Chapter 5: Conclusion

In chapter 1, I attempted to introduce dalit movement in various phases of history, scholarship on violence in different areas such as racial violence, communal violence, gender violence etc. My idea is to provide an understanding of present social, political and economic condition of dalits. Scholarly works on violence related to gender, race etc enabled me to understand and discuss caste violence. In the following chapter 2, I discussed dalit feminism in order to provide an understanding of how caste and gender and intrinsically linked in our society, also to state that my analysis of the caste violence would be present from a dalit feminist perspective. In chapter 3, I discussed the physical caste violence in the context of atrocities committed on dalits in various part of the country. To discuss of caste violence I also looked at dalit women’s autobiographies and their experiences of caste violence. In chapter 4, I discussed the non-physical forms of caste violence i.e symbolic caste violence manifested through the caste discrimination, humiliation that dalits are subjected to, inferior social position, upper-caste normative strands of society commonly subjugate dalits in both rural and urban situations. Dalits are also discriminated and branded as unmeritorious, inferior, untouchables in the modern spaces such as educational intuitions also. I presented my understanding of symbolic caste violence through the experiences of dalit women autobiographers like Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Bama, Kumud Pawde.

In the context of caste violence that is discussed only during the dalit mass killings which is often reported seems to be reactionary. In spite of the visibility of caste in cases of massacre of dalits by upper-castes, it is commonly believed that caste is fading in the
contemporary society due to urbanization and upward mobility of dalits. But precisely, the atrocities on dalits increased because of their upward mobility which threatens the upper-caste dominance. Even reportage of dalit atrocities takes place in case where there is more caste awareness among dalits in that area. A few might go unrecognized for ever.

Caste system and the hierarchy structured through caste continue to exist in every part of the life. Social position of the dalits do affect their everyday life. Caste discrimination takes place not only in villages but also in the universities, progressive communities like Marxist, Dalit, Feminist organizations. But the instances of caste discrimination that take place in these so-called caste free spaces go unrecognized. Contemporary society not only witnessed dalits being massacred by upper-castes, but also many dalit students being rusticated from the universities or pushed out the organizations etc. A Ph.D scholar committed suicide in Central University of Hyderabad (on 25th Feb 2008) unable to endure the caste discrimination at the hands of the upper-caste teacher. Many dalits in significant positions in the public sector are falsely accused of corruption and harassed. Apart from the modern spaces, the very condition of living under the circumstances where dalits are treated as lesser humans, living in the hamlets, their labour being exploited, giving them subhuman status, confining them to menial filthy professions etc are the constant everyday violence that is present in the lives of dalits. To bring out the caste discrimination which I called symbolic caste violence that is present in the everyday life, I looked at dalit women’s autobiographies which present the authentic experiences of dalithood as being village labourers who entered the higher education and also analyzed the casteist patriarchy. Anand Teltumbde says that dalits being massacred are only one
form of caste violence but constant everyday caste violence takes place in its different manifestations.

Only a few dalits have education and access to the fields such as media, literature, arts, science etc. Dalit awareness is the modern phenomenon that dalits acquired more in Ambedkarite and post-Ambedkarite period. Education and dalit movement brought caste awareness among dalits. But still, even today a huge number of dalits have been living in as untouchables deprived of education, dignity and self-respect. Those dalits are not in a position to express their pain and the caste discrimination that they have been experiencing. Dalit autobiographies provide a space for dalits to question the caste inequalities. Dalit autobiography covers a wide range of issues related to dalits. One glaring difference between dalit male autobiographies and dalit women autobiographies is dalit women questions the dalit patriarchy and casteist patriarchy in their writing where as many dalit male writers do not mention the internal patriarchy in dalit communities and movement. Dalit women autobiographies in particular brought out their experiences of caste discrimination, being part of the larger dalit community and also their experiences in the unique position of individual dalits being educated dalit women, writers, activists etc. A significant part of dalit women autobiographies is their discussions of dalit patriarchy. Unlike many dalit male writers who celebrate dalit culture as less gender-discriminatory, dalit women are critical about even dalit culture which is nothing but the part of larger caste system. They also believe that dalit culture is an imposed culture on dalits by upper-castes and caste system and hence the celebration of it
or bringing respect for it is meaningless. Dalit women fight against the injustice and every manifestation of caste discrimination.

Dalit and dalit women autobiography also helped me to look at the history of dalit society and castes from the voice of lower rungs of the society. Through the study of dalit women autobiographies, I could also present a process of change that took place in the dalit culture. For example, Baby Kamble describes the Mahar community was surviving completely on eating rotten dead cows, towards the end of her autobiography, Ambedkar’s inventions made them fight the superstitions, gave up eating dead animals, enter the temples etc. Urmila Pawar describes the post Ambedkarite period in which dalits have started entering the schools etc. Kumud Pawde and Bama present a more modern times of dalit life where dalits are negotiating their space in the upper-caste dominant arena such as higher educational institutions and universities. Urmila Pawar talks about conversion of dalits into Buddhism and giving up the Hindu practices instructed for dalits (taking part in humiliating rituals meant exclusively for untouchables). Later she also describes the modern urbane life in Bombay and how the upper-caste Hindu practices such as celebrating Diwali imitated by dalits to make them part of dalit family culture. Dalit autobiographies are also revolutionary in tone and they provide a political understanding of caste. Jyoti Lanjewar says “The voice of this literature was so thundering that the people behind the closed doors of the respective monasteries and the custodians of the respective religious scriptures, Vedas and Puranas, were forced to open their closed doors and take cognizance of this literature.” (190).
Decolonization for blacks will once again uphold the “native culture” with a few changes that are welcomed. But for dalit political assertion the idea of “native culture” is absent. Dalits by “decolonization” will gain a unique position that completely rejects the traditional existing norms of untouchable community and also rejects the imitation of upper-caste culture but will stand for more egalitarian and emancipating society. For native culture of dalits is oppressive and humiliating, they do not have any past that brings pride and makes them fight to bring back. At the same the existing hegemonic culture which is oppressive towards them is not something dalits want to take part. Dalit category stands for unique egalitarian position.

Dalits’ rejection of religion has its own significance in dalit politics. Rejection of religion included temple entry in order to subvert the concept of ritual purity that is associated with the restriction of dalits from temple. Though it has been followed in the early phases of dalit movement, later as conversion has become a more rigorous way of a rejecting Hinduism which engendered caste system and hierarchy in the society became more prominent. Ambedkar, leader of dalit masses embraced Buddhism in order to deny Hinduism.

Dalitism is not about being silent about caste. Upper castes might believe that not mentioning caste would be more civilized and well-mannered position. Being silent about caste would not eradicate caste. Caste and caste sensitivity in each step of life in society is the significant factor for dalit politics. Dalit political struggle and movement fights against the justice done to dalits but unless it fights the upper-caste socio-cultural norms
such as patriarchy, casteist patriarchy, it can not succeed in fight for the justice to dalits. Complete rejection of Brahmanism is one of which dalit feminists have established in their struggle to establish a more egalitarian dalit community. Judging women on the basis of upper-caste construction of “morality” and “virtue” are the questions raised by dalit feminists.

Assertion of self respect is another important factor in dalit politics. Dalit who have been deprived of human treatment have now decided to fight for the self-respect and dignity. Various self-respect movements run by dalit ideologues substantiate the above statement. Dalit feminism fights to demolish not just caste inequalities by the casteist patriarchy that marginalizes dalit women in various ways. Dalit political assertion is all about how one inculcates the caste consciousness in various spaces and fields in the society. Caste awareness played important role in eradicating caste inequalities rather than caste ignorance and maintaining deliberate silence about caste.

In this thesis, I tried to make a point that caste discrimination, caste prejudice, social and cultural inferiority and humiliation to which dalits are subjected to by upper-castes are nothing but the manifestations of caste violence. It may be believed that these are the subtle forms of caste violence because of their invisibility. But the symbolic forms of caste violence more powerfully help to preserve and retain the caste and gender hierarchy when compared to physical caste violence. Physical caste violence or atrocities are only the occasional outbursts of every presence of caste prejudice and upper-caste dominance. Symbolic caste violence is more prevalent in modern spaces like universities, political
and progressive organizations, fields like media, arts and literature etc to effectively withhold dalits from being part of the mainstream arena. Where as the physical violence takes place mostly in the feudal spaces such as villages and small towns in order to make dalits conform to the caste order of the society without questioning or subverting it. There are a few laws in order to bring justice for dalits in case of physical caste violence. But how effectively those laws are governed to protect dalits is another question which I discussed in chapter 3. When it comes to symbolic caste violence, there is very less scope for dalits to address it since mostly caste factor in many cases (like dalits being discriminated in the educational institutions etc) is very invisible. So, I made an attempt to bring out such symbolic forms of caste violence that dalits and dalit women experienced and powerfully expressed through literature.