Chapter 1

Introduction
As N.M Aston puts it, “The causes and circumstances leading to the age-old existence of oppression and despair of the lives of the marginalized class of nations’ vast majority of people can be enumerated thus:

1. The self down-gradation of these people since ages, suppressing even the slightest protest against injustice that sought to find a voice
2. The conditions of abject poverty, unhealthy and unsanitary conditions in which these people had been sheltered, but they held a belief that they were accursed to live such lives
3. Even the minimum rights as human beings denied to them, rendering them incapable of seeing the light of freedom and comfortable living, thanks to the age-old ideology taught to them by the upper castes in India and the white race in other countries, that they were fated to be hewers of wood and drawers of water-mere slaves!”

Dalit is a category of self-definition of Untouchables in post-Independence India. It signifies a state of radical consciousness and seeks to interrogate and challenge the previous stereotypes that caste Hindu society had employed to describe untouchable as well as near untouchable castes and communities.

There are many different names proposed for defining dailits in India like ‘asprushya -untouchable’, ‘harijan- children of God’, ‘dalit – broken people’ etc. the word ‘Dalit’ comes from the Sanskrit. It means ‘downtrodden’, ‘suppressed’, ‘crushed’ or ‘broken to pieces’. Maharashtrian social worker Jyotiba Phule was the first one to use it in nineteenth century. It was in the context of oppression faced by the untouchables from upper caste Hindus.

**Mythological Context:**

The religious scripture ‘manu Smriti’ described ‘verna system’ of the society based upon the occupation. It is a four layered ‘verna’ system comprising four kinds of people of the society borne out of the body of Lord Vishnu.
According to this myth, Brahmin was born out of head, kshtriya was born out of arms, vaishya was born out of abdomen and Shudra was born out of feet. It emphasized Shudra as a slave or servant because he was born out of feet and he was destined to serve the rest of the society.

Dalit (shudra), thus was recognized as an inferior part of the society. They were assigned inferior activities like leather work, butchering or cleaning the streets, removing animal carcasses and waste. The civilized Hindu society has allotted works like manual labour, cleaning streets, latrines and sewers.

As they consider these activities polluting, the Dalits who are engaged in these activities are commonly segregated and banned from full participation in Hindu social life. They were banned from entering the temple, not allowed to fetch water from the public well of the village.

**Gandhi-Marxists-Dalits**

Dalit as a concept and as an issue has been treated differently throughout the history. Some prominent isms which tried to attach themselves are Marxism and Gandhianism. Indian Marxism has always seen Dalit problem in terms of land and agrarian relationships. It basically defines Dalit as landless labourer. But land and economic reasoning are just not enough to arrive at a holistic understanding of the dalit problem.

The second approach, the Gandhian approach looks at the Dalit problem as a problem of value structure. The roots of this approach are in the Bhakti movement. In recent times, this approach has been the most powerful and relevant to understand.

The word “dalit” takes an interesting turn when British in the Government of India Act 1935 used its English translation as ‘Depressed classes’ to mean downtrodden people of India who were hitherto referred as ‘Harijan’ by Mahatma Gandhi.
But Dr. Ambedkar sensed the multiple nuances of the word and gave it a more respectable identity by calling them ‘Dalit’. In the post-Ambedkar era, it became a part of political activism and got a new found awareness which is stressed to the extreme inclusiveness to all those depressed people who are the historical victims of both class and caste exploitation.

**Dalit Literature:**

The roots of the term ‘Dalit’ can be traced back to the Purusukta of Rig Veda where we find the first reference of the caste system. The hymn describes;

Brahmnoasaya mukamasti  
Bahu rajanayah kruta  
Uru tadasay yadvaishya  
Padabhayam Sudro ajayat  

According to this hymn, Brahmanas were born from the mouth of Brahma, the Kshtriyas from his shoulders, the vaisyas from his thighs and Sudras from his feet. Hence Brahmanas are the most superior and Sudras are the most inferior in the hierarchy.

The Brahmins have established the theories that the caste system is God-made and not Man-made. In the subsequent ages Manu, an ardent supporter of the caste system made it a code in his ‘Manu-Smriti’.

The division on the basis of class is a universal phenomenon, but the characteristic of the Hindu caste system is that it is based on birth and not on aptitude. Because of the rigidity of the caste system, Sudras are considered outcastes down-trodden, polluted, marginals and are exploited by the higher castes since centuries.
The writers of the text like “Manusmriti” themselves belonged to the ruling class and hence dictated terms which would maintain the status quo. The division of society into vernas was initially on the basis of karma or vocation. It was not linked with birth. But the ruling classes had designed it so that the mobility between vocations was very difficult.

As A.S.Chandalia observes¹,

“…The post modernist philosophers like Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida were not there but the determiners of the norms and writers of samhitas knew the power of knowledge. Education, i.e. knowledge is the most powerful means of social mobility. Access to knowledge was refused to all except the Brahmins.” ²

The Hindu religious order has considered the Dalit’s shadow, touch and speech to be impure. It has regarded them untouchable and guilty from birth Dalits should not accumulate property or wear gold ornaments; they should live outside the village and own only donkeys and dogs.

They should partake of food only in clay utensils, use only shrouds for clothing, and take inauspicious and crude names. For thousands of years, Dalits have been kept deprived of power, property and position. It was pronounced that ‘god created this hierarchy’, so that dalits may not rebel against this social order. Thousands of generations of dalits have continued to endure this injustice.

Dalit society came to understand its slavery following the thoughts of Babasaheb Ambedkar. This mute society found its hero in Babasaheb, and its anguish voice through him. This anguish of Dalits is the progenitor of Dalit literature. It is not the pain of any one person, nor is it of just one day- it is the anguish of many thousands of people, experienced over thousands of years.

Therefore it is expressed collectively. This is an anguish of an entire outcast society. This is the reason to make it a social character and not just any writings.
There are multiple meanings and definitions of the word ‘Dalit’. Marathi dictionary defines the term Dalit as (i) Ground and (ii) Broken or reduced to piece.

As Gangadhar Pantwane, a professor of Marathi and founder editor of *Asmitadarsh*,

“To me, Dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the Social and economic traditions 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.”

The Marxists would define ‘Dalit’ in terms of class, generally including women, tribal, workers and agricultural labors. Leading Dalit writers like Annabhau Sathe and Namdeo Dhasal have clear influence of Marxist concept in their writings. The word ‘Dalit’ is found in several Indian languages, and a Marathi word it is found in Molesworth’s Marathi-English dictionary of 1975, a reprint of the 1813 edition. It gives the meaning as ‘ground’, broken or reduced to pieces generally.

It is derived from a Sanskrit word meaning ‘crushed’ and is understood in all the Indian languages that are derived from Sanskrit. Thus the ‘Dalits’ are people who are broken, crushed and torn apart so much so that they are unable to rise and better themselves.

As Sharan Kumar Limbale puts it,

“Harijans and Neo-Buddhists are not the only Dalits, the term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, land-less farm labourers, workers, the suffering masses and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word, it will not do o refer only to the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to be included.

The definition of untouchables or Dalits given in the census report 1911 is very interesting.
The census report actually laid down ten tests to mark off the untouchables from those who were touchable. Under these tests, a separate enumeration of castes and tribes who are:

1. Denied the supremacy of the Brahmins
2. Did not receive the mantras from Brahma
3. Denied the authority of Vedas
4. Did not worship the great Hindu gods
5. Were not served by Good Brahmins
6. Have no Brahmin priest at all
7. Have no access to the ordinary Hindu temple
8. Cause pollution
9. Bury their dead
10. Eat beef and do not reverence law.

‘Dalit’ is now widely used in place of the word ‘untouchable’. Over the years, there have been several terms used to describe the people of the erstwhile untouchable community, such as ‘Anti-Sudra’, ‘Scheduled Castes’, ‘exterior castes’, ‘outcastes’, ‘depressed classes’, ‘ex-untouchables’ and so on.

The Dalits feel that these terms coined by the upper caste Hindus, officials, and social reformers were abusive in nature and synonymous with derogation, domination and paternalism. This is why the people belonging to this category prefer to describe themselves as Dalits, which includes all aspects of oppression.

In this context Elenor Zelliot observes:

“in the early 1970 two Maharastrian movements achieved enough prominence to be noticed by the English Press, The Dalit Panthers and Dalit Literature. By substituting the word ‘Black’ for ‘Dalit’ the reader can immediately understand that a phenomenon comparable to the American Black Panthers and Black Literature has surfaced among the lower caste in social and literary affairs in Western India. Like the American movements, the Dalit Panthers and the Dalit school of literature represent a new level of pride, militancy and the sophisticated creativity. The Marathi word ‘Dalit’, like the word
‘Black’ was chosen by the group itself...Dalit [refers to] those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, Karma and justified class hierarchy.”

Over the ages the connotation and the interpretation of the term “Dalit” have been changing. For example, Namdeo Dhasal, the noted Marathi poet and one of the leaders of the Dalit panthers Movement, infused the term with a leftist vision to include not just the Scheduled castes but also the economically oppressed classes comprising the Scheduled tribes, Neo-Buddhists, landless laborers, and others.

He defines Dalit in terms of class, generally including women, tribal, workers in industries and agricultural workers.

As Gangadhar Pntawane, another Dalit activist from Maharashtra who is also the founder editor of ‘Asmitadarsh’ (Mirror of Identity), the chief organ of dalit literature, the term ‘Dalit’ does not refer to a caste, but is a symbol of change and revolution: ‘the Dalit believes in Humanism. He rejects the existence of God, rebirth, soul, sacred books that teach discrimination, fate and heaven because these have made him a slave. He represents the exploited men…”

**Objectives of Dalit Literature:**

Dalit literature is the literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. This literature is but a lofty image of grief. Every human being must find liberty, honor, security and freedom from intimidation by the powerful elements of society.

These values are now being articulated in Dalit literature. Recognizing the centrality of human being, this literature is thoroughly saturated with humanity’s joys and sorrows. It regards human beings as supreme, and leads them towards total revolution.

Dalit literature has arisen from the cultural conflict. Since the ‘downtrodden’ (‘Dalits’) have no place in the Canonical Literature of India, Dalit writers call it ‘Hindu Literature’ and challenge its hegemony.
In the words of Baburao Bagul,

“The established literature of India is Hindu Literature. But it is Dalit literature which has the revolutionary power to accept new science and technology and bring about a total transformation. “Dalit is the name of a total revolution; it is revolution incarnate.”

Education and the idea of democracy reached many sections of the society after independence, awakening the masses all over the country, as well as Dalits, Adivasis, and Nomadic and other tribes living in and outside villages. The democratization of education enabled its spread among farmers, women and workers.

The idea of the equal worth of all people was widely expressed, but social conditions did not change. There were revolutionary transformations in the lives of the nation, society and individuals due to the consciousness of such humanistic values as equality, liberty, fraternity and justice. Yet, at the same time, sentiments of pain and revolt were also kindled because of dissatisfaction with an inequitable system.

The literature of the post-independence period expressed these sentiments. The new writers emerged from various sections of the society. They presented in their writings, their own language, environment, condition and issues. Dalit literature attracted considerable discussion because its form and objective were different from those of the other post-independence literatures. Its presence was noted in India and abroad.

In this process, dalit literature has effectively threatened the Brahminic hegemony from literature. It also concertized Dalit masses for assertion, protest and mobilization. It stirred up thinking in Dalit intellectuals and catalyzed creation of organic intellectuals of dalits. the emergence of Dalit literature, where writers are mostly Dalits, it proves in itself as a profound change taking place in Indian society.
The Dalit rising in the 1920s:

The mobilization of the oppressed and exploited sections of the society—the peasants, Dalits, women and low caste occurred on a large scale in the 1920s and 1930s, under varying leaderships and with varying ideologies.

Dalit writing is a post-Independence literary phenomenon. The emergence of Dalit literature has a great historical significance. The causes and effects leading to the age-old existence of oppression and despair of the lives of marginalized class of nation’s vast population are also observed in many other parts of the world. Dalit literature represents a powerful emerging trend in the Indian literary scene.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a champion of Dalit’s rights has beautifully summed up the essence of Dalit Literature:

“My words of advice to you is to educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. For ours is a battle not for wealth or power. It is a battle of freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality.”

Dalit literature represents a powerful emerging trend in the Indian literary scene. In the unashamed description of the traumas of being an “Untouchable” and target of upper caste ideology its texts question the institutions that have placed them at the margins.

Arjun Dangle has defined Dalit literature as:

“Dalit literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India… It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary.”
Most of the marginalized groups all over the world have a similar system of oppression but the titles are different as per the class and class divide. In India it was under the pretext of the Cast and in the western World it was under the name of the Race.

Inequality was the main source of this marginality which led to insecurity, injustice and exploitation. Marginalized sections were always on the periphery and distanced from the power centers. In this research work the main objective is to draw similarities between the politics of Caste and Race in Indian Dalits and the American Blacks.

“In the early 1970s, two Maharashtrian movements achieved enough prominence to be noticed by the English language press…the Dalit Panthers and dalit Literature. By substituting the word ‘Black’ for ‘Dalit’ the reader can immediately understand that the phenomenon comparable to the American Black Panthers and Black Literature has surfaced among the lower castes in social and literary affairs in western India.

Like the American Movement, the Dalit panthers and the Dalit school of literature represents a new level of pride, militancy and sophisticated creativity. The Marathi word Dalit like the word Black, was chosen by the group itself and is used proudly; and even in the English press, the unfamiliar Marathi word has to be used…untouchables, scheduled castes, depressed classes, Gandhi’s euphemism, harijan…are the same connotation. Dalit implies those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way.”

Dalits were always on the marginalized ‘other’ side of the Indian society. So when they started voicing after centuries of silence, about themselves, we have the literature depicting assertion of human rights, self-pride, revolt against social injustice, chronicles of personal and collective suffering, and hopes and aspirations for a new society devoid of discrimination.

Dalit Literature is literature about Dalits that are about Dalits. Dalit (Oppressed or broken) is not a new word. It was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of ‘depressed classes’, a term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes.
In 1970s the ‘Dalit Panthers exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. So Dalit is not a caste. It is a symbol of change and revolution. The Primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of dalits, the struggle against casteist tradition has a long history. Some of the important writers whose writings will find a place are: Mahasweta Devi, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle, Sachi Rautray, Rabi Singh, Basudev Sunani, Bama, Abhimani, Poomani, Imayam, Marku, Mangal Rathod, Neerave Patel, Perumal Murugan, Palamalai, Sudhakar, D. Gopi and others./

Sharankumar Limbale has stated,

“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.”

This trend started in 1873 when Jyotirao Phule, a Marathi Dalit (then known as an Untouchable), published his book *Gulangiri* (Slavery) and dedicated the treatise to the then Negroes in America as a ‘token of admiration for their sublime disinterestedness and self sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro Slavery’.

In the year 1992, Indian Literature virtually started a new chapter, with the publication of Arjun Dangle’s *Poisoned Bread*, which was the first ever attempt to anthologize Dalit writings in English. He involved all the genre available in Marathi Dalit literature-poetry, short stories, essays, autobiographical excerpts and public speeches.

As a result, today we have several collections of Dalit writings coming out in both Indian languages and English. Following are some of the most widely read writers of Dalit literature that are available in English translation- Bama's Karukku and Sangati, Dr. Narendra Jadhav's Untouchables: My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India, Sharankumar Limbale's The Outside: Akkarmashi, Joseph Macwan's The Stepchild, Om Prakash Valmiki's Joothan: A Dalit's Life, Baby Kamble's Our Existence and Imayam Beats of Burden, Urmila Pawar's The Weave of My Life. Some of the prominent Dalit writers are Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle, Baburao Bagul, Rabi Singh, Namdeo Dhasal, Dutta Bhagat, Lakshman Mane, Neerave Patel, Palamalai, Sudhakar.
There are number of other writers writing Dalit literature but do not share the Dalit writers’ category as the latter are not Dalit by birth as the other Dalit writers by birth. Mahasweta Devi, Sara Joseph, Kumaran Asan, Mulkraj Anand and Premchand are some of the well known names writing in diverse Indian languages.

“Unlike its precedents Dalit literature wouldn’t lay down any precepts to be confirmed by the coming posterity, rather it would portray dreadful and humiliating event of the Dalit world by exposing inequality, sorrow and misery of their class. Dalit literature would tell us about the cultural conflict of the socially, economically and culturally deprived and disadvantaged groups of people. So this literature would be revolutionary, didactic and doctrinaire. But above all unlike its antecedents Dalit literature wouldn’t play the role of a separatist but an integrationist.”

A study of Dalit literature is a promising one as it has bright prospects for making our society largely integrated. It promotes co operation and love which are major forces of a good society.

In this way it has begun to bring about a change, to enable nondalits to deconstruct a traditional mindset which makes them perceive Dalits as lower than themselves; and instead to see dalits as equals rather than pitiful victims. It also fills dalits themselves with confidence and pride.

Their ultimate aim is to bring them in equation with others and to provide confidence and pride in themselves. So a typical Dalit literature fights against system and not against man.
**Black American Writings:**

The racial problem is only one of the many problems that not only America but many parts of the Western world face at the present time. It is one of the problems that seem endemic to the Twenty-first century societies of the West, particularly the societies those have been industrialized for a considerable time.

This problem of ‘Racial discrimination’ has also its own relation to the whole complex of many larger problems and it cannot be fully understood in isolation.

Racism and classicism signify the traumatic conditions under which African-American lived in White America. It started when white masters of the land brought the first Africans in chains and used their labour to enrich their coffers.

As a result, black people soon ceased to exist as human beings in the white world. Racism is a system of societal and psychological restrictions that has critically affected the lives of blacks. Right from the days of slavery, the blacks have realized the cruel reality of racism: Judgment from the white man’s standards of life and beauty, the black man’s life became unbearable.

As John Arthur suggests;

“Racism is usually a form of prejudice in just that sense: it is an attitude that is grounded in the beliefs formed on insufficient evidence, or beliefs that are held too firmly without adequate regard for other information that may call these beliefs into question.”

The oppressive story of racism in America brought with it pain, sorrow, bloodshed, death, and above all, the negation of an entire race. The African-American race was ghettoized, persecuted and viciously outlawed from all avenues of decency, hope, progress and livelihood. The basic myth of racism is that white skin brings with it cultural superiority - that the white are more intelligent and more virtuous than the black
by the mere fact of being white. On psychological level, whiteness is automatically equated with beauty and culture and blackness with ugliness and slavery.

When the African slave was torn from his homeland and brought to the New World, he was quickly denied his native culture. Tribal organizations, languages, family structure, religion—all were systematically extirpated.

In rebuilding his sheltered life, he was compelled to appropriate his materials form a new culture. But his master permitted him access to western culture on a very restricted basis. The process of assimilation was deliberately obstructed by the Whites. The other side of this coin is an unconscious self-hatred likewise appropriated from the dominant culture. Hated by Whites and being an organic part of the culture that hated him, Black man grew in time to hate himself what others hated him.

An unconscious desire to be White coupled with feelings of revulsion towards the Negro masses may produce an assimilationist pattern of behavior at the purely personal level.

He is condemned because he is Black. Nature is responsible for that. What it means to be a black man in this world dominated by the white race? The black American writer defines his racial condition which is responsible, by and large, for his socio-cultural condition in the conspiring world of the white people. Suffering is indeed his lot. He has committed no sin.

Nobody has talked about Black Adam’s fall. Nor has anybody applied the Indian doctrine of Karma to his socio-racial conditions to explain his perpetual suffering, torture and trauma for being Black. The Karma doctrine can be applied to only individuals, men or women, but not to the whole race-black, brown or white.

The slavery was imposed upon the blacks in America for more than three centuries. The land of liberty locked them in this dark dungeon of slavery. Their racial problem resulted into social, economic and cultural problems.
The inhuman exploitation of the American Blacks has no parallel in the history of mankind. The slavery was institutionalized in the social behavior. The white people gave bad treatment to the Negroes as per the code originated in the minds of both the white and the black people. The black race was marginalized in all respects. The shackles of slavery fell only after the Civil War.

But they were not shattered completely. The Jim Crow Laws were passed to put them in bondage. The highest court of America upheld the notorious ‘separate-but-equal’ principle. The Negro was defranchised without any benefit of legal power and property.

But Africa, the land of his ancestors, cannot altogether disappear from their memories. Africa occupies a special place in their hearts and souls. Their conscious minds are filled with America but Africa is stuck forever in their psyche.

That is the reason why they call themselves Afro-Americans. Their identities have travelled from colored, to Negro, from Negro to Black, from Black to Afro-American and now from Afro-American to African American. They are full-blooded African Americans. The long dark shadows fall across two continents – America and Africa.

Their history is a long passage of time telling a tale of two continents. They were thrown out of their own history, faith and culture. African history has given them a full page about American history has given them a small and narrow margin on its page. Their history is a story of an endless hallucination of agony. But this agony has given rise to a vast and rich heritage like their spirituals, Jazz, Blues, Poems, plays short stories and novels. Marginal is their existence.

Ralph Ellison’s ‘Invisible Man’ to Richard Wright’s ‘Native Son’ to Alex Haley’s ‘Roots’-the Black American literature deals with the essence of black identity caught in perpetual crisis.

The Negro literature has passed through such subsequent phases like black literature, Afro-American literature and finally to African-American literature.
Here the term ‘African’ is used to suggest and signify the primacy and priority of the blacks who are from Africa in context of the literary activities.

As R. Bhongle explains:

“African-American literature today opposes several things in the literature of the white Americans. ‘Negro’ now is no longer a marginal character but a protagonist who asserts his racial identity. He opposes even the earlier image of himself as portrayed by the Harlem writers- a docile, self-conscious, submissive black man knocking at the door of god who has always been unkind. Jesus Christ is described as the white devil with blue eyes. If at all there is the God benevolent to the Negro, he must be an incarnation of his own image and personality.”13

As African Americans' place in American society has changed over the centuries, so, too, have the foci of African American literature. Before the American Civil war, African American literature primarily focused on the issue of slavery, as indicated by the subgenre of slave narratives. At the turn of the 20th century, books by authors such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington debated whether to confront or appease racist attitudes in the United States. During the American Civil Rights movement, authors such as Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote about issues of racial segregation and black nationalism.

Today, African American literature has been accepted as an integral part of American literature, with books such as Roots: The Saga of an American Family by Alex Haley, The Color Purple by Alice Walker, and Beloved by Toni Morrison achieving both best-selling and award-winning status.

William Faulkner remains one of the key figures in American fiction. Before Faulkner’s arrival on the literary scene, American fiction was mostly confined to social and political issues, mostly of the non-controversial type.

The arrival of Faulkner brought about a revolutionary change in the literary scenario. Mustering more courage than his predecessors who felt afraid to deal with controversial and shameful realities like racism, miscegenation etc. Faulkner brought
literary treatment of the social and psychological aspect of the racism to the forefront. Through his acclaimed novels like ‘Sartoris’, ‘The Sound and The Fury’, ‘Absalom, Absalom!’, ‘The Unvanquished’ and ‘The Intruder in the Dust’, Faulkner jolted his white readers, making them aware of the harsh realities of racial segregation and racial exploitation in their so-called progressive society, thought to be a model society for the entire world.

It requires extra ordinary courage for a white novelist like Faulkner to expose the racial misdeeds of his own white brethren. In spite of some initial opposition from racist critics and readers who believed in the doctrine of white supremacy, Faulkner succeeded in his noble task of drawing sympathy from his readers towards the sorry plight of the blacks in the pre dominantly white American society.

**Historical context: Dalit Writings:**

In India, the beginning of Dalit literature can also be traced back to medieval ‘Bhakti’ literature. As it is observed, most of the poets of ‘Bhakti’ writings were low-caste local preachers. They also collectively attacked the then Hindu canonical practices. Many of the Bhakti poets like Namdev and Kabir were highly against Brhminical orthodoxy.

As per the definition of Dalit literature also, these poets can be considered among the first Dalit writers as they belonged to the lower castes and they wrote primarily against the high-caste discrimination against their community in particular and the humanity in general. But during the course of time, many of these writings were appropriated by the upper class Hindus.

Some of the major ones who made a significant impact in the history of Dalit writings are Ravidas, Namdev, Tukaram, Eknath, Chokhamela, Kabir and others. Their writings collectively may be described as protodalit.
These Bhakti poets questioned the orthodox and repressive brahminical understanding of Hinduism and as such made it possible for the lower castes and women to give a form to their religious aspirations. They also collectively emphasized devotion and love and not knowledge as a means of salvation. As Zelliot and Monash put it:

“Another is acceptance of all castes and women into the fold of the saints; in some areas, the songs of Muslim saints are also included in the stories and the canon and the vernacular as the medium used by the ‘bhaktas’, in Hindi and Marathi, the songs are among the first vernacular literature of the area.”

There are two ways of capturing the origin of a movement or a phenomenon: one, the historical way of locating the specific point of birth in a single moment or a cluster of such moments. Second, focusing on the moment of metaphorical birth, where the motifs and images that went into the making of a movement surface in a dramatic way.

But in most of the cases, the factual data received by the historical facts are not enough to substantiate the origin. Just like the origin of any river, Dalit movement ‘s origin is also not very praiseworthy but in the due course of time, it turned out to be a full blown social phenomenon.

Three specific phases can be identified in the present century; first, proto-Dalit activism (1900-1930), second, the emergence and consolidation of Ambedkarite paradigms (1930-1972); third, the birth of the Dalit movement, which begins with the birth of dalit panthers movement of Maharashtra in 1972, the movement which in the same decade spread to another parts of the country.

Initially it was a ‘social movement’- a manifestation of the political will of a community. Here the community in question itself is partly newly invented and mobilized to influence the shape and course of the historical change. This process also involved the cultural politics of renaming several untouchable castes which mobilized themselves by bonding over a common memory out of their real and existential experiences.
Maharashtra-an Aryan cum Drawidian land- was the first to witness an anti-caste movement of Jyotiba Phule and then came the Dalit movement of Ambedkar. But after Ambedkar converted to Buddhism as a possible way of escape from oppression, it lost its steam to some extent.

Days passed on and an end to caste oppression was not in sight. Dalit struggles had to break out in new forms but obviously it had to take more militant form. But in the pre-Ambedkarite period, it was Jyotiba Phule who was the first Hindu to run a school for the untouchables as early as 1851 in Poona, the very centre of the orthodoxy of Brahminism. Poona was the capital of Peshwa Rule of maharashtrian Brahmins after Chhatrapati Shivaji.

Phule established in Poona Satya Shodhak Samaj (truth finding society) in 1873 with the aim of liberating the non-Brahmins from the stranglehold of the Brahmin priests and the rich. Inspired by Phule, Chhatrapati Shahu maharaj, the ruler of Kolhapur started many reformist activities in 1912.

He was the first ruler in the history of India as early as 1902 to reserve 50 % of Government jobs for socially and economically backward section of the society irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

**Contribution of Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar**

Dalit literature in pre-Ambedkar times and after the rise of Dr. Ambedkar marks a clear-cut two different identities. As N.D.Nalawade observes:

"In the first place, even if there is an urge to free Dalits from the Hindu slavery and ask dalits to give up traditional way of life and in the second place to inspire the dalits to acquire the art of writing."\(^{15}\)
Dr. Ambedkar is a phenomenon that has happened to the Dalits in India. The rise and life-time of Dr. Ambedkar was the real foundation period of the all-round rise and growth of Dalits in India.

It has multi-marvelous facets which adorns the careers of present Dalit writers who are more fortunate because Dr. Ambedkar has to his credit a very rich and unprecedented golden heritage of writings on varied subjects and more particularly on the ancient and Sanatan Hindu scriptures.

He has very ably brought to the forefront drawbacks and contradictions in the Hindu scriptures and literature. Simultaneously he has evolved his own theories to establish a new philosophy and even to create an atmosphere for counter attacks. \(^{16}\)

Dr. Ambedkar’s famous books ‘The Buddha and His Dhamma’, ‘Who Were the Shudras’, ‘Annihilation of caste’, ‘The Problem of Rupee in British India’, ‘Thoughts on Pakistan’ and others make him not only the Dalit crusader but an all-round intellectual who happens to be the God-father of Dalit reforms in India.

Dr. Ambedkar is the apostle of the dalits. Historically, he is the first to break sanatan Hindu traditions of ban on learning for the untouchables. His own achievements in the field of learning are the source of pride, prestige and inspiration to the dalits. Because, first, Dalits were supposed to be ineligible to learn due to want of blessings from Goddess of learning and secondly, no man among the Dalits has risen previously to the height of Dr. Ambedkar at the caste level, as well as at the national level.

Thus, none else but Dr. Ambedkar alone stands as an ideal, for the people of the downtrodden castes.

As D. R. Nagaraj notes:

“The Dalit Movement, I suggest, is a product of the mental state that believed in the firm rejection of the Gandhian model of tackling the problems of Untouchables, and that has shaped the contours of its themes and patterns.”\(^{17}\)
Dr. Ambedkar’s contribution to the entire existence of Dalits in India is very well explained by Namdeo Dhasal:

*Your reputation wasn’t false*

*You grabbed the banyan tree by the roots*

*Weapons*

*You didn’t take them out just to fill your belly*

*You unleashed them against injustice*

*You did a post-mortem on the gods*

*Satvi, that fate-reckoning goddess,*

*You cut her nose, snubbed it*

*You threw the barren tales of heaven and fell*

*Into the gutter*

*You fucked the 33 crores of cocksuckers without caring*

*You set the water on fire*

*The sky came storming down*

*At your command*18

The themes chosen by Dalit writers are the natural outcome of their expressions. In the short stories, poems, ballads, novels, biographies, autobiographies, dramas, historical writings and all other forms of literature, they have created their own sphere of influence. The Dalit writes follow the message of Dr. Ambedkar and their literature has man as its centre.

And as Dr. M.N.Wankhede states:

“The pens of the Dalit writers are ready as lever, to lift the people’s democracy out of the mud of anarchy.”19
Dr. Ambedkar’s revolt was not of the sword and guns. It was a purely ideological revolt. This is the similar aim at the heart of the Dalit literature- to awaken an ideological revolution in the Dalit community.

It is a saga of the anguish and injustice experienced by Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar was the main source of the novel, progressive and radical thoughts. When he was serving in Baroda, he was thrown out of his inn and humiliated because of his lower caste. After this incident he had vowed for a fierce struggle and metamorphosed his life into a continuous struggle for justice. He has vowed;

“If I fail to do away with the abominable thralldom and inhuman injustice under which the class in which I was born has been groaning, I will put an end to my life with a bullet.” Dalit writer believe that dalit writings in itself is a form of social change. Poetry in particular often rises in response to atrocities as if making the violence real through the written word might change the future. In a poem called ‘Words’, Waman Nimbalkar expresses this:

“words it is that set aflame
House, homes, countries,
Men as well.
Words extinguish even the fire
In men set aflame by words
Where it not for words, the sparks of fire,
Would not have fallen from the eyes
Great floods of tears would not have flowed
No one would have come near
Nor have gone far away-
Were it not for words.”
Another factor contributing to this awareness of dalit writes is a belief in a culture, counter to the Indian Brahminical culture. The use of marginal figures of ‘The Ramayana’ and ‘The Mahabharata’ and other religious mythology is observed in their writings to assert their connection to this age-old scriptures.

Examples include Shambuk who was a shudra ans was killed by Rama for learning the Vedas, Karna, the step child of Pandu and rejected by his own mother Kunti, Bali- whose kingdom was taken away by Lord Vishnu in his dwarf avatar and especially Eklavya- the greatest disciple of Guru Drona but who was a tribal or a law caste boy and as he was proving himself superior to Prince Arjuna. Drona asked him to cut his thumb and stop learning archery from him.

k.M.sheriff writes;

“A remarkable achievement of Gujarati dalit literature is a creation of a subaltern mythology to counter classical Hindu mythology with its casteist hegemonistic trappings. Ravana and Eklavya are the epic heroes…”

Like Marathi Dalit literature, the Gujarati Dalit literature has also come out with the poems. And after that, by the strong hands this sort of literature prosper in various literary forms, inspite of that it fully flowers in poetry. The literature produced in both, prose and poems has no limited values.

When the Dalit literary trend became popular at national and international level, many similarities were found and discussed with the other marginal literatures like Black Americanam writings.

**Historical Context: Black American Writings**

After President Lincoln’s assassination, Andrew Jackson, Vice- president vetoed most of the bills helpful to the Negroes. He made it easy for states to come back to union without guaranteeing equal rights to blacks.
During his presidency, Southern States enacted “black codes” which forced freed slaves to be serfs. Some laws made it illegal for Blacks to rent or lease farm lands. They were imprisoned if they broke labour contracts; almost all were done under extreme duress. Courts were free to assign black children under eighteen to forced labour.

The United States celebrates its harlem Renaissance as one of the most pungent literary attacks on racial discrimination. It greatfully accepts renaissance as a great cultural and literary event and made it a part of the nation’s consciousness.

However Blacks also began immediately asserting their independence of Whites. They formed their own churches. They were becoming politically active, strengthening their family ties, trying to educate their children.

The Whites whipped up barrage of propaganda against Blacks, slandering their so-called inborn character, inept, corrupt and ruinous to Governments in the South. But despite all these resistance, Blacks were elected to Southern states in that election. They stared writing their experiences in a systematic manner and with a single aim to let it reach to as many people as possible – both Blacks and Whites.

The African American literature can be defined as writings of people living in America having African descent. It is a twofold saga of the condition of African Americans in America and what it means to be a true American.

As Princeton University professor Albert J. Raboteau has said,

“all African-American study "speaks to the deeper meaning of the African-American presence in this nation. This presence has always been a test case of the nation's claims to freedom, democracy, equality, the inclusiveness of all.”

The literary expressions of Negroes themselves have had a continuous development in America since 18th century. For Blacks in America, apart from the memory of slavery, there came the living experience of segregation, lynching and humiliation everywhere in their daily life for generations after generations.
The literary output of the American Negro has been both large and credible but mostly ignored by White America and therefore not much known. However, a number of great names whose works could be rated first class did emerge despite the lack of freedom, racial persecution and later hard economic life, too bitter to allow education and leisure to take to literary labor.

The Black poetess, Phyllis Wheatby was the pioneer and her first poems were published in 1773. She was followed by Richard Allen; first Bishop of African Methodist Church, whose autobiography published in 1793, was hailed as a great narrative. Booker T. Washington’s ‘Up From Slavery’ was one of the best in its genre.

These were followed by a plethora of acclaimed Negro writers in the nineteenth century. ‘The Life of Gustavus Vassa’ in 1837, ‘Henry Highland Carnet’ and ‘J.W.S.C. Pennington’ in 1840, R.B. Lewis’s ‘Negro History’, ‘White Field Poems’ in 1846, all these made a mark and earned respect and recognition.

William Wells Brown wrote several works starting from ‘Narrative of a Fugitive Slave’ in 1847, ‘Sketches From Abroad’ in 1855, ‘The Black man’ in 1863, ‘The Negro in the American Rebellion’ in 1867 and ‘The Rising Son’ in 1874. All these works were rated as outstanding accomplishment in literature. In the 20th century Bishop Loguen’s Life History and ‘Douglass’ Autobiography ran endless editions till 1893.

It was in 1841 that the first Negro magazine edited by George Hogarth and published by African Methodist Episcopel Church appeared. In the 1850s emerged a new woman poet of applauded abilility, Farces E.W.Harper and poet James Whitefield. Negor historians Martin L. Dalancy and William Cosper Nell and Catto whose history of the Negro Church made valuable contributions.so also the impressive biographies of Josiah Hension, Samual C. Ward and Samual Northrop added fame to the growing prestige of Negro literature.

On the whole, the literary output of the American Negro has been both enormous and creditable although comparatively little in the kingdom of the whites. Paul Lawrence Dunbar the undoubted laureate of the Negro race occupies a unique place in American literary world.
He raised a dialect and the theme from minstrel stage to literature and became and remains a national figure. In 1020s emerged what was known as ‘Harlem Renaissance’ with daring calls. A poem by Claud Mckay recorded in Congressional Record as an example of dangerous currents among young blacks:

“If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot
Like men we will face t murderous cowardly pack
Pressed to the wall dying, but fighting back”\(^{22}\)

Another famous poem by the black poet Lawrence Dunbar,

‘We Wear the Mask’:

“And we wear the mask that grins and lies
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes
We sing but oh the clay is while
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask.”

By 1930s the mask was off for many black poets.

Langston Huges wrote in ‘I too’;

“I too sing America
I am the darker brother
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes
But I laugh
And eat well
And grew strong
Tomorrow
I will be at the table
When company comes”  

But as W.E.B.Du Bois observes;

“To appraise rightly this body of art, one must remember that it represents mainly the work of those artists whom accident set free; if the artist had a white face, his Negro blood did not militate against him in the fight for recognition; if this Negro blood was visible, ability was united to indomitable will. But the shrinking modest, black artist without special encouragement had little or no chance in a world determined to make him a menial.”  

In this perspective of the racial problem a “close” reading of texts may be particularly useful, if we are really concerned with what the writer in question is saying in his fiction, especially in the works of the writers like William Faulkner.

Because of its very urgency, of its topicality, and of the emotional charge that it carries for a great many Americans of the present time, the reader may very well attribute to these writers’ texts meanings that are not actually there.

Similarly in India, in the 1990s, English translations of Dalit autobiographies began to appear in quantity. Beginning in Maharashtra, the translations helped these sagas to reach out to a larger mass to many regions and many classes. With diverse themes, some tell stories of triumph over adversities.

For example Narendra Jadhav’s ‘Outcaste: A memoir’, a best-seller in the Marathi language as ‘Our father and Us’.  

57
Another best seller ‘Joothan’ (Leftover Food) details the harsh conditions of Untouchables in a north Indian village. Just like Joseph Macwan’s bleak description of the weaver community life in Gujarat, this novel also is the first autobiography to be published in English.

Dalit literature serves the purpose of Social intervention and carries strong radical connotations. The nature of these connotations varies depending upon the writer’s personality, motives and inspiration to write the changing socio-cultural contexts.

To appreciate it, one has to understand the historical, social and cultural setting to which they belong. The context, perspectives and characteristics of the historical trend collectively set the quality of the concept of dalit literature along with the Western counterpart of the genre. The exercise provides the understanding of the Subject who is an individual among many who shares the same types of cultural ostracism, physical repression and social stigma, the result being that he is kept out of the legitimate boundaries of human society.
References:

4. Elenor Zilliot, ‘From Untouchable to dalit’, New Delhi, Manohar Prakashan, 1992, p-267
7. Elenor Zilliot, ‘From Untouchable to Dalit’, New Delhi, Manohar Prakashan, 1992, p- 267
18. Namdeo Dhasal, ‘Ode to Dr. Ambedkar: 1978 – Equality for All or Death or death for India’ 1992, p-7
22. Howard Zinn, ‘A People’s History of America, 1492….  
23. Howard Zinn, ‘A People’s History of America, 1492….  