

## **A CRITICAL STUDY OF DALIT SELECTED AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

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### **Abstract**

The present research entitled “A Critical Study of Dalit Autobiography” explores selected Dalit autobiographies: The Prisons We Broke, Ooru Keri, Karukku, and The Scar. This study deals with treatment of Dalit social problems. The selected autobiographies Dalit oppressed people are the eye-witness accounts of the horrors of their lives. This study underlines inhuman treatment done on Dalits by upper caste people under the veneer of ritual purity and pollution. The four autobiographies declare in one voice that untouchability is not an evil of a bygone era but it is present in all domains of life despite constitutional remedies and democratic redressal measures. This paper touches on Harlem Renaissance and Black Panther Movement. It focuses Dalit point of view. The paper exhibits Dalit social realism and expresses different views of critics about Dalit writings. Further, the paper examines Dalit’s Socio-economic condition.

**Key Words:** Marginalization, Social Realism, Exploitation, Socio Political Condition, Socio-Economic Condition, Subjugation, Dalit Point of View

### **INTRODUCTION**

The present study has been entitled “A Critical Study of Dalit Selected Autobiography”. The objection of research is to investigate social, cultural and economic condition of Dalits and role of education in their development. This study makes an analyses of societal norms of caste, gender and social inequalities with references to the selected autobiographies in which Dalit writers have made use of their personal experience to expose the domination and subjugation of Dalits and analyze the concept of Dalit identity. In sum, this study examines the question of Dalit identity in different social and cultural locations in the selected autobiographies. The research also studies constitutional safeguards and government policies enacted for the empowerment and protection of Dalits and their consequences in the pictured selected Dalit autobiographies. This study further associate with Dalit organizations and movements, Dalit writers have come out with new language and basic themes of caste, class, and gender inequalities.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The view of different critics, writers and authorities on the development Dalit autobiography have been analysed in the study and a scrutiny of the view reveal that any of the authorities have gone into an examinations of Dalit literary themes, Dalit sensibility, and the influences which made them to write autobiographical novels. Many of the Dalit writers and critics have neglected a study of Dalit methods of writing novels and their employment of narrative technique. So, the present study fills the research gap. This study provides review of literature

related to the major critical works done on Dalit autobiographies. It also establishes how the research deviates from other critics in the appraisal of critical texts written on Dalit autobiographies. Keeping in mind the paucity of critical studies and evaluation, an attempt is made in this dissertation to study exhaustively the Indian Dalit men and women and their social conditions and problems portrayed by Dalit writers.

Raj Kumar in *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity* exhibits the issues involved in studying autobiography in both theory and practice by comparing western autobiographical tradition with recent real life writings of India. The researcher analyzes the western, upper caste men and women, Dalit men and women autobiographies and makes it clear that autobiographies and make it clear that autobiography, a literary genre, is diverse and complex.

Sharankumar Limbale's work *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* is a seminal book on critical theory of Dalit literature. The researcher explores the various concepts regarding Dalit literature, its form and purpose and ideas of Ambedkar. He also exhibits the contribution of Dalit literature to the Indian literature and Marathi literature that was not given proper space in mainstream literature. He formed up new principles to judge the literature of marginal section of India with its separate aesthetics including social injustice, search of liberation from every type of exploitation and centres to humanism.

The Dalit critic Raj Kumar has written a text titled *Dalit Literature and Criticism*, which provides concise and lucid introductions to a range of key concepts in contemporary literature and cultural theory. Each book in the series presents students of humanities and social science exhaustive overviews of theories and theorists, while also introducing them to the mechanics of reading literary cultural texts using critical tools. This book is an attempt to write and develop a critical literary history and theory of Dalit literature. The book grapples with several questions and issues that are key to understanding Dalit voices in literature. The book defines the word Dalit, and it explains the Dalit history and context of Dalit self-expression. It also describes philosophy of Dalit literature and Dalit aesthetics. The book guides the readers how to read, interpret and teach Dalit literature. It provides a concise critical survey of the five decades of Dalit literature and criticism, the book deals with Dalit life, cultural and history. The volume asserts that Dalit writers are writing a revolution, for a new, egalitarian democracy which will be castles and classless.

The Dalit critic Ghanshyam Kumar has written a book titled *Dalit Discourse in Indian English Narrative* is not confined only to the life-condition and struggle of the people on the lowest rung of the social hierarchy but vividly and candidly portrays the whole sociopolitical, religio-economic and cultural perspectives. The reality of Dalit mobility from Bakha to Limbale to Valmiki to Velutha has not been stable ever but is being experienced in the mode of ever growing anger and protest against the establishment. This book is a sincere attempt to bring the Dalit issues from the periphery to the centre, laying stress on the emerging essentiality of the concepts of Dalit aesthetics.

Uma Chakravarti has a feminist historian written a book titled *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens* (2003) led to this revised edition which analyses the recent socio-economic and political changes that have taken place. Caste-based marriage and control over women's sexuality have been crucial for the continuation of the caste system in India. Thus, caste and gender are linked. Brutal reprisals have followed when Dalits and women have tried to challenge caste-based marriage and inequality which allots strict rules of conduct for women and all Dalits. The book also includes a new afterword: caste and gender in the new millennium, which provides an updated discussion on the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 (known in short as Prevention of Atrocities Act: POA). Erudite, yet accessible, this book enables the reader to understand the ramifications of caste today.

The editors Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak have composed a book named *Dalit Literatures in India*. This book breaks new ground in the study of Dalit literature, including in its corpus a range of genres such as novels, autobiographies, pamphlets, poetry, short stories as well as graphic novels. With contributions from major scholars on the field and budding ones, the book critically examines Dalit literary production and theory. It also initiates a dialogue between Dalit writing and western literary theory. The second edition includes a new introduction which takes stock of developments since 2015. It discusses how Dalit writing has come to play a major role in asserting marginal identities in contemporary Indian politics while moving towards establishing a more radical voice of dissent and protest. Lucid, accessible yet rigorous in its analysis, this book will be indispensable for scholars and researchers of Dalit studies, social exclusion studies, Indian writing, literature and literary theory, politics, sociology, social anthropology and cultural studies.

The editors Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore have edited a book entitled *Dalit Feminist Theory a Reader*. This book radically redefines feminism by introducing the category of Dalit into the core of feminist thought. It supplements feminism by adding caste to its study and praxis; it also re-examines and rethinks Indian feminism by replacing it with a new paradigm, namely, that caste-based feminist inquiry offers the only theoretical vantage point for comprehensively addressing gender-based injustices. Drawing on a variety of disciplines, the chapters in the volume discuss key themes such as Indian feminism versus Dalit feminism; the emerging concept of Dalit patriarchy; the predecessors of Dalit feminism, such as Phule and Ambedkar; the meaning and value of lived experience; the concept of difference; the analogical relationship between Black Feminism and Dalit Feminism; the intersectionality debate; and the theory-versus experience debate. They also provide a conceptual, historical, empirical and philosophical understanding of feminism in India today. Accessible, essential and ingenious in its approach, this book is for students, teachers and specialist scholars, as well as activists and the interested general reader. It will be indispensable for those engaged in gender studies, women's studies, sociology of caste, political science and political theory, philosophy and feminism, Ambedkar studies, and for anyone working in the areas of caste, class or gender-based discrimination, exclusion and inequality.

The book titled *English in the Dalit Context* has been edited by Alladi Uma, K. Suneetha Rani and D. Murali Manohar. The book is set against this backdrop of the politics surrounding

English in India. The volume, a collection of 15 essays, bring to the fore a multiplicity of views expressed by Dalit intellectuals and activists on English in all its different senses. It also includes essays by non-Dalit scholars who have been long involved with questions of colonial modernity and of the English language in the Dalit context. This important and essential reading will be invaluable for students and scholars of English and caste and Dalit studies. The study has consulted eight major Dalit critics, no one has worked on Dalit autobiographies written in different states of India as a comparative study, so this research assumes its originality and as a venture it fills the gap.

### **Dalit literature: A View**

Dalit literature represents a powerful and emerging trend in the Indian Literary scene. It is a recent offshoot of Indian literature. It concerns about the several centuries secluded Dalits. The literary expression of Dalit literature is creative and intellectual, which transform the social reality into various literary genres. Dalit Literature is primarily a social and human document, which deals with the people who had been socially and economically exploited in India for hundreds of years. It portrays the inside sufferings of the Dalit people. The Aryans invaded indigenous aborigines of India and implemented the new law of “Varna System” for the effective administration.

Traditionally, Hinduism created the caste hierarchy Varna belief. It classified Indian society by the professions which the men and women inherited. In India, the caste system was framed as Brahmins – teachers; Kashatriyas – warriors; Vaishays – traders; and Shudras – labourers. The fifth fold “Avarna” is the “Untouchable” the aboriginal. Ancient (2000 – 500 BCE), Medieval (600 CE to 1200 CE), and Early Modern India (1500s) excommunicate untouchables from basic social welfare like house, culture, politics, and education about 1 - 5 million years ago (BE). Dalits have to live in separate places and were given unskilled jobs like cleaning streets, toilets, and death matters. In India, several invaded administration did not consider the welfare of the Untouchables. They were discriminated and referred as “Chandala,” and “Avarna” (in the Hindu sacred book Veda), “Untouchable,” and “Harijans,” (used by Narasimha Mehta and Mahatma Gandhi), and “Exterior Castes” by the famous Indian historian J.H.Hutton. The British Indian the Empire was not formed in (1600 – 1947) but, It gave some reform schemes to the historically disadvantaged men and women. In 1935, the Government identified them as “Depressed Class.” It passed the “Government of India Act 1935,” and proposed reservation of seats for the deprived the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST). Dalits now began to articulate their dignity and identity in speeches and writings. Foreign writers, non – Dalits, and Dalits were aware of the impact of case system in South Asia. They produced research articles, poems, drama, shorts stories, novels, and other forms of mass media about the exploited social life.

The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature states that: The first two centuries of the African Diaspora’s sojourn in the U.S. were marked by the dominance of the slave narrative and African American folklore, both of which continued to flourish and influence African American literature and politics long after the end of slavery. This does not mean that, these two creative forms represented the totality of African American Literature. African American

Literature created advancing wave front in the United States of America during the twentieth century as a voice of protest against racial discrimination. Dalits also documented their life – style and culture were lowly estimated in the Indian caste system. African Americans were prevented from enjoying life because of their race. The Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s – 1930s institutionalized the African American literature as a subject of academic inquiry and ensured that the writers and their readers were keenly aware of the tradition in which they worked.

### **Harlem Renaissance and Black Panther Movement**

Harlem Renaissance was initially started as the “New Negro Movement.” It created great space for Negro culture and music like jazz and Blues. It was characterized by an overt racial pride that came to be represented in the idea of the “New Negro”, who through intellect wittings and art promoted progressive or social equality in America. Negro slaves narrated in their autobiographies. The horrors of family separation, sexual abuse, and the inhuman workload are pictured in the chosen novels. These helped the abolitionists to educate both Black and White people beyond the borders. Most of the black slaves did not even know their biological parents and the date of birth because of illiteracy and blacks as commodity in slave trade. They were not even allowed to read and learn. Black writers orally reported their struggle of slave-hood through speeches, and consequently edited them in “creative forms” of autobiography and folklore.

In America the “Black Panther Movement” was started for the upliftment of black people. After a few decades, Dalit Panther got its intellectual recognition in the life period of Babasaheb Dr.B.R.Ambedkar (1891 -1956). He was the first untouchable educated in the United States of America and England. After India’s independence (1947), the idea of democracy reached many sections, awakening the masses all over the country, including Dalits and Tribes. Indian literature of the post – independence period expressed these sentiments, and the Dalit literature also portrayed their society in their regional languages. There was revolutionary transformation in the lives of Dalits, due to the consciousness of humanistic values as equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice. The regional literatures like Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, and Gujarathi literature began to flourish along with translation studies in various national and world languages. Indian literature in regional languages and Indian Literature in English (ILE), Dalit Writing in translation is another groundbreaking development in the pre and post – colonial translations from the various languages, particularly in English. Dalit writer Chandra Bhan Prasad says “She is the symbol of Dalit Renaissance” (Geeta Pandey BBC). Dalit writers use various genres to voice their exploited beings, and they transcend beyond caste system and its faith.

The term Dalit means, the people who are economically, socially, politically, educationally oppressed according to Dalit criticism. In Hindi Dalit literature, Dalit means one who is rooted in his/her soil, the son and daughter of particular native. In British military, Dalit means one who is pososing lower position. In Dalit literary criticism, the word Dalit includes women, one who does not have self-respect, and one is economically depressed. The term Dalit also incorporates schedule caste women, women of caste, SC, ST, MBC, BC and minority

communities. Dalit is not a name of community. Dalit writer Bisho A.C.Lal Says, that in his opening address at the Dalit Solidarity Conference, in Nagpur, “The word Dalit is a beautiful word, because it embraces the sufferings, frustrations, expectations and groaning of the entire cosmos” (xiii). Dalit literature for its expression is an integral part of the Dalit movement as it utilises different forms, styles, and content. Dalit writers brought out social purpose and social criticism rather than mere entertainment in their writings. It should be viewed with its contemporary context, as it is not a recreational literature because, it advocates rights of the Dalit community and inspires people to rise against oppression. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, in her introduction to Joothan says, “Autobiography has been a favorite genre of Dalit writers” (xxxv). Autobiography is an asset of literature. It is matter of life study for other human beings Dalits themselves merge with Dalit autobiographies.

### **“Point of view of Dalit” Autobiography**

Dalit autobiographies differ from other types in expression and purpose. They portray Dalits’ devaluations, and serve as an “intellectual propaganda” for creating social economic and political awareness. Dalit writer Malagatti says, in his introduction to his autobiography Government Brahmana “We are choosing memories that create social change”(x). The main purpose of the Dalit autobiographies is to record the suffering and humiliation of the Dalits. It helps in the emancipation of the oppressed and exploited people. Dalit autobiographers are concerned with the pathetic condition of the Dalits. The sufferings and humiliations are an integral part of the Dalit struggle. Dalit literature is basically a socially committed one. It helps the Dalits to become aware and struggle for their rights, which are denied to them by the so-called upper castes. Dalit autobiographies are sources of Dalits’ social realism in contemporary India. Textually, these works deal with the socio economic and political influences of Dalits. These autobiographers picture contemporary authentic conditions of the underprivileged and offer dramatic accounts of poverty and survival in general. They are deprived of economic power and social welfare. They get some benefits by Reservation Policy. They are forced to stay out of welfare. These kinds of social and legal injustices are the themes of the autobiographies.

In 1840s, there were many artists and writers influenced by socialism and working in similar styles, often collectively referred to as “realists.” The social conditions that have been prevailing (hence “Social Realism”) required everyday problems to be considered case by case. Jeff Adams, in his book *Documentary Graphic Novels and Social Realism*, traces the nineteenth century origins and early twentieth century applications which are developed using the concept of a social realism. This modeled on the theories of art historians such as T.J Clark, Linda Nochlin, and the Political writings of Bertold Brecht and Georg Lukacs on Marxist based concepts of realism developed in the inter war years of the 1930s. They all share concepts of realism that can be defined primarily as political and critical practices that analyze social conditions, and it is these conditions that underpin the cultural events represented in artworks, and graphic novel (25). Realism in art and literature is an endeavor to portray life “as it is,” like the social crises of contemporary world Negro slavery.

## **Dalit Social Realism**

Realism is most commonly used in studies of Western literature of the nineteenth century to describe the practice of authors like Stendhal, Emile Zole and Gustave Flaubert in nineteenth century France. These analytical, politically astute authors often referred to the contradictory rituals of class in contemporary society, and through a combination of melodrama and documentary established literary forms that may still be recognized in graphic novel narratives (27). Dalit autobiographers insist the importance of social conditions and record case by case what they see “as it existed,” in a dispassionate manner. The authors show life with reality, omitting nothing that is “ugly or painful, and idealizing nothing.” The approach, “social realism,” is aptly employed in the research to bring out the authors’ commitment in drafting the social behavior of upper caste people against Dalits in contemporary India. To the realists, the writer’s most important function is to describe as truthfully as possible, what is observed through the senses. It is concerned with appropriateness of social crises, which are depicted as “mimesis” in literature, particularly autobiographies. Documenting social realities was an overwhelming them in black narratives and also in Dalit autobiographies. Both the Black and Dalit writers gave voice for the exploited and the deprived mass.

## **Views of Critics about Dalit Writings**

Margaret Walker points out the “1930s” as the decade in which “the New Negro Came of Age.” (Stacy Morgan’s *Rethinking Social Realism: African American Art and Literature* 4). Her thoughts on the new consciousness may be juxtaposed with Dalit literature. Writers began to emphasis on the democratic consciousness and expected social changes. African American writers considered themselves as agents to leverage transformation in the social and political sphere on behalf of African American community. Their literature began to call attention to the threat of both race prejudice and class inequalities. They did not write for the white communities. The writer and critic W.E.B. Du Bois declared, “Most whites wanted Negroes to amuse; they demand caricature” (Morgan 4).

Dalits’ social thinking and writing emerged out of the authors’ social stratifications and are displaced and remain as fugitives due to caste atrocities like burning huts. They also transferred themselves as “agents” of Dalits’ social emancipation. These autobiographers documented their life, social and political events which play a key role in the study of literature, and who are sample contemporary documenters of “social crises” and the social reality. Dalit life narratives have gained prominence in the last two decades in line with the increasing visibility of Dalits in the Indian public sphere and their vociferous demands for a more just political and social order. The Dalit narratives are analyzed, where are rich illustrations of this double movement that they witness on behalf of a suffering community and keep alive the singular, non-universal nature of Dalit pain through an aesthetic that is not wholly translatable in the lexicon of rights and justice.

African American people worked menial jobs and wrote their sufferings in America. In India, Omprakash Valmiki tended pigs with bare feet after school hours. Vasant Moon gathered plastic and aluminum garbage in Nagpur streets. Siddalingahia worked as a waiter at the tables

of marriage halls. Bama and Gunasekaran weeded in the Naikers' and Konars' farmlands. While suffering from poverty, they managed to observe the prevailing caste discrimination on a broader scale around them. The English poet Geoffrey Chaucer depicted the classes of British society in *The Centerbury Tales* (in Michael Murphy 23). The documentation of "social realism" is deeply concerned with the realistic depiction and exactness of common people as the ploughman. Ploughman "Poorer class" is from the last grade of British society. He is better than Dalits in the Indian society. Similarly in "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, Thomas Gray also spoke about the common man: a poor ploughman.

The social realism that, people narrated or documented were invariably about the rich people of the world like kings, noble heroes, popes and bishops. The lower communities were portrayed as caricatures rather than as serious characters. "Social Realism changed that however, suddenly people wanted to read and hear stories about everybody" (Conrad Clough). The have-nots and downtrodden could be the subjects of entertaining tales. Social Realism casts light on the lives of people of social classes that has never really been looked at before. It is a concept that reached fruition in renaissance humanism. It was only in death, that lowborn men and nobility were alike. Even such a person as a grave – digger can be seen to be able to "match wits". The upper caste people who have mercilessly been devastating the lives of Dalits and Tribes in India are the critiqued. The desire of authors to document social and political events, and the means by which they might do so, is an enduringly contentious subject. The autobiographers were written in native language and consequently and translated into world language. The methods of depiction, sequences of content, and text organization are analyzed to reinforce the Dalit authors' exploration of society. At present Dalits considered autobiography as a weapon to leverage transformation in the social and political institutions of India. As Octavio Paz (Susan Bassnett, *Post – Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*) asserted, translation is the principal tool to understand the world. He says, that the world is presented to us as a "growing heap of texts" (3).

Writings are essentially expressions of the reality of human life and great pieces of literature depict that reality with communicable lucid language facilitating narrative with readers' aesthetic and literary sense. Realism is an attitude regarding things as they are, practical outlook on life; representation in art or letters of the real aspects of life; even sordid and repellent. Every phenomenon of people's behavior occurs in the author's social life. An author will responsively convey the social trait. Dalit autobiography presents experiences in real life into his or her literary work. In other words, a literary work reflectively brings and provides issue and cultural phenomena and social behavior, which happens in the author's real life. There have been several theories about autobiography. They have been assimilated into literary assets may be valued by the following works. *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Latin) by St. Augustine of Hippo, written between AD 397 and AD 398, is the first autobiography. It reflects Augustine's wanton boyhood and spiritual confession towards the union of soul with God. It is an autobiographical work, originally written in the Chagatai, the emperor's life period 1483-1530. Babur's cultural origin, his prose is highly personalized in its sentence structure, morphology, and vocabulary, and also contains many phrases and smaller poems in Persian. During Emperor Akbar's reign, the work was completely translated to Persian by a Mughal

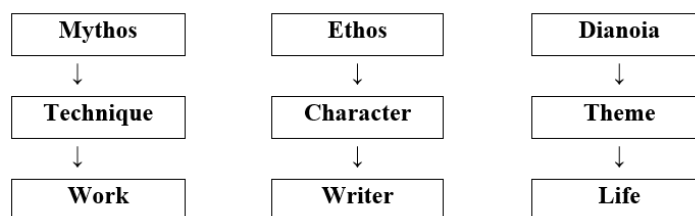


courtier, Abdul Rahim, in AH 998 (1589-90). Letters of Babur gives an account of his life and administration strategies for future generation.

Mohandas K. Gandhi's *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927), Jawaharlal Nehru's *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (1941), and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's *Wings of Fire: An Autobiography* (1999) are remarkable literary assets of Indian Literature. These autobiographies create spiritual and patriotic consciousness towards national development by documenting the life stories of authors. Elleke Boehmer justified (in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*,) the status of colonial and Postcolonial literature. African American slave narratives, Dalit narratives are the stories of Dalit victims who endured similar exploitation in their own soil. Dalit autobiographies authentically portray various forms of social and legal injustices. William L. Howarth, in his article, "Some Principles of Autobiography," observes that, "the life, religions, and society" (366) constitute the theme of the autobiography. Dalits use an array of incidents related to injustices as the theme of autobiography in order to educate fellow Dalits, but not to celebrate. There is no fictional theme in Dalit autobiographies. They do not glorify anything about authors' love and romance. Dalit autobiographies portray what is real, including their contemporary India and its freedom struggle as national document. Dalits narrate serious matters of basic human rights.

Autobiography has Greek etymology that is Auto means self; Bios means Life; and Graphe is Writings Autobiography. In the latest book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson briefed the legacy of autobiography. An autobiography is the story of a person's life written by a person, who shows reminiscent personal events as objectively as possible. It is the evidence of men's efforts and deeds in life. In turn, the humanity would learn the art of living from this genre. Blake Abolitionists made consistent efforts to track down and expose fictitious slave narratives in the abolitionist press. Frederick Douglass' *Narratives of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845), Harriet A. Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861), and Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (1901) are the most powerful and authentically crafted slave narratives and literary assets of backs. The African Americans survived from the evil practice of slavery, and brought out their sufferings in the form of speech and writings for mass emancipation. There were very significant impacts on Dalit Literature by African American Literature, and Dalit writers found a "parallel phenomenon" in their movements. It could also be noticed that African American literature is "as support, as proof that a group similar to the Dalit can become creative, and can progress in an orthodox and conservative society."

As William L. Howarth, in his article “Some Principles of Autobiography,” says “the life, religions, and society” constitute the theme of an autobiography:



The writer William L. Howarth, traces the theories of Northrop Frye that, “three elements; mythos, ethos, and dianoia guide a writer’s progress” (Howarth 363-70). Mythos is the technique, style, image, and structure which constitute the self-portrait of the author. Ethos refers to the factors that the writer’s sense of self, and place that motivate him to write. Dianoia is theme which deals about the “life matters” of the writer which provide sequences of context. It is made up of replica of writer; idea and beliefs, the representation of era; general philosophy, religious faith, or political and cultural attitudes. The inclusiveness of the issues like love, memories, and death attract the readers. Dalit literature analyses “dianoia” the life matters which constitute Dalit autobiographies such as Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan: An Untouchable’s Life* (2003), Vasant Moon’s *Growingup Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* (2001), Baby Kamble’s *The prisons We Broke* (2009), Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* (2003), Bama’s *Karukku* (2000), and K.A. Gunasekaran’s *The Scar* (2009). The autobiographies have referred to encapsulate textual accounts of some of the most fury memories of caste triggered injustices. Dalits’ lives are portrayed in broad political and historical contexts. They predominantly portray subjective humiliation with mass identity. The autobiographies are like brilliant cut through which Dalits’ social-cultural-political portrayal is seen as it is the reality.

The novel *Joothan: An Untouchable’s Life* is a famous autobiography of the Dalit writer Omprakash Valmiki. In 1993, it was originally published as an essay *Ex Dalit ki Atmakath* in Marathi language in a book *Harijan se Dalit*. *Joothan* means polluted food associated with animals. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Professor of English, York University, Toronto, translated *Joothan* into English during 1997-2002, with a foreword and an Introduction, that help the world readers to understand Dalit literature. Mukherjee says, “It was speaking of my corner of India, in my first language, Hindi, in a way that no other text had ever spoken to me” (x). There are eight chapters in this autobiography. The novel *Joothan* encapsulates the pain of poverty, humiliation, and the atrocities on Dalits. It portrays the struggle between chuhra (Dalits) and upper caste Tagas of Barla. Omprakash faced injustices in village, school, and government offices. The Basic Primary School Headmaster Kaliram forced him to sweep the class rooms and playground continuously for three days. Chemistry teacher Brajpal Singh failed Omprakash in chemistry lab experiments and spoiled his education at the Intermediate Level itself. After abandoning his education, Omprakash got apprenticeship at the Ordnance Factory in Dehra Dun. He felt self-reliance in terms of money but not in the social behavior of people. In the factory, Commandant Sahib did not allow Omprakash to take a chair, and in the

Ordnance Factory Training Institute in Khamaria, the Trainer-in-Charge Mr. Gupta humiliated him after seeing his development in job. Omprakash's heroic struggle and coming to consciousness by reading literature and Ambedkar. He lived as tragic figure and object of caste pride. Omprakash Valmiki is a famous eminent poet, editor, publisher, critic and short story writer. His most acclaimed work is *Joothan* his autobiography. His other important writings are *Dalit Sahitya ks Saundarya Shastra*, *Ghuspathiye* and *Salam* (story-collection). Valmiki has been writing regularly for *Vartman Sahitya*, *Samkaalin Janmat*, and *Samyantar*. He has been awarded the Ambedkar Rashtriya Puraskar in 1993. He is also an officer at Opto Electronics Factory, Dehradun.

The novel *growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* [GUI] came out in Marathi as *Vasti* in 1995. Dr. Gail Omvedt, an American and professor of B.R. Ambedkar Chair on Social Change and Development, has translated into English in 2001. Currently, she is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Indian Institute of Dalit studies (New Delhi) and the National Institute of Dalit Studies (Ahmedabad). It has twenty nine chapters with an "Introduction" by Eleanor Zelliot, Laird Bell Professor of History, Emerita Carleton College. She is a contemporary of the author Vasant Moon. As a researcher, she also gave her personal experiences of Nagpur during 1960-1970s. The autobiography portrays Mahars as victims. Who are affected by poverty, caste atrocities, and social and legal injustices in Nagpur? Vasant Moon's destitute mother *purnabai* worked as a maid-servant in the houses of Europeans to bring out Vasant and her daughter *Malti* in the neighbourhoods of Nagpur. Vasant portrays the struggle between Mahars "Dalits" and upper castes. His grandfather *Sadashiv* also worked in Europeans, houses and supported Vasant's family. Vasant faced social boycott, caste discriminations, and assaults by upper caste people. He aspired for good education, yet he was ill-treated by the upper caste school teachers. With determination, he got M.A., (Marathi) with second class, but the university withdrew it and replaced it with third class. This incident devastated the ambition of Vasant to be a Professor of Marathi. During 1930s, Ambedkar emerged to voice for Dalits. Mahadma Gandhi also worked for the welfare of Dalits. Dalits were attacked, when there was different theory between Ambedkar and Gandhi. Similarly, during 1950s, Muslims were killed at the time of the partition of Pakistan. Since boyhood, Vasant associated with Dalit movement *Samata Sainik Dal (SSD)*, and developed social consciousness. He worked for his people throughout his life. He also sent articles to Magazines like, *Janata* and *Shuklendu (Rising Moon)*. He worked as a Deputy Country Commissioner in 1955, and along with Ambedkar, he embraced Buddhism on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1956. GUI was rich in new glossary and references to Dalit culture. It throws on the sociological and historical events that were partially ignored by Indian Media and the Indian historians. Vasant Moon was an eminent editor and wrote drama, poetry, and fiction. He was committed to his community and served for it. He was influenced by *Wamanrao Godbole*, *Marx*, and *Dr. Ambedkar* and began to follow them. He edited seventeen volumes of the speeches of *Babasaheb Ambedkar*. He is also well known for his autobiography. Vasant Moon was born on 22 January 1932 at *Maharpura, Nagpur, in Maharashtra*. He completed his primary and secondary school education in the Normal school of Nagpur. Despite poverty, he was more careful about his studies. For a few months, he worked as a Deputy Accountant General in Post and Telegraph

office before he completed his Master of Arts. Degree Vasant Moon's popular works are Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (2002), and Delusions of Arun Shourie: a futile attempt of icon breaking of an iconoclast (1997). On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2002, it was unknown fact to the Indian mass media.

### **Critique of the Prisons We Broke**

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* is the first Dalit women. Her narratives were serialized in 1982 as Jina Amucha in the magazine *Stree*. Maya Pandit, professor and Teacher-Educator at EFL University, Hyderabad, translated Jina Amucha from Marathi to English in 1986 with twelve chapters. She also wrote a detailed introduction and an interview of Baby Kamble. Professor Gopal Guru gave a scholarly "Afterword" about the development of Dalit Women and literature. *The Prisons We Broke* portrays the struggle of Mahar people with upper caste men and women in birth state of Ambedkar. Baby Kamble recalled the diabolic mind of the upper caste people who have been exploiting Dalits. *The Prisons We Broke* gives a realistic picture of the Mahars in Maharashtra. In December 1927, satyagraha was observed to establish Dalits' civic rights and expose the tyranny of the upper castes. Baby Kamble recalls the historical social crisis.

Kamble was humiliated, harassed, and discriminated against by not only her classmates but by her teachers also. Kamble and her classmates belong to the Mahar caste, they would fight against their caste Hindu girl fellow students. The school in which Kamble was getting education was a girls' school. She and her friends were not scared of their classmates at all. But their teachers were in favor of the caste Hindu students and punished Kamble and her friends when upper caste Hindu students made complaints against them to the teachers. The teachers were Brahmins, who hated the Mahar students openly, Kamble writes. Kamble is more vocal in the criticism of the educated Dalits who forget their roots and ignore the Dalit cause. She is also very critical about the educated Dalits adopting Hindu ways of life. Maxine Berntson stated in the introduction to Marathi version of *Jina Aucha* that, "The customs, rituals, festivals and the Jatras that she describes are indeed a source of unexplored treasure for a sociologist" (Maya Pandi's Introduction xiv). *The Prisons We Broke* is the articulation of protest against chauvinism and Hindu hegemony. Kamble describes the physical and psychological atrocities on Mahar women in public and domestic spheres. Their struggles are portrayed as "social agents" for the better transformation in society. Baby Kamble is an activist and writer. She mobilized Dalit women's Organization. She was a contemporary of Ambedkar and was deeply influenced by Ambedkar's ideology and his social development. She also runs an ashramashal in Nimbure. She was born in 1929 Vergao, a village in western Maharashtra, in her grandparent's house. Her grandparents worked as butlers in European households in the cities around. They sent money home each month, their family was somewhat better off than the others around it. Pandhrinath was her father and was a contractor in profession. He earned and helped fellow people. The caste cluster, or group of many endogamous castes, living chiefly in Maharashtra state and in the adjoining states of India. Baby Kamble dropped her study after fourth standard and she was a victim the evil practice of "child-marriage". She wrote her life experiences in waste papers and kept them in her petty shop. An America-born sociologist,

Maxine Berntson visited the Dalit settlement phaltan in 1982. She accidentally met Baby Kamble in her slum. Maxine Berntson collected Kamble's writings and she also took efforts to serialize them as Jina Amucha (1982) in the women magazine Stree, and its English translation the novel *The Prisons We Broke* came out in 1986. It is the relic of Dalit women oppression. She also faced atrocities from her husband Kondiba Kamble.

### **The novel Ooru Keri: An Analysis**

Siddalingaiah's *Ooru keri: An Autobiography* is almost reminiscent of distorting the hunger and humiliations of Dalits in Karnataka. It came out as an article in the Kannada magazine Rujuvatu, and the English translation by Dr.D.R. Nagaraj [editor and critic] came out in the magazine section of Deccan Herald during 1995. With five parts of nostalgic memories, *Ooru keri* was again translated by S.R.Ramakrishna, who is a Founder and Editor of *The Music Magazine* in 2003 and was published as book. The novel *Ooru keri* portrays poverty and anxiety of the Dalits in Karnataka. Siddalingaiah's father Dyavanna was a farm labourer in Magadi. He struggled to bring out Siddalingaiah and his two sisters Shivalingamma and putamma. Siddalingaiah's childhood was submerged into poverty. His family belongs to farm laborers and gets low-income, sometimes nothing. In spite of his abject poverty, Siddalingaiah attended fee night-school. He began to realize self-respect and dignity from his teachers at the school. He reveals the experiences, which juxtapose ordinary day-to-day struggles like caste discrimination, poverty and identity. His determination, creativity, and courage helped him to outwit the brutality of the caste system. Keri is the colony where Dalits live. It is a geographically separated from the main body of a village; it is set off from the mainstream society. Siddalingaiah penned the real social conditions to expose the caste dominated society to the world. It was the leftover that was generally given to Dalit people by the upper class instead of wages. Exploitation of innocent and weaker section had been a common phenomenon in India.

Siddalingaiah's mother worked as a sweeper in a Dalit hostel in Srirampura. Every day, after the boys were served, the leftover was given to the workers. His mother used to take home the mudde, and saru (meal). This leftover solved many of Dalits' starvation. As soon as his appetite for food was fulfilled, he began to ponder over the thoughts of Ambedkar. Siddalingaiah joined the Karnataka association and was elected the joint secretary. In this way, his political affairs improved with rationalists. He also published his poetry in the magazine *Shudra*. He started Dalit Sangharsh Samiti movement and continued to visit several places in Karnataka. He accounts from autobiographies and narratives provide a deeper insight into the exploitation of Dalit and their emancipation. Siddalingaiah is a popular Dalit poet, folklorist, and writer. He is the founder of Dalit Sangarsha Samhiti (DSS) and former member of the Karnataka Legislative Council. Siddalingaiah is an exemplary public intellectual. *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* was published in 1996. It is fortunate that he has become accessible to an English audience at least now. The autobiography also presents, in capsule form, events from Siddalingaiah's childhood to the start of his adult career. Dates are absent in this book. They do not matter for these meditative narratives. *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* has unique style, sarcasm and ironic tone in narration. D.R.Nagaraj says in his "Afterword," "The autobiography is used to justify,

enlarge and explain the writer's social masquerades. As autobiography that does not break, case pain; and mock itself is nothing more than cheap self-justification" (113).

### **The novel Karukku: An Overview**

Bama's novel Karukku is the most popular Dalit woman autobiography in Tamil. It is a life-story of a Dalit woman; rather the author herself considers it the story of Dalit mass. Lakshmi Holmstrom [Founder-Trustee, south Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive] translated Karukku into English in 2001 with nine chapters, and gave elaborate introduction to Dalit culture and writings. It won the crossword Award in India. In the "Afterword," Bama says that Karukku symbolises her "conflicts" and "resolutions" that, are like two sides Palmyra petiole with a serrated blade. One side, she was converted catholic and found her origin. She learnt that her discrimination is based on her birth as a Dalit. On the other hand, as a Dalit woman, she struggled in churches, schools, and society. The novel Karukku portrays the psychological conflicts of Bama, which are caused by caste and religion. It also established Bama as a distinct voice in Dalit literature.

Bama is a famous Dalit writer, activist, and a teacher, she was born in 1958 to a poor, downtrodden family at the remote village of Wathirayiruppu, Puthupatti, in Virudhunagar District, Tami Nadu. Her father Susairai was soldier in the Indian Army and Sebasthiamma was her mother. She got B.Sc. (Maths), and B.Ed at St.Mary's College, Tuthukkudi. Bama as a teacher has witnessed. Dalit children are deprived of proper treatment and leadership opportunities in management-run schools, government-aided and government schools. At first, she worked in a convent school in Aarani and left the convent in 1992. She also worked in the Institute of Development Education, Action, and Studies (IDEAS) in Madurai for a salary of thousand rupees per month. Bama narrated her bitter experiences from religions, job, and society to Rev.Fr.Mark S.J. and Fr.M.Jeyaraj. They encouraged her to write down the tragic memories and she published it as Karukku (1992) in Tamil language. The word "Karukku" in the Tamil dialect refers to the serrated edges on the sides of Palmyra leaf's petiole serrated blade. It cuts the people who touch the serrated blade. Bama's novel Sangathi (Tamil, 1994; English, 2005) and Vanmam (Tamil, 2000; English, 2002) portray the Dalit intercaste conflicts. Her short stories Venayam, and Kissubukkaran (1996) are popular in documenting Dalit culture and identity. She also wrote poems on nature, education, caste, and child labour. Her poem Amma is dedicated to Bama's mother with lot of emotions. Her latest novel, Manushi, is soon to be published and is hoped to be the second part of Karukku. Bama was influenced by Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, and Ambedkar. She attended the Writers' Meet in Paris. Her works were translated into Telugu, Malayalam, French, German and English. She moves with French people easily than Indians. She has been at the forefront of Dalit literature and aesthetics in Tamil Nadu.

### **An Estimate of the Scar**

K.A. Gunasekaran's The novel The Scar is a modern Dalit autobiography in Tamil language, and was serialized in the magazine Dalit Murasu during 2004. V.Kadambari, who is a Professor in Ethiraj College for Women, Chennai translated The Scar into English in 2009 with eight

chapters. Dalit activist Ravikumar gave a historically valued introduction to the autobiography. Gunasekaran narrates the familiar tale of caste oppression and prejudice prevalent in the Indian society. The narration unfolds his deep pains and sufferings from his childhood itself. The novel *The Scar* is a graphic and confronting narrative of the life experience of a Paraya an aboriginal agricultural community and one of the Dalit communities formerly known as Untouchables from Ilayangudi village in Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu.

In the novel *The Scar*, Gunasekaran describes how he and the high level Muslim people live in Ilayangudi which is a big village market place in Ramanathapuram district. One day, His grandmother sent him to a shop at south Keeranoor mainland where, Konar people live. He bought cooking oil in a wood-chip bottle and walked back through fields on either side of a narrow bund usually used by Dalit people. He saw a man coming in the opposite direction. As soon as he saw him, Gunasekaran took one leg off the bund and gave him space to walk. In a harsh of moment a slap went on his cheek. He screamed in pain. During April-May holidays, Gunasekaran went to Tanjavur where his one of the relatives Seenivachagam lived. He had a group of folk artists. They have been performing cultural programmes particularly Karagattam dance in front of the temple processions. The artists were interested in the voice of Gunasekaran and his folk songs. He joined them and played *thamuku* and *pampbai*. He earned enough money from the cultural songs. He went back to Ilayangudi. The month he spent in the company of folk artists was an important experience in his life. It helped him to pay fees, hostel fees, and to continue his study in college. After receiving his M.A., he continued to stage the folk music show. K.A. Gunasekaran is well known folk artist, playwright, and activist. He is a popular researcher in the Dalit folk songs of Tamil Nadu. He was the Director (2009-2011) of the International Institute of Tamil Studies (IITS), Chennai. Being an artist, he has staged many social-issues through his plays in remote villages in Tamil Nadu and other parts of the world. He has won many state level honours and awards. Currently, he is Professor of Performing Arts, in the University of Pondicherry. Gunasekaran's major Tamil plays are *Sathiya Sodanai*, *pavalakkodi* or *Kudumba Vazakku*, *Ariguri*, *Thodu*, *Maatram* [a play about the eunuchs], *machi*, *Kandan* or *Valli*, *kaavulagavasi*, *Parayai Pilandhukondu*, *Thottil Thodangi*, and *Bali Adugal*. His autobiography *The Scar* was written in Tamil as *Vadu* in 2009. The Tamil word *Vadu* refers to the wounds that were caused by the caste system. The novel *The Scar* portrays the quest and search for human nature in the caste dominated Indian society. It evokes the mixed culture of Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism.

The contributions of Dalits and non-Dalit writers have been emerging every day and has enriched Dalit literature in recent years. Critics and reviewers keen interest in Dalit literature. John C.B. Webster, Josiane Racine, and Jean Luc Racine, Senior Fellow, Centre for Indian Studies, Paris, Oliver Mendelsohn of La Trobe University, Marika Vicziany of National Centre for South Asian Studies, Melbourne, Dr. Gail Omvedt, Eleanor Zelliott, Christophe Jaffrelot, Director of CERI-Sciences Po/CNRS in Paris, and A. Padmanaban, IAS (Retd) have been making significant contributions on Dalit lives in their recent writings. There are few critical evaluations of Dalit autobiographers with particular emphasis on "Personal" with sociological context. The autobiographical discourses were taken as sources of self, history, and society. The exploited "life-journey" gave purposeful documents which matter to Dalits and non-Dalits.

### Critics on Dalit Autobiographies

Dalit literature echoes the agony of the experiences of the social exclusion and stratifications. It portrays the caste humiliation, injustice, atrocities, and discriminations perpetrated by the upper caste people. It expresses the political consciousness that focused on the struggle for self-respect and dignity for the community. John C.b.Webster, a Christian Missionary, says that, “healing the ‘wounded psyche’ is the Church’s unique and distinctive contribution to the total Dalit struggle for dignity, equality, and justice” (177). Christopher Jaffrelot suggests that “Not only have their Dalit’s books attracted a mass audience, but they are profoundly impacting the political landscape” (4). He also says that, Dalit literature has helped to bring a new recognition to Dalits’ social and political problems. Jaffrelot also points to Ms.Mayawati Kumar, a Dalit chief minister of India’s most populous state, Uttar Pradesh and the leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany explored “the untouchables, who number some 150 millions, are among the most subordinated and poorest people in India” (290). Their study also brought out the current social and economic debate on poverty in the global context of recent years. Padmanaban says that, the Untouchables are struggling to cross basic things. They should strive for “education and spread of knowledge” (121).

Juris Dilevko, Keren Dali, and Glenda Garbutt, in their book *Contemporary World Fiction: A Guide to Literature in Translation*, say that *Joothan* is the autobiography of untouchables in India. The Government prohibited caste related discriminations in 1949, and treated the issues as illegal. *Joothan* explores the degrading reality of Dalits in the contemporary India and the political awakening of B.R.Ambedkar. In his review, “*Joothan: A Dalit’s Life*,” Namit Arora says that “Valmiki’s narrative voice brims with a quiet sense of outrage at what he had to endure as a human. It attempts to shame them into introspection. This is the kind of book that becomes the axe for the frozen sea inside us”(2). Eleanor Zelliot, in “Dalit Literature, Language, and Identity,” brings out the significance of *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*. She says that its vivid portrayal of Nagpur city “evokes the changes in Magar community especially in the ideology of Ambedkar and his conversion” (452). Similarly, Lakshmanan, in his article “Out – Caste,” says that Moon’s autobiography provides insights into the future of the oppressed. He also feels that Mon’s autobiography should be translated into Indian and foreign languages. It is a collection of historical endeavors of caste and political rivalries in the central India.

Janhavi Acharekar stated in his review “Liberation Narrative on the autobiography: *Baby Kamble’s The Prisons We Broke*, the work transcends the boundaries of personal narrative. It also gives sociological, historical and political record. It magnifies Dalit feminist critique, and a revolt against Hinduism as a whole. Vrushali Nagarale, in her article “Discourse analysis of African-American and Dalit Women’s Selected Biographies: A Comparative Study,” states that, *The Prison We Broke* talks more about Dalit’ blind beliefs and superstitions. Both men and women possessed the evil spirit and considered it as the curse of God and Goddesses. Reviewing the novel *Ooru Keri*, Vikas Kamat says that Dr.Siddalingaiah narrates small incidents of village discriminations in very simple language without adding his prejudice. He also expresses that agony of injustice and the beauty of the simplicity of common Indians for



the reader to regurgitate and enjoy. “For this alone, the autobiography will remain as a forerunner in Dalit literature” (Review of Ooru Keri by Siddalingaiah).

Deepa Ganesh’s “From the Fringes,” comments on the novel Ooru Keri and its dramatic performances on the stage that the emotions of each phase intact. Siddalingaiah’s wanton childhood memories and adulthood development are reflected in his novel. The autobiographical story gives a sharp portrayal of Individual and community as external force. A translator and fiction writer K.Srilata, in her review says that, reading Bama’s autobiography Karukku is an intense experience. She brings out the edges of palmyar that snatches the feelings from blood. The novel Karukku remains as a cherished masterpiece of Dalit women writing, and it forces the reader to sit up and pay attention to the texture of the narrator’s life, a texture that is startlingly different from that of urban, middle-class, and upper-class life (“A Palmyra Leaf that Sears Us”).

Shubashree Desikan’s, *The Invisible Boundaries of Caste,* tells that, *The Scar* exposes the pain of life as a parayar. Gunasekarn was determined to challenge the caste imperialism but not to be cowed down. His autobiography offers micro pictures of caste domination in Madurai region, Tamil Nadu. The author crosses the invisible caste boundaries in villages. But he is assaulted by the upper caste people. *The Scar* portrays the journey of Gunasekaran from the burden of caste to the struggle to annihilation of caste. Yet, underneath the jaw of caste, he makes a colorful personality, singer, writer; educationist and folk artist unfettered by cynicism, “*The Scar* speaks of caste evils but also the will-knit relationship between parayars and Muslims” (6).

Most of the writers, researchers, critics, and reviewers evaluate that, Dalit autobiographies are the testimonies of caste oppression and exploitation in the recent years. The novel *Joothan* is considered as an epic of the Dalits sufferings that have been narrated with various existing references. Gary Michael Tartakov estimates that, *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* deeply troubles the readers with deprivation, pain and anxieties. *The Prisons We Broke* is considered as the autobiography of Dalit women. The novel *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* is a collection of village and slum life of Dalits. The novel *Karukku* brought out the treatment Dalits, who changed their religions for better treatment. *The Scar* is totally a document of social abhorrence. The best way to understand the resentments of Dalits in India is through a perusal of the autobiographies.

### **Dalits’ Socio-Economic Condition**

The socio-economic condition of Dalits has been the national issue since 1947. Articles 15 and 16 of Constitution of India gave opportunities in jobs, education, and political forums through reservations. This research traces Dalit’s socio-economic conditions like living place, malnutrition occupation and educational facilities as depicted in the select autobiographies. The autobiographers authentically brought out the poor condition of living place, food, work nature, and educational facilities prevailing for Dalits in contemporary India. In all these autobiographies, the narrators and the majority of Dalit characters are descendants of farm laborers. They do not have land for production a symbol of wealth. The most of them have

remained for centuries as laborers in the lands of the upper caste people. They worked only as daily waged servants.

The faith in Caste system is primarily responsible for the past and present unchanged social stratification of the Dalits. Their liberation has been a myth due to “Varna” hierarchy and the concept of purity and pollution of castes by the scriptures of Hindu literature, religion, and culture. Dalits have been inhumanely discriminated by the upper caste people. They are unable to annihilate it. On the one hand, British India had obviously failed to establish a constant redistribution of lands and strengthening economic power in favor of Dalits, but it provided a few basic needs like health, education, and sanitation to the Dalits. On the other hand, the Government of India has been making various policies in education and employment that have been exploited. The word marginality is treated as synonyms in the context of Dalits. They are also the victims of exploitation. The novel *Joothan* is also a remarkable social document of Chuhre community of Barla, village in Uttar Pradesh (Joshua Project). They were forced to live in a separate settlement exclusive for Dalits outside of the Village. A high brick wall and a pond segregated upper caste from the Chuhra basti. Upper caste men and women of all ages came out and used the edge of the pond as an open-air lavatory, squatting across from the Chuhras’ homes in broad daylight with their private parts exposed. There was no proper sanitation. But, Dalits were not allowed to get drinking water from the wells of the upper caste. In Chuhra basti there were thirty families, without proper water facility and sanitation.

Traditionally, Chuhras were cursed to sweep the roads, clean the cattle barns, get shit off the floor, dispose of dead animals, and work in the fields during harvests, carry death-news, and perform other physical labour for all upper caste people, including the Tyagi, and Brahmins. The Tyagis did not address them by name, only called out, “Oe, Chuhre” “Abey, Chuhre” (2). It was alright to touch cows and stray dogs, but touching a Chuhra inflicted instant pollution on the Tyagis. During Omprakash Valmiki boyhood, his entire family worked hard, yet the member did not manage to get two hearty meals a day. They often did not get paid for their labor, and instead, the laborers were abused. Dalits’ nutrition is concerned, they are far behind than other people in India. They lack awareness in this respect. The novel *Joothan* encapsulates the pain, humiliation, and poverty of Dalits. The writer Omprakash gives a detailed description of collecting, preserving, and eating leftovers. His memories of being assigned to guard the drying leftover from crows, chickens, and relishing the dried leftover burn him with renewed pain and humiliation when he becomes a Government servant. He says, “Both Ambedkar and Gandhi advised untouchables to stop accepting leftover” (xxxix). Ambedkar showed how the upper caste villagers could not tolerate Dalits’ denial of leftover anymore. The upper caste people cunningly made vengeance by assault and denied earning opportunity in the farms.

The writer Omprakash’s father decided to give education to him. His father begged Master Har Phool Singh for Omprakash’s admission. Later he was given admission in the Basic Primary School. At the outset, Omprakash was not allowed to sit on the mat and drink water. The teachers gave a place at the last row where he sat helplessly. The children of the Tyagis would tease him by calling “Chuhre Ka” (3) a pejorative, it means “You son of Chuhras.” There are two more untouchable students along with Omprakash, who are good in studies and their

parents are government employees. During the examination days, he encountered all sorts of problems. There was no electricity; they used to in the light of a lantern and an oil lamp. Cunningly, a chemistry teacher in the Intermediate Level deliberately failed him in chemistry lab and as a result, he was forced to drop out but he scored excellent marks in other subjects. Due to poverty, he worked in a wood depot to load and unload the woods and continued his school. The poor Dalits should work in the field of Tagas in the hot sunshine in order to earn food grains for survival. Most of the reapers are the Chuhras and Chamars. They wore clothes scarcely, and their daily wages were not given properly. They got whatever Tagas gave including leftovers. In addition to this, Dalit women were assigned to clean the cow-dung. It is more difficult in winters. The stink would make one faint; however, the cleaning work is a free service to the upper caste. These are some of the deprived conditions of the Dalits. After school hours, Omprakash used to take the pigs in the afternoon, and they were another economic source of him family. His brother Sukhbir's death brought great economic difficulties in terms of basic needs. His Bhabhi (widowed sister – in – law) gave her wedding anklet for Omprakash's sixth standard admission. He joined in Barla Inter College. Sukkhan Singh, Ram singh, and Chandrapal Varma, and Shravan kumar Sharma (a Brahmin) became his friends. Omprakash visited their homes for study. He became the class-monitor after getting the first rank in the class. As a gesture of respecting Omprakash's development, his seat was moved from back row to front row. The behavior of some teachers was not friendly to him.

Even when the downtrodden people began to improve, the upper caste people never like this progress. Fauz Singh Tyagi called Omprakash Valmiki to sow sugarcane. He refused to work, keeping in mind the board examinations in the following days. But there is no help on his side. He was taken to the field. Besides this, he experienced all sorts of problems, no peace, no study hours, no freedom, and no electricity. He captured that memory, "There was no electricity; we studied by the light of a lantern or an oil-lamp" (67). The rainy season was hellish to the Dalits. Omprakash's colony filled up with pig's excrement and mosquitoes. All the downtrodden people's toes were engulfed by ringworm [tinea pedis] a fungal infection. Omprakash remembers the year 1962; all the homes of his locality were made of clay. Their house began to leak, wall collapsed, and roof began to slide. As soon as evening fell, everything became absolutely dark. No electricity facility was available for the Dalits.

In the novel *In Growing up Untouchable in India*, Vasant Moon portrays the Dalits' livelihood in which, they have been living without proper house, water electricity, and sanitation. Nagpur is a city in the state of Maharashtra. It is a largest city in central India. Moon remembers that in Maharpura settlement most of houses were old, earthen, and flat- roofed- the birth place of Vasant Moon. March, April, and May are the hottest months for the western and southern regions of central India. People were unable to endure the heat waves of the sun and many women and children would stay in homes. If it rains, there will be an intoxicating smell of earth over the settlement. The flow of sweating stops; and the drains begins to overflow the settlement. In Maharpura, the heat and rain brought both trouble and joy to Dalits.

Vasant lived with his grandfather Sadashive, who worked in a European home from which Vasant inherited the ethics of life, morality, and discipline. Domestic violence is a common

phenomenon in Indian villages. Vasant witnessed the pain of his drunken father. He often mercilessly beat up his mother Purnabai. Consequently, Purnabai sought the help of Parsi households for earning to feed her children. Vasant Moon out of hunger, and his sister Malti took a bowl to the upper caste neighbourhood. The begged, "Oh, madam, give us a piece of bread." An elderly man suddenly sprung at them and said: "Hey, run or I'll whip your ass!" (22), tragically the house member insulted them. Vasant returned home with pain, hunger, and being assaulted. Vasant Moon and Malti ate the available food and gulped some cold water from the earthen pot in the darkness. There was no electricity for the entire community. His mother Purnabai worked in Mishibab's house for two rupees and food. From the rich house, she brought vegetables and chapatis to her children. Since, there was no means for food, Vasant became melancholic and desperate. He collected empty aluminum tube of pasting lotion, plastic, match box labels and cigarette pockets and sold them for food. This petty business later was transformed into collecting the caricatures of war and suffering portraits. In his life, hunger remains a pin of perennial stigma. It is a question for all Dalits. Atmaram Patil meted out the expenses of Vasant's studies. Most of the Mahars worked as cooks in the houses of Europeans. In 1930, Mahars stopped descent base occupation carrying dead animals away. The upper caste people cunningly crushed Mahars from economic and other social independence. Sashrath Patil helped his people, but his life was threatened. His properties were setting fire or "arson" [The general definition or arson means that somebody deliberately or intentionally set fire to a property in order to destroy it, with a criminal intent].

Vasant Moon got clothes from his classmates. His eagerness to study was supported by his friends. His economic conditions were very low for a better life style. Rajkumar articulated: Vasant Moon's Vasti is an autobiographical narrative of an untouchable by who grown in a slum amidst poverty to become a self-made person and later a responsible leader of the Dalit community in Maharashtra (193). Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* portrays the residential quarters of the Mahar community at Veergaon in Purandar district of western Maharashtra. In 1918, the British Government took up canal building in this region. Kamble's father Pandharinath lived in Phulton and became a contractor to feed his fellow people. Early morning, tea with leftover bread from the night before was a feature unique to Kamble's home. For other households, there was no morning tea. Dalit homes had food depended on the bags of stale bread and fermented curry that the children received as alms in the village. Their mothers would light the fire and put the fermented curry and stale bread together to boil in the earthen pot.

Baby Kamble describes how most houses in 1920's were plastered with mud and decorated with eternal poverty. At the door was a keli, an earthen vessel with a narrow mouth used for storing water, covered with a coconut shell which served also as a container to drink the water. There was also a half-broken and worn out chul (hearth), and next to it, a couple of parul (earthen pots). A wooden spoon and an iron tawa (griddle), used for roasting the bhakri (jowar bread), occupied one corner, while a grinding stone was placed in another. Above the chul hung the valani the rope on which the skins of dead animals would be dried. Baby Kamble notes the sense of humour of the women in the community referred to homes as their "palaces" and to the earthen pots and wooden spoons as "kings" and "queens" (40). This is humour, yet an ironic

tone of the poor. In times of food scarcity, the women would appeal to their husbands and ask them to gather wild berries at least for the children. Wild berries washed down with water would serve as the meal. Ironically, when there were epidemics among the cattle, it meant there was food in the community. Though the bodies of the sickly animals were sometimes rotten some parts could be retrieved. At other times, the men had to think about strategies to generate food. They were on the lookout for unsupervised grazing cattle and would feed some medicine to one of the buffaloes so that it would die in a day or two. They were often ready to bring in the dead animal even before the message of the owner reached their quarters. Dalit women cooked up for their share. If there was not enough firewood to cook the meat, it would be eaten almost raw. The women took great print in cooking the festive meal at the buffalo fair as they would try to cook gravy.

All the people of the Maharwada were illiterate except Kamble's father. Her people in the settlement lived in abject poverty. They had absolutely no electricity, and yet their hearts were full of kindness and love for each other. Only three or four among the houses were in good condition. The rest of the houses were stricken by poverty. The walls were nothing but stones arranged vertically with some mud coating. They were tiny huts really. During the festival time, women would polish the mud walls and the floor of the house with cow dung or buffalo dung. The Maharwada symbolised utter poverty and total destitution. Besides men made deprivation, epidemics, like cholera and plague were haunting epidemics that killed Mahars and they became victims. It is an irony that, whenever domestic animals die out of epidemics, the Mahar community would be happier to eat the meat. Dalits stormed the animals' flesh. The other livelihood of Dalit women is the hacking of firewood. Mahar women cut thorny prickles and spiny woods. Sometimes, the women's body would be pierced, and blood would be sprayed on the woods. In spite the difficulties, poor women would bring the woods to the houses of Bhramin for sale. But the upper caste women would instruct to check for any blood. It is found, it was considered pollution. An upper caste people's wedding comes in the village, the Mahar had to work to collect extra firewood for the occasion, and also had to clean dishes after the meal. In return, the Mahar community got the leftovers of the wedding, which were then distributed in the community. The women went to the village to sweep and clean the pandals (the huge tents constructed for marriage) and received all the leftovers of the preparations made for the wedding feast, but not the wage.

The yeskar Mahar, The Mahar whose duty was to work for the village at particular times has to wait upon the Patil's chawdi for the whole day. The Yeskar Mahar had to go and collect his wage in the form of alms at the upper caste houses every evening. "Johar Mai-Baap" traditional salutation from mahar to the upper castes, literally meaning, "I salute you as my mother and father" this kind of cultural and traditional oppressions were clamped on Dalits without mercy. The work of the yeskar often included tending to the horses of the visiting officials of the British and Indian Officers. Yeskar would be directed to tell his wife to arrange for grass stacks for the horses and to clean the stables. He had to arrange for firewood, give messages across the village, and all this are an empty stomach. The stick of the yeskar had bells, that rung out announcing his presence, whenever he went to ask for bhakri in the village at night. If the villagers hear the voice of the Mahar, when sitting down to eat, they had to put aside their full

plates. They dealt with the Mahar from a height and a distance. The various sections of Dalits were exploited in the name of culture, religion, and wealth. Yeskar Mahar collected a bundle of stale food and returned home where everyone was waiting to taste the leftover. The Yeskar was not even to allowed to voice in the upper caste street of his presence. His only freedom is to sound the bell.

Most of the Dalits were dependent on the leftover of the upper caste people. All the menial jobs have been given to the Mahar including cleaning the shit of the upper caste bride and bridegrooms. Mahar had a duty towards dead animals, he also had a duty towards the dead people. The merciless jobs imposed on Dalits are carrying death news and digging the grave. In the scorching sun, heavy rains and biting cold, the Mahar had to take the news even without food and wage. If upper caste family is close to the dead man, the Mahar had to carry the firewood to the cremation ground and wait at a distance. The Mahars have to deliver messages about deaths in the village and get the firewood ready for the funeral. Once the firewood was ready, they would wait on the sides to acquire the shroud that had covered the dead body and the bamboo that had carried it. This was kept away for building the house and the shroud was washed thoroughly and used by Dalits as a new cloth.

Siddalingaiah's the novel *Ooru Keri* portrays his life-long-struggles like poverty, caste atrocities, and treacheries in the village Magadi of Karnataka. "Ooru" is the decent settlement of the upper caste people where Dalits are not allowed to move as free as possible. It has all facilities like shops, schools, and government offices. Usually, it is separated by road, pond, bushes, and manmade walls. "Keri" is the colony where Dalits live, it is geographically separated from the main body of a village; socially, it is set off from the mainstream society. Siddalingaiah's childhood was submerged into poverty. His family belongs to farm laborers and gets low-income, sometime nothing. Going to day-school was a matter of social, political, and economic privilege during his childhood. Dalit students, including the author, had not been allowed to sit along with upper class students in the class room. Siddalingaiah grew up like any Dalit wanton boys-humiliated and unable to comprehend why his family was made to suffer. His early memories, he said, were of how his father was unable to find work in Magadi, causing the family to move finally to Bangalore. Hungry, suffering, and humiliation at odd jobs while studying are his chief memories; they made him to lose faith in God, and also mark the beginning of his Dalit introspection. Siddalingaiah eloquently articulates the evils of exploitation and their outcome. He reveals the experiences of day-to-day caste struggles, discrimination, poverty and identity crisis. His determination, creativity, and courage helped him to outwit the brutality of the caste system. Siddalingaiah's parents were illiterate and worked as farm labourers. Ainooru was a land-owner and had a beautiful house with a huge bore well with pum-set cabin. Dalits people were not allowed to get water from this well. However, they used to go to far off places for fetching water. Siddalingaiah never saw others but the Dalits used to drink water from the upper caste man's well. One day, his father took him to an orthodox Brahmin house. They gave them the previous night's leftover of Poori. He never saw and ate a complete food like the leftover, "stood in front of his house, he gave us the citrana and poori leftover from the previous night. I had never tasted these delicacies before..." (2-3).

though he stood in the front door, but interested on the leftover. He describes the pitiable conditions of the suppressed community who starve for daily bread.

Famine and natural disasters affect all people equally, but Dalits were considered the last beneficiaries. Those who are rich in wealth were given priority, but not the Dalits the untouchables in feelings. Siddalingaiah's mother worked as a sweeper in a Dalit hostel in Srirampura. Every day, after the hostel boys were served, the leftover was given to the workers. His mother used to take home the "mudde," and "saru" (meal). Leftover saves many of Dalits from starvation. In spite of abject poverty, Siddalingaiah attended free night-school. He began to realize self-respect and dignity from his teachers at the school. Babasaheb Ambedkar globalised the plight of untouchables by his educational knowledge, the author also began to earn self-empowerment through education, but he was not allowed to sit along with upper class students in the class room. Hungry, humiliation and odd jobs while studying are his chief social influences that made him to lose faith in God, and also marked the beginning of his Dalit introspection. He first emerged on the public scene as a student leader in the 1970s, a period when Dalit rights issues had begun triggering conflict with the upper classes. However, Siddalingaiah did not join active politics then because he had much work on hand. Although he was both a teacher and an activist, it is his autobiography and poems that brought fame to his experience as Dalit. His writings give a realistic expression of Dalit in the recent years.

Due to famine, Siddalingaiah's family moved to the slum side of Bangalore City, and his father worked in the nearby firewood depots to run the family. His people used to go to Shivanahalli tank and collected tuber, yams and greens to make night meal. They are their main food. The people of his colony got into debt by the Marwadi shop. Many times they even failed to pay the interest for the debt. In this way, Siddalingaiah's father became a huge debtor. One day two things beat him on the street. He was wailing and trying to escape. He was injured and his clothes were thorn. Siddalingaiah joined the Gopalaswamy Iyaer Hostel. It changed his life. Nearby the Iyaer Hostel, Kannadigas and Tamils lived together in Srirampura. He used to listen to their inspiring speeches. His friends were delighted, and they raised money for his expenses. He began to deliver speeches on Ambedkar and caste system, and won numerous cups as prizes. Consequently, he sold the cups to pay for his books and clothes. He acquired more knowledge about orthodox Hinduism and the caste system. He became a rationalist and started opposing Hindu beliefs. Siddalingaiah joined the Karnataka Association and was elected the Joint Secretary. He got an opportunity to associate himself with leaders like Dejawog, Mariyappa Bhatta, G.Venkatashbhaiah, and G.S. Shivarudrappa. He also founded a society called Vicharavadi Parishat and visited all Dalit hotels in Bangalore. The association brought out the problems of hygiene and food. He demonstrated the plight of Dalits to the Government of Karnataka. The then Chief Minister of Karnataka Shri Devaraj Urs agreed to increase the scholarship amount, and ordered to renovate Dalit hotels. Siddalingaiah, being attracted by Periyar's speeches, got the opportunity to meet Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker, who was invited to Bangalore. In this way, his political affairs improved with rationalism. He also published his poetry in the magazine Shudra. As a night school student, he realized the importance of night school. He started night schools for Bangalore's slum children. The night school enlightened many downtrodden lives. They shouted, "Do something to get us to attend your classes" (101).

Bama's novel *Karukku* portrays Dalits social status of a village in Tamil Nadu. The underprivileged are supposed to work for daily wages in Naicker's fields. She begins to narrate her own experiences which resemble the experiences of the Dalit community as a whole. In this sense, Dalit and African American autobiographies stand on same scale. As Lindon Baret in her "Self Knowledge, Law and African American autobiography: Lucy A Delaney's *From the Darkness Cometh the Light*," states, "African American autobiographies has been the relation between the individual and the communal"(105). Most of the agricultural land belonged to the Naicker [a land owning upper caste] community in madurai District, Tamil Nadu. Each Naicker's fields were spread over many miles. The fields were called olivishikkaadu, the fields known as mandavak kaadu, otthaalu kaadu, chadayaalu kaadu and the field with the lotus pond. Dalits people know all the fields by their names and turned up exactly where they were required to work. Bama's mother used to pick up field works to feed her children. Dalits people would go to the lake-side in the evening, pluck some wild green leaves like Kuppaikira or thoyilukkira, drumstick leaves, and eat them with quickly stirred and thickened ragi dough. During holidays, Bama worked in gleaning groundnuts, collecting firewood, and picking up dry dung. In some occasions Bama and her sister took available gruel, but her mother would suffer in hunger: Dalits worked in the field of the upper castes on daily basis. Their hard work was exploited half the time by the Naicker employers. There was no progress in the life of the Dalits. Along with Naicker, the tradesmen also swindled their hard work and labour. Bama went to work in the Naicker's field. Dalits were not allowed to touch the goods of the Naickers. The lives of the Dalits entirely depended upon the mercy of the Naicker. If Naickers families did not allow Dalits for any agricultural labour, then they would go up to the woods on the mountains, and make a simple living by gathering and selling firewood.

In India, each village is a heaven for contest between the upper castes. They are economically and socially strong. The untouchables are economically poor and numerically small. The world people may not even realize how caste is deep-rooted in beyond India. Upper caste people value a person's caste, rather than his/her humanity. In the novel *The Scar*, Gunasekaran unfolds deep pains and sufferings of his life and Dalit community in Southern Tamil Nadu. During his school days, he did weeding work in upper caste (Konars') farm land to meet his family and school expenses. He purchased second hand cloths for Deepavali. As a matter of fact, it is the low-caste people's economic status in all the states of India. In his village, whenever the irrigation tank has water in it, his grandmother used to take him to catch snails and slugs for their meat. Dalits were deprived a hygienic environment, they never ate a full meal, especially a decent meal.

To meet out poverty, Gunasekaran and his elder brother Karunanidhi would angle for fish in ponds from morning to evening most of the time without even lunch. Gunasekaran used to sell the fish in the streets of Ilayangudi and Padhur. He would buy rice with that money, and the entire family would have dinner at the night. He also sold Neem seeds in the season. Most mornings, his family members ate tamarind seeds as breakfast. His family lived in a rented house. This can be understood from the words of a notable politician and writer, Ravikumar, in his introduction to the novel *The Scar*. Gunasekaran remembered his pathetic condition in



the Ilayangudi village and his memories are experienced testimonies. The magnitude of caste superiority has devastated in his boyhood itself. This psychological humiliation made scar in his heart, which becomes a novel. It is the prevailing social experience in every corner of India. He already began to observe the post-independent social condition. It is a problem of the depravity of the whole society. He bemoans the fact that, the issue of communalism is not sidetracked as the problem of the Muslims. It is not just the problem of poverty and of a people lagging behind in the economic competition. The whole Indian society and polite is ranged against Dalits, which has got reflected in the writings. The Dalit leaders see the problem primarily in the sphere of society and polity, and secondarily in economy.

### **Summation of the Study**

The research paper has been explored the dramatic accounts of Dalit' social experiences in the caste hegemonic society of India. The theme of Dalit autobiographies are the social phenomenon and realities of Dalits. It traces the conditions of the Indian social forces that surround the Dalits, and their interaction with Dalits. It also explores how Dalits are denied equality and liberty socially, politically, and economically institutions the select Dalit autobiographies corroborate the conditions of contemporary Dalits in the different Indian States. All the authors depicted their deprived conditions of food, shelter, settlement, and culture within and around the Indian society. They also gave their traumatic memories of anti-Semitism, abuses, assaults, discriminations, injustices, and atrocities. In the process the study delineates the socio-economic, trauma, self-determination and annihilated faith on caste system.

In economic terms, many Dalits are agricultural coolies in large numbers. They were also called unskilled occupations. These agricultural coolies are formed different religions and communities. The constitution of India terms these groups the "socially and educationally backward classes," and authorities the government to provide them with special benefits to help them overcome their disabilities. One of the themes of most Dalit autobiographies is the socioeconomic conditions of Dalits in India. All selected writers of the study are described authors depict the poor conditions of food, shelter, settlement, and culture within and around the Indian society. They have also given their psychological impacts meted out by caste exploitations. Making sense of autobiographies is necessarily a culturally conditioned and socially reflexive process. Martin Barker, in *Comic: Ideology, Power and the Critics*, explains, "the first function of language is to establish social relations between human beings in society" (265). As a medium, autobiography authentically establishes the individual relationship of Dalits and non-Dalits. All the writers are integral part of the Indian society. Most of the sources and incidents used in the autobiographies are the productions of Indian society, which are the objects of the research, that bound up with the socio economic of state and society. Dalits neither manage economic problem nor escape from the caste prejudice. They have been living in mercy of the upper caste people. In fact, there are several aids from government and foreign countries to help them. They were victims of multiple social welfare and security.

In India Dalits have been deprived in multiple ways: denial of education, knowledge and access to resources like land, water and social involvement. The poor income and severe poverty

depress the Dalits. Premchand is known for realistic novels and he is regarded as the “Emperor of Hindi Novels”. He wrote about feudal system, slavery, and exploitation. His novels are portrayal of peasants as the leading characters and with village as centre of plot. Dalit writers are from the peasant family particularly daily wages. They do not have wealthy resources, but courage and determination.

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