REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE IN DALIT WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES - A SELECT STUDY

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By

SOMALI SAHA

(Registration No. Ph. D/1964/12 Dt.27.09.12)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SUNITI KUMAR CHATTOPADHYAY SCHOOL OF ENGLISH AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES STUDIES

ASSAM UNIVERSITY, SILCHAR

Silchar- 788011

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Chapter VI

Conclusion

In India the curse of 'Chaturvarna' segregated thousands of Dalits from the mainstream culture to a subhuman and debased existence as they are thrown out of the Hindu caste hierarchy and pushed to the fifth rung of the social ladder. Humiliation, neglect, oppression and deprivation become the destiny of these Dalits who are marginalised in every walk of their life. The traumatic afflictions constantly penetrated on them by the upper caste people drove them towards further repression. But these low and hardly audibled, repressed Dalits strive continually to make them heard and assert their presence by registering the throb of resistance. As literature is a reflection of society, and is often a potent vehicle to propagate ideologies, the Dalits took pen not only to articulate their pathetic existences but also to effectively sow the seed of resistance in the minds of the fellow Dalits.

In the Dalit society, the Dalit women are thrice alienated on the basis of their class (poor), caste (outcaste) and gender. They are the ones who are the most helpless victims of repression and of discrimination. These women are not only struggling against the dominant ideology and cultural hegemony but also battling against the gender disparity for which they are marginalised in their own society by their own men. But they are gradually becoming more conscious of the oppression of the caste system which plagues them from birth and continues after death. To get rid of multiple marginalisation and to confess their voice and identity in social structure, they appear in literature as a speaking subject without being interpellated by the dominant group's voice, language, tone, style or tradition. Now a Dalit woman is being able to start her journey from repression to resistance by portraying

her life experiences and is gradually becoming the dominant one extending her identity beyond the biological and sexual configurations to her cultural and historical specificity. With a view to oppose the systematic erasure of their presence in the mainstream literature, the autobiographical writings written by the Dalit women are emerging as a counter-discourse in the true sense of the term.

This research is an effort towards understanding the Dalit women's voyage from repression to resistance, from silence to expression, registering the subtleties of oppression and the gendered relationships conferred on Dalit women in Indian society. It seeks to showcase the repressed condition of the Dalit women as well as aims to demonstrate how far the autobiographies written by these women are able to project their identity as an act of resistance against caste, class and gender discrimination. This work is also an endeavour to show how these autobiographies have established themselves as a distinct genre emerging from the conflicts as well as creative dialectics between self and society.

To arrive at ultimate views or judgements of any topic is always challenging as a great number of issues may appear at this point. But keeping in mind that no study can be complete and perfect, an attempt has been made in indicating some tentative conclusions as well as in pointing out a few directions which such a study may lead us to. In the concluding chapter of the present study, with the summation of the preceding chapters, some narrated autobiographies of Dalit women and selected Dalit men's autobiographies have been brought in briefly so as to help contextualise the Dalit women's work and to set down some significant areas of difference between attitudes and values that characterise the women's as someway divergent to the men's writing.

In the introductory chapter, the situations of Dalits in modern India, the multiply subjugated situation of Dalit women, the emergence of Dalit Literature, the role of Dalit autobiographies in voicing the excruciatingly painful experiences of their day-to-day lives, the inner voices of Dalit women described in their autobiographies are focused. The geneology of the term 'Dalit', the reference of Dalits in the Hindu shastras, the accounts of eminent historians in delineating the influential role of caste in Indian society are all highlighted in this chapter. Theoretical parameters such as feminist theory, subaltern theory and resistance theory taken into account to form the hypothetical structure of the thesis are also analysed here. The need of Dalit aesthetics to study such a particular genre of literature has been discussed in this chapter. Here it is also shown that the agenda of the Dalit women is not localised in individualism but links the individual to her entire caste community as a way of gaining power and support in a group struggle against similarly experienced oppression.

The caste system of India ostracised certain sections of people by classifying the society into four varnas- where the Dalits are called 'avarnas', marginalised and alienated in every walk of their lives by the mainstream majority society. They have been reduced to men who "left no foot prints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirror"(Roy 216). Vulnerably positioned at the bottom of both India's caste and gender hierarchies, Dalit women experience endemic gender and caste discrimination and violence in their own society as the outcome of severely imbalanced power equations and their socio-economic vulnerability combined with double risk factors of being Dalit and female, increase their exposure to more violent situations which reduces the chances of their escape from the hostile situation.

In the introductory chapter an attempt is made to trace the origin of Indian caste system, the roots of which are buried so deep that it is hardly possible to the scholars to arrive at a definite conclusion about the origin and growth of this decisive system. Concerning the origin of this system, the western view is centred around the Aryan invasion theory and the consequent enslavement of the local population, where, on the other hand, the Brahmanic view sees it as a result of divine sanctions which owes its origin in *Purusukta.* In the Varna scheme of the Vedas, there are only four orders with no mention of the untouchables. They are identified as 'avarnas', 'ati-sudras', 'panchamas' or 'asprishyas' with the lowest ritual standing and traditionally subjected to onerous social and civil disabilities. The reform movements in India beginning with Raja Rammoham Roy to Gandhi and his followers were mostly led by the upper castes who were worried about the decadent Hinduism of their day. Later on, prominent figures like Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar put immense effort to fight against the caste system and untouchability in their own ways. Ambedkar, being an untouchable himself, championed the cause of the 'broken men' and fought relentlessly throughout his life to ensure equality, social justice and self-respect for them. The untouchables are now widely known as 'Dalits'- the term which was derived from the Sanskrit word meaning 'crushed' and over the ages the connotation of the term has been changing and new interpretations are being given to it. But the term 'Dalit' does not refer to a caste, but is a symbol of change and revolution.

Though the Dalits endeavour to rise themselves up in the social scale, they have been subjected to deliberate and calculated humiliation of an inhuman kind through the years. But pushing all the constraints, they are ready to interrogate and

challenge the hegemony of the upper castes which has been clearly reflected in the emergence of Dalit literature. The establishment of 'Dalit Panther's Movement' in 1972 which was initiated to awaken the Dalit youths of Maharashtra, aimed to create an atmosphere of a counter culture by bringing a separate identity to the Dalits in the society. The call for a social reconstruction by the Panthers was further activated by the Dalit writers which subsequently emerged as Dalit literature.

Among all the genres of Dalit literature, Dalit autobiographical narratives are the tales of personal sufferings of the Dalit writers which are fused with their interpersonal responses and community feelings experienced by them in the hierarchal Hindu society. These writers with their growing perceptions and genuine experiences, capture the tensions which grow out of a continuous battle between 'loss of identity' and 'asserting of self' and the very process of writing autobiography by the Dalits is a form of resistance against various forms of oppression. Dalits use their autobiographies as a form of protest and resistance, a way in which they could establish their own identity without speaking a single untruth. But the rise of Dalit autobiography on the literary scene and the inadequate representation of Dalit women in them create a new consciousness among the Dalit women writers to challenge and register their protest against the male dominated citadel through their autobiographies.

As far as the methodological framework of this research work is concerned, it has been shaped by the parameters of subaltern theory, repression and resistance theory and feminist theory. While Gramsci, who popularised the term 'subaltern', is of the view that the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic, Gayatri Spivak in her essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988) admits that

the subaltern cannot speak because “the phased development of the subaltern is complicated by the imperialist project”(271). In ‘A Literary Representation of the Subaltern’ (1988), Spivak further suggests that literary texts can provide an alternate rhetorical site for articulating the histories of subaltern women by which they may change their repressed identity by articulating their resistance and defiance. Examining the subaltern thesis from a different angle, Ranajit Guha stresses that the imperialists were the only ones allowed to narrate history, and other accounts of history must be read as transcriptions or translations of imperialist power through willing, subjugated subalterns.

As far as the notion of feminism is concerned, it questions and subverts the assumed notions of superiority of male inherent in patriarchy. Since women are seen as disadvanced sex in most of the cultures, feminists of all hues have been trying to get a better space for them in all spheres of human activities. When the mainstream feminists believed that caste identities could be transcended by the larger identity of sisterhood among all women, the Dalit feminists challenged the misleading concepts of ‘casteless gender’ and ‘genderless caste’ and believed that there is no common philosophy to combine Dalit women’s movement with other women’s movement as Dalit women’s emancipation entails a dual struggle as a Dalit and as a woman. Dalit women through their literary representatives of their struggles have questioned the geneology of Indian feminism, where the position of caste has not been articulated. Articulation of gendered marginality with the emergence of autonomous Dalit women’s organisation drew attention to the complex relationship between feminism and a caste’s complex history.

Dalit feminism poses anew the position of how to understand caste’s complex history as a form of identification and as a structure of disenfranchisement

and exploitation, how to revisit forgotten and repressed histories that illuminate the criticism of feminism by its most vulnerable and exploited constituency. The Dalit feminists demand an overhaul of the gender relations due to multiple and overlapping patriarchies operating in different castes. While mainstream feminism is guilty of projecting a universal of womanhood without taking into consideration the typical, social, economic, religious differences, the Dalit movement also tried to push under carpet a major chunk of Dalits in the name of uniform Dalit experience. But the Dalit feminism does not presuppose a rupture with Dalit or feminists movements, but it leans heavily on both these movements imbibing their strengths and eschewing their narrowness. Hence, Dalit feminism instead of mainstream feminism suits to be the parameter to assess the performance of the Dalit women writers.

Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* says, "He is the subject, he is the absolute- she is the other"(Beauvoir xix). Even in traditional literary history, women have been the discredited 'other' to the sovereign man- few in number, deemed limited in ability and restricted in scope. But a Dalit woman is an 'other' for the upper-caste people and also an 'other' for her own community. But when the 'other' is silenced into repression, the silenced voice lies latent for some time, only waiting for an opportunity to break free and make itself heard. While repression theory argues that when people experience trauma they are likely to place that memory in the unconscious until the anxiety is sufficiently relieved" (Schooler and Hyman, Jr 536), the resistance theory emphasises the value of the rediscovery of what has been repressed in a minority's past and resistance literature is the voice of the repressed 'other' that has finally found its space to speak out from, and assert itself. Dalit woman's autobiography, as a form of resistance literature, is the

representation of the voices of the repressed ‘other’ that not only utters the singular voice but also encompasses multiple voices of human experience representing various forms of dominance and exploitation.

Dalit women’s autobiographies do not resemble the conventional autobiographies of persons at the fag-end of their lives or those who had tasted the fame of being accomplished writers, but they come to the readers as powerful documents showing growth of intelligent and sensitive minds which register the particular realities with aplomb and accuracy. Hence the need of Dalit aesthetics instead of traditional aesthetics is felt and applied in this thesis to estimate the genre of Dalit autobiographies.

Literature is considered one of the forms of human consciousness and autobiography as a literary form is a study of the way in which one’s own experience is transformed into creative outpourings. The act of writing autobiography, for a woman is essentially an act of breaking silence from her repressive patriarchal society that has taught her to be culturally silent. Women being confined to such ‘private realm’ present their lives through their autobiographies which would provide them a way to enter into the ‘public realm’. For them writing autobiographies has become the vehicle of revelation of truth, making confessions of self rather than pouring emotions and feelings only.

Writing an autobiography is a special act for the Dalit women who use the genre to achieve and mobilise resistance against different forms of oppression. Autobiography is not a mere list of chronicles or memories for them but a narrative of self-portrait. As according to James Olney, an autobiography is a monument of the self as it is becoming a metaphor of the self at the summary moment of its

composition; it is a special space for Dalit women along with other minorities of society in the theory of metaphorising and a respectful acknowledgement of such an act by the canon. For the Dalit women, autobiography is a self-portraiture and a medium by which a writer meets with her 'self' and introduces it to the readers. The second chapter entitled *Autobiography as a Means of Self-expression: A Study of Urmila Pawar's The Weave of My Life* shows how autobiography as a literary genre becomes not only the means of expressing the identity of an individual Dalit women, but also becomes the saga of the entire Dalit consciousness.

This chapter delineates how in her autobiography Urmila Pawar, a Dalit feminist writer, recounts three generations of Dalit women who struggled to triumph over the double burden of caste and gender. In her memoir, Urmila engages not only with issues of identity and selfhood, caste and class consciousness but also exhibits changing expressions of patriarchy and Dalit women's participation in emancipatory struggles and in the Ambedkarite movement in resisting the oppressing social order. Illuminating exactly why and how caste plays a definite role in Dalit feminism and how Dalit woman acts as active agents in introducing changes with their communities, the chapter shows how this autobiography emerges as a means of self-expression of the Dalit woman to get a separate category in the canon of Indian feminisms by establishing herself in a society where she is being oppressed from time immemorial. *The Weave of My Life* is not a plain description of a life lived with smiles and tears but it is the making of Urmila Pawar as a modern individual who emerged from the Phule-Ambedkarite movement and worked ceaselessly to grant individuality to both men and women. Apart from recording a woman's discovery of selfhood and assertion of identity, it also offers a background picture of the Indian

culture, including interpersonal and inter-communal relations, clashes and tolerances. Through her autobiography, Urmila brings forth the image of a persona who hopes for the Dalit future without politics and emanates an urge in people to fight caste and prejudice on all fronts, beginning at home and continue it till humanity wins.

The journey of Dalit women from margin to mainstream is remarkably announced in Dalit literature and provides a key to the element of protest and resistance in Dalit women's autobiographies. These writers narrate the inhuman treatment meted out to them, never with a touch of self-pity, but reveal a sense of anger, anguish and protest. The third chapter titled *Protest as Keyword: An Analysis of Baby Kamble's The Prisons We Broke* examines how Dalit Women's autobiographies function as vehicles to convey the writers' vehement protest and resistance. As the resistance theory has emphasised the value of the rediscovery of what has been silenced in a minority's past and advises to re-chart the place reserved for subordination, this chapter focuses how the writer uses this narrative as 'resistance literature' to deconstruct the history and identity created by the upper caste people and also to reconstruct their positive identity. As according to Harlow, resistance literature provides a more comprehensive analysis of the social, economic and cultural dominance, and poses its challenge to the 'master narratives, of the dominant 'centre' by constructing new discourses and appropriating the ones imposed on by the colonial/ dominant 'Centre', similarly, this chapter focuses how Dalit women's autobiography being one form of resistance literature intends to threaten the societal dominance including patriarchal hegemony, caste, class and gender hierarchy that has reduced these women to objects of pity and laughter.

This chapter provides an explicit exposure of the oppressive, caste and patriarchal doctrine of Indian society and the tough lives of Mahar women as depicted by Baby Kamble. Being born and brought up as a Mahar girl, Kamble has witnessed and suffered a lot for being a Mahar. This chapter attempts to show how this text being an unwavering representation of the sordid sight of the existence of Dalit women, acquires the symbol of protest and assertion of identity, where these women struggle to smash the shackles of ubiquitous patterns of humiliation and exploitation.

As the Dalit women's autobiographies can be called the most potent tool in redefining the self and identities of Dalit women, Stuart Hall's proposition that the 'self' was not a coherent entity but was made of multiple and constantly shifting identities is significant. Sexuality, caste, class, gender, age, ethnicity, religion are among the many factors that contribute to identity. Bhabha also suggests that colonial identity cannot be seen as fixed or monolithic; it is unstable, shifting and relational. Identities are even fluid, multiple and contingent, depending on the context in which they are articulated. In Indian society, Dalits have multiple identities, which change with their context. They belong to different religious communities and linguistic groups. One could be a Hindu, Muslim or a Christian Dalit, as well as a Chamar, Mahar, or Vankar Dalit. Each of these identities is often referred to as a 'subject position', therefore each individual in a society and his/her identity is constituted by continuous articulation and negotiation between the various 'subject positions'.

But when the Dalit women writers try to reconstruct their identity, attempt to escape from the identity constructed by the society, they face a conflicting situation. It is not easy for them to differentiate the reconstruction clearly from the already

constructed identity. The fourth chapter titled *Redefining Conflicting Identities of Dalit Women: An Analysis of Bama's Karukku and Kumud Pawde's The Story of My Sanskrit* shows how Dalit women struggle to redefine her conflicting identity which has been constructed by the society to marginalise her in terms of caste, class and gender.

In *Karukku* (2000), Bama discusses the necessity and potential of the Dalit woman to forge a positive identity despite limitations and distortions imposed upon her by the pre- constructed identity. This chapter studies how Bama attempts to redefine her identity of 'Dalit' by joining the nunnery, but finds herself in a conflicting situation being tied up between 'Dalit' and 'Christian Dalit' identity. Though Bama's social identity becomes that of a Christian Dalit woman by joining the nunnery, her personal sense of identity comes not by subverting the pre-constructed identity, but from being a Dalit woman again rather than a Christian Dalit woman. Kumud Pawde's autobiographical excerpt *The Story of My Sanskrit* is about her successful attempts to learn Sanskrit. This text foregrounds on Kumud's realisation that her getting a job after a long struggle was definitely not due to her good performance in the interview or her academic qualifications, but because of her high-caste surname. How the inter-locking system of caste, class and gender matter a lot in establishing the identity of a Dalit woman is also focussed here.

Dalit women writers, through their autobiographies attempt to transform the narration of a life story into a construction of a history of a group of people; try to present a collection of testaments to record the experiences of life among the oppressed. These works endorse the necessity for being treated as testimonio or testimonial narrative, as they connect an invisible community with a larger

community. The fifth chapter entitled *Autobiography as Community Manifesto: An Analysis of Bama's Sangati* focuses how Bama, the representative of the voiceless Dalit woman, transforms a narration of a life story into the construction of the history of a people through her testimonio.

Commenting on testimonio Beverley observes: "The situation of narration in testimonio has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on, implicated in the act of narration itself" (65). And the *testimonists* speak on behalf of marginalised populace who are oppressed, bullied and tormented by the dominant group of their societies. Thus the testimonio is the voice of one who witnesses for the sake of an 'other', who remains voiceless. The speaking subaltern subject of the testimonio gives voice to the lived experiences of herself and of those who are victims of multiple marginalisation. Similarly a hardly-audibled, subjugated Dalit woman through her testimonio not only voices her own experiences, but also speaks on behalf of all her voiceless counterparts.

This chapter deals with Bama's second autobiographical novel *Sangati* (2005) which unveils how Bama, the representative of the voiceless Dalit woman, transforms a narration of a life story into the construction of the history of a people. As Bama connects an invisible community with a larger community, *Sangati* authenticates the necessity for the genre of testimonio by which she is able to facilitate dialogue with other marginalised groups. A reading of this text enables the readers to experience the ways in which genre boundaries can be violated by depleting the 'I' and by replacing it with the collectivity of the Dalit community. Through this testimony Bama is able to identify, analyse, and interpret specific

dynamics and institutions that threaten the physical survival of Dalit women and also hopes to make a constructive identity of them as Dalits and also as women.

The analysis of selected Dalit women's autobiographies in the preceding chapters portrays some of the notable features of Dalit literature. First of all, it can be said that Dalit autobiography is the representative expression of a vast number of people from Dalit community about whom the writer writes. Expression of annoyance and frustration towards the hierarchal caste system and challenge towards this oppressive tradition are the chief characteristics of these writings. The main concern of this genre is of self-assertion and protest, and the ways of a quest and construction of an identity of one's own, on the part of those who have been denied a full human dignity, and whose consciousness was made to forcibly internalise patterns of cultural depreciation and social subalternity. It can also be said that while resisting the exploitative, social, cultural, religious order created and implemented within the framework of Varna and caste systems in India, this genre is scientific in temperament and hopes for optimism.

To the Dalit writers, Dalitism is an encapsulating, multifaceted concept embodying subjugation and control which is imposed from 'above' in all spheres of living, be it social, economic, political, cultural or moral. It is understood that Dalit literature holds both external and internal forces responsible for their perpetual domination and loss of identity and Dalit women writers make autobiography their most potent tool of self-expression and assertion of their self. Here it is pertinent that there is a considerable degree of anger, anguish and restiveness in Dalit literature. This literature is not written for mere entertainment or transient pleasure, but it is an embodiment of protest and resistance. Dalit women's autobiography is a

particular genre by which the writers aim to reconstruct their own identity by deconstructing the socially constructed identity by which they were pushed to the farthest corner of the society. It is observed that Dalit literature endeavours to encompass Dalits not merely as members of one particular caste group/s but includes all socially and culturally marginalised and suppressed castes in their narrative format. And finally, Dalit literature in general and Dalit women's autobiographies in particular is not against Brahmins or the upper castes, but is extremely critical about Brahmanical ways and mindsets, their ideologies which is responsible for the existential condition of the Dalit women.

Although it is not only gender consciousness that dominates Dalit women's autobiographies, these autobiographies can uniquely be distinguished from men's autobiographies, in their concerns and perceptions from women's point of view. Different issues, concerns and anxieties raised in Dalit women's autobiographies incite thoughts in readers about the significance of Dalit men's autobiographies as well. At some stage it would become inevitable to look at men's autobiographies along with the women's, since they might provide material for a more complete Dalit perspective of their own predicament between the two worlds.

Often women writers round the world, irrespective of the differences in their problems and perspectives, share an unspoken agony. Their gender becomes more prominent than their genres and their sympathy for their own folk is often misinterpreted and branded as 'feminism' not 'humanism'. Some critics like George Henry Lewes view that a woman's literature "promises a woman's view of life, woman's experience: in other words a new element" (47). In *The Lady Novelist* (1852), Lewes differentiates the writings of men and women on the basis of their

focus: in men's writing the focus is more on intellect whereas in women's writing the focus shifts to emotion. To quote him: "Masculine mind is characterized by the predominance of intellect and the feminine by predominance of emotions....Woman, by her greater affectionateness, her greater range and depth of emotional experience, is well fitted to give expression to the emotional facts of life..."(131-32). For men, writing autobiographies is just another act of portraying their perceptions of the world outside, but for women it is much more than that: it is more the portrayal of the world within, the world hitherto hidden from the rest of the world, than the world outside. Sometimes, the focus is neither the world within, nor the world outside but the conflict between the two, between the individual and the society, between tradition and modernity, between fact and fiction. In her article, *Mennonite Women's Autobiography: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Approach* (1996), Mary Cisar explains: "Studying women's autobiography fixes our gaze on the dichotomies between inside and outside, the community and the individual, patriarchy and feminism, history and fiction" (143). This dichotomy in their existence requires them to make multiple adjustments at every phase of their life and when the extent of adjustment crosses the limits of forbearance, it leads to revolt which is often orchestrated through literary outpourings.

Every section of society has its own specific concerns and any mode of writing focuses on one aspect or the other. Autobiographies which claim to give an honest account of the lived experiences also have an agenda and are written as per a given structure. But Dalit autobiography is a document which testifies to the existence of suffering inflicted on the basis of caste, questions its rationale ruthlessly and convinces the readers about the sheet unjustness of the phenomenon called caste

system and with this, also symbolises the voice of freedom. But it can be said that sympathetic creative outpourings, analytical sociological discourses as well as journalistic polemics do not succeed in capturing the complexity of the caste system's effect on those who have historically been relegated to the margins of society on the basis of the birth based considerations of high and low. Here, Dalit autobiographies attempt to fill a vital gap in the effort to study marginalised human subjectivity as they show that the core of a human personality can be known only when its core formative ingredients are taken into account. And this accounting is possible only when one reads or listens to the factual accounts of the true experiences.

Theorising on modern women's autobiographies Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck write:

> The (masculine) tradition of autobiography beginning with Augustine had taken as its first premise the mirroring capacity of the autobiographer: *his* universality, *his* representativeness, *his* role as spokesman for the community. But only a critical ideology that reifies a unified, transcendent self can expect to see in the mirror of autobiography a self whose depths can be plumbed, whose heart can be discovered, and whose essence can be definitely known. No mirror of her era, the female autobiographer takes a given that selfhood is mediated; her invisibility results from her lack of a tradition, her marginality in male-dominated culture, her fragmentation-social and political as well as psychic....A feminist reconstruction of women's autobiography, against the backdrop of twentieth-century philosophical questioning of the self, can begin to use autobiography

> for the fertile ground it is. Autobiography localizes the very program of much feminist theory the reclaiming of the female subject-even as it foregrounds the central issue of contemporary critical thought-the problematic status of the self (1-2).

Dalit writers used to write their autobiographies with the dual but integrated purpose of expressing and assessing their identity as Dalits who grow and suffer so much. Making the painful growth the base of their ideas, they produce literature which seeks its themes not in the abstraction of universal values but in the lived torment of actual human life, the life which is defined not on the abstractions of sentimentality but on the hard and inclement rocks of unjust socio-cultural and politico-economic relationships between man and man. The blend of pathos and protest with the combination of the rebellion against social injustice with a dream of a life of dignity for the oppressed can be found in these autobiographies.

An autobiography with its claim of genuine remembrance and retelling can also have a counter-claim of genuine forgetting and omission which is evident from the treatment of women in male autobiographies. It was not in the writings of Dalit men and women but in the writings of the upper caste people it is perceived that the upper caste women had been valorised, the middle class women marginalised and the Dalit women victimised. Dalit women not only questioned their own victimisation but also spoke for the upper and middle class women who met the same fate at home. They are the subalterns who are championing the cause of women as a whole. The call is not merely to break stereotypes and demand self-respect but also to highlight the differences accorded to the problems of men and women and the lopsided progress of the Dalit movement itself; a movement which is precariously balanced on the sandstone of double-standards. Dalit women's attempt

to write their own stories in reconstructing their identity by discarding their socially constructed identity is echoed in Paul Morris's observation as he writes: "Writing by women can tell the story of the aspects of women's lives that have been erased, ignored, demeaned, mystified and even idealized in the majority of traditional texts" (60).

Generally the life stories of Dalit women crafted by Dalit male writers, in spite of their commitment and sincerity, have been set aside by the Dalit feminist critics as unrealistic and doubly distanced from the truth on the ground that since they do not live the life of women, they cannot recreate a woman's life in their writings. As Ruth Manorama asserts in her article 'Dalit Women: Downtrodden among the Downtrodden' that "the majority of the Dalit poets have tended to see women as victims rather than victors" (qtd in Massey, *Indigenous People* 165), it is true of most of the Dalit writers who may glorify them as mothers and sisters but still neglect their distinct identity as women. On the other hand, when women write their own stories, it is treated as women's writings, not as a document of human creation and is given a lower status in the literary canons.

Sharmila Rege, a Dalit feminist, argues that Dalit men representing Dalit women put forward their own views on behalf of Dalit women. Similarly, when upper caste women talked about oppression they considered Dalit women to be similar to themselves and talked about a generalised victimisation of womanhood. As argued by Rege in her book, *Writing Caste Writing Gender* (2006), according to these women a caste identity can be transcended by the larger identity of sisterhood among all women. But this kind of theorisation of experiences is problematic because the actual experiences of different sections of women in society are very

different and a Dalit woman's situation is totally different as she is doubly cursed as a woman and as a Dalit.

In the 1980s and 1990s a new wave within feminism emerges which necessitates a rejection of universalisation of experiences of women belonging to different castes and classes, leading to an emphasis on the independent identity of Dalit woman. Gopal Guru in his article 'Dalit Women Talk differently'(1998) argues that in order to understand Dalit women's need to talk differently it was necessary to delineate both the internal and the external factors that had a bearing on her constitution. While defining the necessity for Dalit feminism, Guru admits that the issue of representation of Dalit women gets complicated due to what he cites as external factors that is, non-Dalit forces homogenising the issue of Dalit women and internal factors that is, the patriarchal domination within the Dalits. There was a strong feeling among Dalit women that upper caste educated activists could not represent their grievances in their entirety as they were not the ones who actually went through the trauma of being a woman and moreover a Dalit woman. There was a gulf between upper caste women and Dalit women which was not easy to cross. Gopal Guru, while distinguishing the discourse of Dalit women from the upper class feminism, asserts that social location determines the perception of reality, making the representation of Dalit women's issues by non-Dalit women less valid and less authentic. He utters,

> Beneath the call for women's solidarity the identity of the Dalit woman as 'dalit' gets whitewashed and allows a 'non-dalit' woman to speak on her behalf. It is against this background that Dalit women have of late protested against their 'guest experiences' in a text or a

> speech of a non-dalit woman and instead organised on their own terms (qtd in Rao 82-83).

Dalit feminists believe that there is neither any common material base nor a common philosophy to combine Dalit women's movement with other women's movement as the emancipation of Dalit women always entails a dual-struggle of being a Dalit and a woman which is quite different from the predicament of other women.

The practice of writing autobiographies actually has always been the privilege of the intellectuals, the powerful, the rich or in other words the dominant class. Since they are mostly written by learned men, they are structured, well knit and written in a standard tongue. However, it is only in the end of the 1970's there emerged a notion of female self-hood which could be triumphantly liberated from its neglect or repression under patriarchy and made visible through writing. Gradually Dalit women's autobiography comes into being as a strategic necessity of that particular time by challenging the existing male selfhood. Dalit women's testimonies become a kind of consciousness raising writings which would enable readers realise the joys, nostalgia, suffering, pains of Dalit women as a collective and communal identity as women. They could also make readers realise a sense of pride and satisfaction derived by many of them in being able to realise their artistic persona and being able to contribute to the collective oeuvre of Dalit literature. However, it is to be understood that, Dalit women's testimonies by Shantabai Kamble, Baby Kamble, Kumud Pawde, Urmila Pawar or Bama, in no way project the sense of a unique self at the cost of the community.

Significantly, there are remarkable differences in the autobiographies written by Dalit men and women. Usually the world of male Dalit writers is inhabited by caste prejudices which cripple the inherent potential of Dalits and fracture their dignity as human beings. Most of the world of these writers is a territory torn apart by caste and afflictions of caste and in their provinces the females enter only as a prop to the hero who struggles hard to achieve a formidable place in a largely inimical society. But women in this battlefield of life enter mostly in the garbs of mothers. Dalit male writers feel deeply grateful to her who is, as a rule, hardworking and bears many tribulations of fate for them and as a reward they sing paeans for her sacrifice and unexpressed love. By exclusively focussing her identity as a Dalit woman, Dalit men's portrayal forsakes her identity as a woman and tries to see her in certain stereotypical images which are a reflection of patriarchal framework in upper castes. Her projection of being Dalit is exploited as a strategic asset and she becomes a victim of an ideology which tries to keep her where she is, by idealising and seeing her only in the form of 'mother' image. It results in her broken images in the works of male Dalit writers who fail to present her as a convincing 'woman being' with her own life and distinct impulses against what is seen as correct image by the patriarchal structures. Nowhere there is a mention of her diverse identities, of her different capabilities, her inner and outer conflicts. In some autobiographies even when there are ample scope, a limited and conventional picture has been given to the women characters. In doing so, they accord justice not to women, but only to themselves.

But the domestic violence, inequality in matters of care and food never attract the vision of Dalit male writers, though it is quite evident from Dalit women's autobiographies that these were major issues among the women. The

complete dismissal of domestic violence in the men's narratives shows their apathy and the complete denial of violence at home. Since men benefit from the patriarchal system it is supposedly difficult for them to initiate change in some of the oppressive situations in Dalit women's lives. Dalit men like men of all classes and castes thus espouse the beating of wives and the general physical, mental and emotional trauma which the womenfolk have to bear within a household. But in the narratives of Dalit women the day-to-day private life is depicted more realistically revealing the dark side of a patriarchal structure. Dalit women's autobiographies like Bama's *Sangati, Karukku,* Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke,* Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life,* Sumitra Bhave's *Pan on Fire,* while narrating how they fought with the circumstances, also have given an inspiring message to the society. In all these autobiographies, the women emerge riding conflicts on different planes. The readers get from these narratives a woman's perspective on diverse things-what makes her world, her take on societal evils and her anguish, hopes and fear, her remembrance of the past, her experience of the present and her concern for the future.

Dalit male writers frequently idealise Dalit women in the archetypical roles of mothers and sisters and attempt to forcibly create structures which show invasion of romanticism in their outlook leading to systematic erasure of the reality of Dalit women who have to carry the double burden of caste as well as patriarchy. As far as autobiographies are concerned, for Dalit men, these writings are necessarily weapons of protest-often on behalf of the community, but instances of projection of the self-the ego-surfaces in spite of their sincere efforts of wrapping their weakness. The conclusion from Hazari's *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste* speaks;

> The sea was rough, the boat was small, and I had never sailed before. Already I felt that I was part of a new world, encircled by the mighty ocean, which knew no creed or caste, and as I gazed toward the wide horizon, I prayed that one day I might find the peace of soul I had never known but always sought (qtd in Kumar160).

Hazari here leaves the land, the community people and finds better fortunes for his self and concludes with his abstract wish for peace in a foreign land. In contrast, this is what Bama writes in the forward of *Karukku.* "After seven years of living in the convent, on 8 November 1992, I left behind my life of renunciation and came out into the world. After that, I wrote my book, *Karakku*. That book was written as a means of healing my inward wounds; I had no other motive" (IX). Bama, refuses to be an escapist, doesn't borrow abstractions and has a very practical and humble objective of serving her own people.

Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003) is considered one of the noteworthy works in Dalit literature. Together with the real representation of Dalit sensibility where caste is seen as collegiums of multiple socio-religious prejudices against the untouchables, the autobiography gives some interspersed pictures of Dalit women facing the vicissitudes of life bravely. The focus of the book is primarily on the experience of living as a Dalit and caste is seen as the crucial factor. If a husband is seen as aggravating the suffering of his wife, it is only individually and not collectively as species or a group. Nowhere does the women portrayed in it show group awareness as females and held males responsible for their woes. Although, the portrayal of women, particularly Shantamai and Masamai, shows signs of compassion, the women question are largely missing from the text.

Shantamai, the protector and guardian of Sharan, is a symbol of his past which he wants to shed off, without realising that this shedding off may also deprive him of his identity, his Dalitism along with their shared existence. It also brings to the fore the peculiar position of Dalit women who sacrifice everything for their sons and are later abandoned by them who now acquire sophistication and start looking down upon them. The writer largely models his women characters on the traditional role of mother as earth- the main reason lies in his engrossment with caste as a decisive disabling factor in our society.

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2003) gives a more complex picture of subjectivity where the protagonist and the Dalit community are inextricably linked in a complex web of meaning. In this text, the protagonist Valmiki is an individual, and yet his individuality is often stifled by those who see him only as a faceless member of his community- to them he is nothing more than a 'Dalit', 'Chuhra', 'Bhangi'. Here the protagonist continually faces a clash between the negative identity imposed on him from the outside and his own positive self-ascribed identity. He faces personal discrimination and is deeply sensitive to the pain of other oppressed Dalits, with whom he identifies to such a great extent that he seems to experience their pain himself. This autobiography exclusively deals with the process of the growing up of Valmiki and the consequent trials and tribulations he faces. There are a few female characters and concerns in the text whom the author deals in an oblique manner. In the very beginning, while describing the dirt and insanitation of the chura basti of his village, the narrator refers to the pond which acted as a boundary between the prosperous Tyagi basti and impoverished chura settlement. This pond which was used for numerous purposes was also a public shit ground

where “the purdha- observing Tyagi women, their face covered with their saris, shawls around their shoulders, found relief in this open-air latrine. They sat on Dabbaowali’s shores without worrying about decency, exposing their private parts” (Joothan 1). The unmistakeable irony in the comment brings out the dual standards of the males of upper caste society who while seeking to confine woman in cover all the time, do not care for them at their most private moments. The false morality of the upper castes towards their women is fully revealed here which, while pretending to be more cultured and refined, do not provide their women a decency of existence.

Besides, though the protagonist associates himself with other Dalit friends and the Dalit community as a whole, the ‘we’ that has come to mean ‘all Dalits’ is decidedly male. The silence regarding Valmiki’s wife’s own agency is one obvious example; Chanda only appears for brief moments in the narrative, once when she asks ‘you’re not joking, are you?’ in response to Valmiki’s marriage proposal, again when she receives a theatrical award, and once more when the narrator describes her refusal to use the name ‘Valmiki’ herself. No insights into this character’s own reasoning, nor the different circumstances and restraints faced by Dalit women in general, are given in the narrative.

Gender specific abuses collated with caste specific ones in the novel, relegate women to the margins. The Headmaster Kaliram makes Omprakash sweep the entire school and playground instead of allowing him to study in the class. After two days of manual hard work when Omprakash slips into class to study, Kaliram abuses him using gender specific invectives: “ Abey Chuhra Ke, mother fucker, where are you hiding’... your mother...”(5). The use of gender specific invectives alluding to female sex reinforces the impression that sex in a patriarchal society becomes a tool

for subjugation and violence. The terminology connecting sex with brutality and degradation objectifies women and when connected with caste, it further downgrades women to the level of beasts. *Joothan* focuses primarily on how caste becomes a stumbling block in a Dalit male's attempt to lead a dignified life. In his preoccupation with his own war against caste, the writer does not get time or energy to explore more fully female characters in the novel.

In *The Outcaste*, the narrator frequently loathes his birth which put him under the curse of being an outcaste. The target of his tirades against the accident of his birth becomes his mother Masamai, while his grandmother Shantamai remains a shadow character with her helplessness, her simplicity and her love for the narrator. While Limbale largely succeeds in bringing to the fore the pity and terror of being a Dalit in his autobiography, the women, though given a large space in the narrative, are not adequately presented. They are seen as complement to the larger Dalit society and not as separate beings with their own concerns which might be sometimes at odds or variance with males. The patriarchal structures in Dalit society which adds to their woes never become visible in the narratives. These structures are thus conspicuous by their absence and distinguish a female Dalit writer's work from these of males. Even *Joothan* gives a very sketchy view of women alongside the narrator's conflict with caste ridden society. The alternate aesthetics of Dalit reality, while accentuating the 'caste' factor, suppresses the 'female' factor and the result is that women are seen only through a narrow prism, with their sensibilities and sensitivities remaining unexplored.

The autobiographies of Hazari, Omprakash Valmiki and Sharankumar Limbale speak powerfully of the daily horrors of untouchable existence, and also of

the effect of the caste system on the selfhoods of the untouchables. The experiences recorded therein argue forcibly that it is the actual day-to-day living of the Dalits which play the decisive role in shaping their subjectivity but the shaping of Dalit women's identity was scarcely referred in their autobiographies. In all these writings, female characters only occupy subsidiary positions.

In the works of non-Dalit male writers also, Dalit women fall prey to twin ideological structures-one which sees them as natural, spontaneous and primordial, while the other partakes them as indivisible part of oppressed human society. The females never become a talking voice and are always passive, accepting and a field for brahminical licentiousness. For example in Premchand's *Godan* (2002) or Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1988), the elisions and paucity of space given to them indicates their neglect in the so-called mainstream writings. The stereotypes occurring in these writings further diminish them in idealised terms or just completely erasing their existence, thus paying no attention to their own painful drama in the theatre of human existence.

While non-Dalit men as well as Dalit men hardly talked about Dalit patriarchy in their autobiographies, Dalit women never hesitate to write about the nature of exploitation they generally face both within their communities and outside. The autobiographies of Bama, Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Viramma and several others are examples of how Dalit women have to defy several traditions to assert their individual identities. The subjects Dalit men commonly deal with in their narratives are different forms of caste and class exploitation and the various kinds of deprivations they have to face because they happen to come from the so-called lower caste communities. Their protests in their narratives are loud and clear. They

also have advocated the restoration of dignity and self-respect of Dalits who have been denied such basic human rights for so long.

While Dalit men are victims of casteism, Dalit women are doubly oppressed as Dalits and as women. They are penalised and brutalised not only by upper caste men but also by men from their own community. The subordinate status of Dalit women and their complete marginalisation is clearly reflected in the writings of Dalit men but women's contributions in the running of the family and their efforts at earning a livelihood are completely absent there. This selective amnesia by Dalit males shows that men are not ready to acknowledge Dalit women's contribution to the family, the community and the Dalit movement at large. These men refuse to accord their women equality even in literary representation. The silencing and stereotyping of the women has hence led to an alternative voice from the women themselves.

The works of Dalit women writers present a different world of varying shades and concerns than their male counterparts. Dalit women's autobiographies not only challenge their absence in Dalit men's narratives but also voice the concerns shared by women across all strata. They explore vexed questions of their position in the society, their apprehensions and disquietudes in a forceful way. Domestic violence, sex as instrument of subjugation, menstruation, family relations, sustenance of children, their education and their inter-personal relations are explored more on the level of individual and 'the person' takes precedence over the caste specific dominations. In the autobiographies of Dalit women writers, they emphasise on continuity and flow of life and not on its investigation into tiny bits to emphasise a preconceived notion about society or life. They attempt to create alternative

accounts which openly criticise the patriarchal structure in their society and reflect on women's problems with specific issues in a Dalit society and thus the hardships faced by these women under the patriarchal order are articulated.

It would not be irrelevant to mention here that while the research work is dealt with several autobiographies, some of them have been analysed at length and in detail, and others have not. This does not at all mean that some are given prominence and others not or that some are more important than others. On account of the specific features of the genre of autobiography, some texts have been taken as primary concern and some others which are termed as narrated autobiographies have been taken as secondary sources. The following narratives are taken as passive sources for further understanding of the predicament of Dalit women writers.

Pan on Fire (1994) by Sumitra Bhave convincingly depicts Dalit female experience from the point of view of Dalit women who are mostly illiterate and have lived a life full of vicissitudes. This text foregrounds an essential Dalit female experience without being overshadowed by cerebral engagement of a Dalit writer with issues which the narrator had not experienced herself due to difference in her educational and social position viz-a-viz. the more downtrodden masses. In this book, eight different Dalit female speakers put forth the staple Dalit experiences like beginning of menstruation, relationship between siblings, their sexual experiences, domestic violence faced by them, overburdening of work, their desire to have financially secured jobs etc. These immediate concerns overshadow the caste questions which have a predominant position in the writings of most of Dalit male biographers and novelists. Unlike the Dalit male autobiographers who consider these experiences as utterly private and any explicit description invites strong condemnation from all quarters, there is surprising frankness and honesty in its

narration by these Dalit women. Almost all Dalit females of this book decry the violence inherent in sexual relationships.

While *Pan on Fire* (1994) enunciated the sensitivities and priorities of eight Dalit women in their own voice, *Viramma- Life of an Untouchable* (1997) brings to life the lost world of Dalit way of life as seen from the eyes of a Dalit woman belonging to an elder generation. The testimonio portrays the world view of Viramma, a Pariah woman, as revealed in her conversations with Josiane Racine during the period of 1980s. Admittedly lacking in any revolutionary message as well as devoid of lurid pictures of deprivation which have normally come to mark Dalit male autobiographies, the book is an invaluable document of Dalit culture as seen and hankered for by traditional generation and it also gives adequate representation to female sensibility and female experiences. Further the book through the voice of a Dalit female seeks to express those aspects of female experience which are either thought to be too insignificant or too private by the conservative males belonging to both upper castes and Dalits.

This book is different from other autobiographies written by Dalit male writers not only in its emphasis on female experiences but also in the spirit of life which flows through it. The festivities, the songs overshadow the stringency of life which is too stark in Dalit male writings. The caste question remains unresolved to some extent in this text and the emphasis lies more on revealing the traditions and traditional world order. Though there is a distinct presence of rebelliousness in the voice of young generation which acts as antitheses to the voice of Viramma, yet on the whole, the book deals with a Dalit woman's or rather an older Dalit woman's version of things.

Vanman (2008), the latest narrative by Bama is primarily concerned with the inter caste rivalry between two Dalit groups- Christian Parayars and Hindu Pallars. Although the chief motif of this text is to present victimisation of the Parayars in a society dominated by caste hostility and the writer presents Parayar and Pallar castes as one block without gender differentiations, there are marked instances when the gender issues come to the fore. Despite the outward ignorance of the Dalit women, they possess an earthly wisdom and are seen as hardy and capable of enduring great hardships. These women like outdoor life and despite the prevalence of superstitions among them, they greatly desire and value education.

Thus Dalit women's presentation of the pathos of being born a woman in a patriarchal society is amply illustrated in the autobiographies they have written. Though sometimes caste issues tend to eclipse the protagonists' identity as women, the narrators' position as women inadvertently gives even such narrations a feminist angle. These issues are an integral part of their existence as women as Dalit. While in the autobiographies written by Dalit male writers, the broken images of female characters bears the testimony to the neglect of gender question and these females are viewed in certain stereotypical images, the twin repressive structures of caste and gender have been adequately represented by Dalit female writers in their autobiographies.

As the miserable condition of Dalit women is magnified by multiple socio-cultural constructs like caste, class and religion, and results in their multiple fissured colonised identities, Dalit women writers, instead of imitating their upper caste counterparts, have always tried to create their own identities and establish a tradition of their own. Their writings are distinctly separate from the writings of their male

counterparts as they are non-conservative and aggressive in expressing their innermost feelings and intimate experiences. To cast off the exaggerated, negative and stereotypical images, these women take the onus of scripting their own stories to create their own self images.

From the above analysis it is evident that for Dalit women writers, the process of writing autobiographies has been a purgative experience as it pre-empts them to think critically about their lives, free themselves from the stereotypical and derogatory images inflicted on them historically and project their perspectives in the right manner. Generally, writing an autobiography is one of the difficult arts of self-portraiture in which there is a need to unify the authors' public or social image with his or her private image in order to present an all-inclusive, true picture and autobiography for women is a stupendous task as they are also supposed to maintain the delicate balance between the cultural mores of feminine mystique and the authenticity of the lived experience. The Dalit women have, however, assumed this difficult task with impunity not only to draw the attention of the society to their tormented existence, but also to undertake the task of self-evaluation.

The Dalit women's autobiographies communicate to the world what the male world had done to them and when these women take to self-expression, they reveal themselves in the most unique way. Generally literature written by the Dalits is the product of struggle and out of this struggle sprung up the genre of Dalit women's autobiography in which Dalit women brought forth their agony - the agony of being doubly oppressed, as a Dalit and female. The Dalit woman as reflected in their autobiographies is the hard-working, solitary, oppressed being who struggles hard to survive in the high-caste society as well as in her poverty-ridden, filthy, superstitious

social environs. Discarding the stereotypical images enforced on them by the elite as well as Dalit society, Dalit women's autobiographies depict the struggles of Dalit women, recall their past and aim to construct a better future. The household, food, hunger, community, castes, culture, labour practices, humiliation, violence, resistance, collective struggles are widely established in these autobiographies. These autobiographies convince the readers of the fact that the Dalit subjectivity has its own particularity which cannot be clubbed simplistically with the generality of the psychic entity called Indian identity; rather it is the product of the long historical process entailed by the peculiarly Indian caste system.

While the Dalit woman's autobiography reveals her 'self', it also gives a vivid portrayal of the evils of untouchability, insult and humiliation born of that as well as the agony of hunger, poverty, illiteracy and superstitions. The situation of these Dalit women vibrates the assertion made by Betty Friedan as she says, "What had to be changed was the obsolete feminine and masculine sex roles that dehumanised sex, making it almost impossible for women and men to make love. How could we ever really know each other as long as we played roles that kept us from knowing or being ourselves?" (386). Sidonie Smith's work on women's autobiographies can also be recalled here as it noted the necessity for the author of a marginalised group to renegotiate narrative authority of autobiography, which has been originally defined and continually policed according to the interests of the dominant community. Similarly, Dalit women writers have attempted to negotiate this challenge of securing narrative authority by emphasising the 'experience of discrimination' and 'Dalit identity' as two necessary criteria for both writing and critiquing Dalit autobiography. Different facets of Indian society, different phases of

Ambedkrite Dalit movement, participation of Dalit women in the movement, their struggle for survival, the man-woman relationship, humiliations, atrocities and degradation of Dalit women form the core part of Dalit women's autobiographies. Dalit women writers like Shantabai Kamble, Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Kumud Pawade, Mukta Sarvagod, Shantabai Dani and Bama have enriched Dalit women's writings through their autobiographical narratives which give a close view of female experiences. They are, therefore, the statements about real patriarchal society and struggle of these writers for female autonomy.

From the above analysis, it is pertinent that Dalits have been the subject of literature as subhuman and have always been stereotyped in the minds of Indians, whose characteristics were mainly negative and distorted. But contemporary Dalit literature has become a force, which has shaken the foundations of caste-ridden society and literature and has definitely contributed to a change in the attitude of society affecting some degree of change in attitudes in literature also, although it may not as yet able to make a radical reversal of the previous situation. Nonetheless, Dalit literature poses some problems because, they were basically written in regional languages and hence it was difficult to understand them because of the language barrier, which is also significantly imprisoning this literature. Since the literacy rate is low among Dalit people, it is not easy for them to write in mainstream regional languages and it is all the more difficult for them to publish also as most of this literature is radical in substance and rarely entertains attitudes of reconciliation. Moreover, unfamiliarity with English forces the Dalit writers to remain invisible to a large number of readers outside the regions they inhabit.

It cannot be denied that Dalit literature is sometimes resented and denounced for being propagandistic, unaesthetic, monotonous and aggressive and among all the genres of Dalit literature, Dalit autobiographies have often been compared to digging out stench from hateful bins of the past. But Arun Prabha Mukherjee, a translator of such narratives defends that the life narratives are not 'sob stories' but stories of anger against injustice (Rege 10). Gopal Guru also points out that life narratives are "sociologically illuminating, politically subversive and aesthetically interesting"(10). These narratives not only traces individual journey but collective journeys, but also indicate a movement from Dalit individual to Dalit community. They can be treated as signifiers of historically and culturally specific understanding of memory, experience and identity, through which the Dalit writers keep their history alive and attempt to resist against this harsh reality in which they are beset. For Dalit women also, autobiography is not merely a kind of literary exercise rather a form of assertion and resistance in its own right. Discerning accurately the psychology of Indian social system, Dalit women writers are showing not just indifference to the ideal values which have proved to be worn out and worthless from a cultural point of view, but instead of muffling the misery of neglected women, they are giving courage and power to resist and overcome it. They lodge not just their personal complaint but of all the women of Dalit community. Breaking the existing framework, they bring out the psyche of the society as well as an awareness of a different sorrow.

Challenges of modern times, casteism, and stunted growth of women resulting from male- oriented politics, and the mentality of Dalit male writers to form their own narrow clan and institution of disciplines- all these have been burrowing Dalit lives. As long as writers remain unorganised, fragmented and keep

in moving in the realm of questions based on a narrow view of Dalit woman's life, Dalit literature will continue to be self-centred and self-destructive and if the woman shaped in Dalit literature remains neglected, it will create a hurdle in the rich growth of Dalit literature and this literature will be considered as one-sided. For broadening it, societal narrowness, reflective thinking as well as profuse enhancement of Dalit concerns are indispensable and it is a ray of hope that Dalit literature is getting worldwide publicity in India and abroad, translations are undertaken and University level recognition is accorded.

Though Indian literary history and theory, as well as the teaching of Indian literatures has traditionally been silent about Dalit literature for a long time, yet in recent times Dalit cultural and critical productions are making a significant critical intervention in the thinking and writing about Indian history, society, culture and literature. Though it has not yet been acknowledged as a literature in its own right, and there is scanty reference found in the standard literary journals of India, but its reverberations are now being heard all around the globe. Having effected a reversal of centrality and marginality, they are now in a position to be privileged enough to view their literature having a prestigious position in the gamut of Indian literature. A ray of hope is that, with a bulk of translated and published works, Dalit literature is about to reach the stage of self-authentication. Over the last three decades, it has grown sustainably stronger and is wielding over readers and critics alike and in its journey from marginal literature to mainstream literature, Dalit literature is becoming the 'celebration of difference'.

It is heartening to mention that the insights that one can get from Dalit women's autobiographies would now be able to a larger body of scholars as these are translated into so many languages. English translation of these narratives would

certainly help scholars and critics to draw on the valuable resources for reconceptualising some of the insights that are embedded in these texts. As translation helps in bridging the gap between two minds existing in two different spaces and times, it makes the Dalit experience available to a larger public through its reproduction in connecting it to a language like English. Translation not only plays an important role in terms of creating a moral impact upon the unruly self usually from the upper caste, but also opens an ethical moral corridor within the hardened self.

According to Spivak, the translator must be famous with the "history of the language, the history of the author's moment, the history of the language in translation" (*The Politics of Translation* 186). She also asks that the translator have graduated into speaking of "intimate matters in the language in the original" (187). Translation is, thus, a key component of Spivak's theory as it lends her project the specificity lacking in many western discussions of post-colonial texts. In her essay, *The Politics of Translation* (1993), Spivak was particularly damning the western feminist translation and feminist analysis of writing by "Third World" women. As according to western feminists, all writing by third world writers sounds the same, Spivak argues that it is not enough to have a progressive political commitment and attention must be paid to the forms, the language and the specific contexts of texts.

Spivak suggests that the task of the translator is not to re-describe and then re-inscribe power relations but instead to measure cultural differences in specific cultural historical situations. In terms of theory, Spivak accomplishes a double-writing in her translation, critiquing western metaphysical, humanist thinking and at the same time creating openings to imagine real cultural differences at work.

Translators like Maya Pandit and Lakshmi Holmstorm while translating the Dalit women's autobiographies do not concentrate only on the literal translation of the texts, rather retain some regional terms to make the original flavour intact. They deliberately retain these terms as a strategy of making the text a little 'foreign' so that the reader can feel its distinct difference. As Dalit women's lives are different, translator like Maya Pandit feels the need of the texts to be understood on that level of difference so that bridges of understanding can be formed.

Sometimes the translators are also able to fill the gaps that the writers left in their own writings. As English language has become a global language, the translation of Dalit literature from regional language to English may definitely give a great boast to this innovative literature because through these translated versions, the authors also may find a larger reading public in the other countries. According to Dr. Jay Prakash Kardem, a prolific Hindi Dalit writer, "..if Dalit literature is translated into English, it can convey its message to a larger mass, not only in India but at the international level also" (Choubey 23). Tharu and Lalita also observe that translating a regional language into English is an act of representing a regional culture to a more powerful national and even more powerful international reader (Rege 76).

Therefore, it can be concluded that Dalit women's autobiographical writings form a significant locus for both a historical study and a responsible social study. Through this genre the Dalit women are attempting to accomplish their journey from repression to resistance, from silence to expression, registering several layers of oppression conferred on them in Indian society. These women, through their autobiographies attempt to subvert their pre-constructed identity which is imposed

on them by the society to marginalise them in multiple terms. Being emerged from the conflicts as well as creative dialectics between self and society, these autobiographies of Dalit women are also establishing themselves as a distinct genre and comparisons of this body of writing with Dalit male writing are bound to throw some significant light not only on the subjects of caste, class and gender prejudices within Indian society and but also in measuring its position in the gamut of Indian literature. Yet, it has to cross a long voyage. It has to be written, published, translated, read and critiqued more and more to break the century-old age of silence and to have the desired effect of abolishing the triple load of caste, class and gender discrimination from Indian society.