies are completely his self-experiences. Others around him would have definitely helped but to what extend such a conveying helps, it cannot be said. However, the writes feels an illusion having downloaded experiences. It is illusionary because after such autobiographies his mental stress may or may not lesson down, for mere reason that his/her responsibility increase adding to the mental stress. Then, why bring forth blocked deep down inner
memories? Why did he/she disclose miseries instead of tendering them deep in heart? Doing so it added to or decreased pains? Did it relived from the pain of desolation? The individual may be disturbed by such questions. Besides such bitter memories, which can lead to instability in rest of the life, what pleasure one would derive by confessing memories? Certainly, one may confront such thoughts, but it is after all having said everything. Moreover, the ceaseless memories burst out with such a force that the speaker doesn’t bother about the aftermaths of confessions: this human tendency. For instance, Uttam Bandu Tupe in his *Katyvarhi Pota* in the beginning says, ‘sometimes I feel an intense desire to dismantle dejected dejected heart before someone else.’ Exactly this is the feeling behind telling one’s experiences. Indeed, a large number of these stories are ‘testimony’ to the sanctioned atrocities of tradition; a highly sophisticated individual from mainstream society, perhaps, may not strain his/her imagination to believe that there exists a society detached on corner of their village or town.

But unfortunately many of the scholars, even from Dalit communities, have been expressing displeasure over the frank, ‘uncut’ depiction of Dalit society.’ They are in fact bothered about questions such as ‘Can reading and teaching of Dalit autobiographies bring fundamental change in the opinion of readers? Do readers enjoy these narratives as narratives of pain and suffering at the same time rejecting to engage with the politics and theory of Ambedkarism?

Many dalit scholars have opposed the dalits writing autobiographies who equate the writing process with that of ‘digging out stench from hateful waste bins of the past. Some dalit readers did not accept the relevance of highlighting life of destitute experienced by the community. In Narendra Jadhav’s view dalit autobiographies are revival
of memories of ‘hateful past’. Baburao Bagul, a leading dalit intellectual advocated that how dalit autobiographies project not only ‘anguish, waiting and sorrow alone,’ but also a ‘historical necessity in promoting human freedom’. Gopal Guru, a noteworthy scholar disagrees with the embarrassment generated by Dalit autobiographies among dalit middle classes and politicians for the mere reason that these classes don’t want to recall ‘undesirable past into the cultural present.’ Another disputable issue from Gopal Guru’s point of view is that most of the dalits in community haven’t read these dalit autobiographies because they do not feel it necessary to ‘discover their life world’ and thus ‘resist on every day basis without aspiring for representation.’ On the other hand some scholars have advocated the political importance of dalit autobiographies on basis that these narratives are alternatively highlight the impact and importance of Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts which would time and again motivate nest generations in democratic society. Thus, according to Sharmila Rege, “the debate on whether the hateful past should be written and bought into the present suggests the complex relationship between official, forgetting, memory, and identity.” S. Rege strongly defends that, “Dalit life narratives [autobiographies] cannot be accused of bringing in undesired past into the present, for they are one of the most direct and accessible ways in which the silence and misrepresentation of Dalits has been countered.” Therefore she argues, “Dalit life narratives are in fact ‘testimonios’, which forge a right to speak both for and beyond the individual and context explicitly or implicitly the ‘official forgetting’ of histories of caste oppressions, struggles and resistance.”

Why should one emphasis over biographies as most authentic representation of Dalit lives become evident on considering views expressed by Rege as such. Dalit autobiographies violate the literary
parameters set by mainstream literature for the mere reason that their works are “testimonies of caste-based oppression, anti-caste struggles and resistance.”\textsuperscript{120}

One of the most striking points she draws our attention to is the deliberate sidelining of dalits’ writings from academic parlance. She notes, “The understanding of caste as an ideological system based on an irreconcilable opposition of the principles of purity and pollution had dominated disciplinary knowledges”\textsuperscript{121} seen from upper castes’ point of view. To support her argument Rege cite most alarming opinion expressed by Chakravarti. Chakravarti says:

\begin{quote}
It is not surprising the sociological writing- whose practitioners have mostly been men-often intellectualizes and thereby masks rather than explains the structure of the caste system. It gives an overemphasis on the ideology of the caste system, namely, on its ritual aspect, to the exclusion of material conditions and questions of power. This is a consequence of focusing of the brahmanical view drawn from brahminical texts. It completely evades the views of dalit writes who provided a counter view on the caste system by focusing on the experiential dimensions of caste based oppression.\textsuperscript{122}

The above opinion helps in revealing the subtest level of caste biases suffused in Indian society today. In other words, it is one of the unnoticeable attempts of dominant castes to defend the caste system on the one hand and implant biases in minds of next generation on the other hand. So, any one realizes discriminative practices in bureaucracy or society, the dominant class unashamedly can claim that there nothing exists like caste discrimination at present and those who claim caste based allegations are nothing but caste prejudices of the suffers. On this impending danger of perpetuating caste discrimination, recommending datil autobiographies as ‘historical narratives’ in academia with generate
a ‘counter view of the caste system.’ In this regard Gopal Guru points at crucial role of Dalit autobiographies in academia. He says,

‘Testimonios [Dalit autobiographies or Dalit narratives: poems, stories, novels] have the ability to convert ‘what is considered pathological into subversive chemicals’. These writings perform a double function; they inflict an inferiority complex in the minds of adversaries by resurrecting dalit triumphalism and bring out guilt in the minds of ‘upper castes’ by recording social wrongs done by ancestors.123

Gopla Guru underlies the benefit of including Dalit writings in academia. On this background excluding Dalit writers from curricula, pedagogies will put us at risk, as S. Rege warns that “Reading Dalit ‘autobiographies’ minus the political ideology and practices of the dalit movement does stand the risk of making a [just show] spectacle of dalit suffering and pain for non-dalit readers”, because reading ‘tesimonios of caste based exploitation, everyday resistance and organized anti-caste struggles; they bring new insights and theories into elite Bhraminical institutions of academia.124

Above discussion, regarding importance of dalit autobiographies and impending danger if neglected and erased from history, points at crucial period in the Dalit literature. That is why it demands that the general public should preserve Dr. Ambedkar’s thoughts and ideology being a citizen of democratic nation. Waman Nimbalkar cites the need of preserving Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s thoughts, since:

The immense potential of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his philosophy [which] was not restricted to himself or any one particular individual. He handed over to them [dalit writer and dalit public in general] the flares of his philosophy for development...His thoughts contained a graph of the progress of the people at the grass roots of the society. For this, Dr. Ambedkar’s life itself had become a revolution. This revolution had changed the
consciousness of the Dalits...That is why, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his philosophy is the source of Dalit literature.\textsuperscript{125}

To sum up, above discussion indicates the influence of Dr. Ambedkar’s philosophy on Dalit literature: a guiding force for those who have somehow attained education despite belonging to lowest rung of society. It holds ample evidence, hence, to claim that no other social reformer has influenced the general public than Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who had been shaping the life and thought process which itself assumes ray of light for present generation as they march ahead to claim their fundamental rights in democratic society. Thus, it become more important to explore the personality traits of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. So as to understand this great visionary, how he raised to the most influential person among untouchable the next chapter attempts to explore his life that will serve the purpose of assessing impact on selected autobiographers’ who are torch bearers of Dr. Ambedkar’s thought for next generations.

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