

MAPPING THE SUBALTERN STANDPOINT: A READING OF SELECT DALIT FEMALE NARRATIVES

Ph.D. THESIS

by

YOGISHA



**DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ROORKEE
ROORKEE – 247667 (INDIA)
DECEMBER, 2018**

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OF SELECT DALIT FEMALE NARRATIVES**

A THESIS

*Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of degree*

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

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by

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis, entitled “**MAPPING THE SUBALTERN STANDPOINT: A READING OF SELECT DALIT FEMALE NARRATIVES**” in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and submitted in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee is an authentic record of my own work carried out during the period from July, 2014 to December, 2018 under the supervision of Prof. Nagendra Kumar, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee.

The matter presented in this thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other institution.

(**YOGISHA**)

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

(Nagendra Kumar)
Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

The present work endeavours to unearth and apprehend the Dalit female Standpoint as the unique slant to edifice and exhibit the consciousness of Dalit females in the select Dalit Narratives---- Bama's *Karukku* (1992) and *Sangati* (1994) Baby Kamble's *The Prison's We Broke* (2008), and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2009). It further reiterates the substantive efficacy of having a standpoint of one's own and the privileges of having it. It provides an aid in reconfiguring the life of a collective group as these standpoints are peculiar points of view which are available to those marginal people of this group who hold certain locations in the society due to various ideologies. This collective group is particularly destitute due to various social, political and psychological reasons. The group can be termed as Subaltern as it is thwarted and hegemonized by various power structures. The particular subaltern group upon which the present research focuses is the Dalit female group. It further talks about the particular location that affects the Dalit women group in various ways and constructs their knowledge regarding it. It provides them an objective knowledge due to their situatedness in it. It also denotes the self-referentiality of Dalit women which is another factor responsible for their claim of being an outsider-insider. This claim indicates the potential of their standpoint which enables them to look at both sides of a situation. This is an aspect of their Dalit standpoint which has been born out of their well speculated experiences. Further the study focuses upon the narratives written by these women which emerge as a site that contemplates the subject spirit of these women that is exclusively an outcome of their culturally embedded identities. It will be observed that these standpoints are not just the corollary of certain events but an upshot of the experiences gained by those events, when a group is located at a certain place in the society. The study also explores the phenomenon of difference that makes the Dalit women divergent from the mainstream of the society as their oppressions are intersectional in nature. It covertly connotes to the different understanding of the prejudice and domination which enables them to map their position in the social space using the known points. The charting of these known points denote the myriad possibilities for the emancipation of self and the collective group, one is concerned with. In addition, the study also considers the possibilities that can be helpful in highlighting these differences and clearly articulating the vision of the Dalit women. It also seeks to understand the oppositional consciousness driven by the procurement of Dalit Standpoint. Finally the study identifies that the standpoints signify the radical possibility that is intrinsic in the knowledge gained by the myriad experiences.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, the study relies upon textual analysis of the above mentioned novels using critical theorists and Dalit thinkers in the area of Standpoint feminism and Dalit literature respectively, such as, Sarmila Rege, Gopal Guru, Uma Chakravarti, Uma Narayan, Anand Teltumbde, Anupama Rao, Dorothy Smith, Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway etc. The study also draws upon the theories of Michel Foucault to understand the power dynamics and matrix of subjugation in the context of the Dalit Women. The study also acknowledges the contributions of Black female standpoint theorists and scholars to facilitating understanding of the composition of the Dalit female psyche as evinced in the novels selected for the study.

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-YOGISHA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Number	Description of the Contents	Page No.
	Candidate's Declaration	
	Abstract	i-ii
	Acknowledgement	iii-iv
	Table of Contents	v
Chapter 1	Introduction	1-45
Chapter 2	Presenting an Outsider Within: - Reading Subaltern Resistance in Bama's <i>Karukku</i>	46-67
Chapter 3	Women in Panopticon: Exploring Subordination of Subaltern in Bama's <i>Sangati</i>	68-96
Chapter 4	Subaltern Status: Baby Kamble's <i>The Prisons We Broke</i>	97-121
Chapter 5	Discourse of Muffled Pain: Intersection of Caste, Class, and Gender in Urmila Pawar's <i>The Weave of My Life</i>	122-151
Chapter 6	Conclusion	152-158
	Chapter –Wise Works Cited	159-174
	Bibliography	175-191
	Publication Details	192

Introduction

“Because they are so many, and so various, the people of India are also divided. It appears to have always been so”—Ramachandra Guha

The world has always remained split into binaries, this particular concept is the basis of this existing world, where one finds authority over the other, for instance, male-female, black-white, rich-poor, and upper caste-lower caste. This dichotomy has prevailed since ages and a chain of exploitation, oppression, and adjustments is going on. Most of the literatures of the world and theories represent this clash of contradictions and lapses of binaries upon each other, with the aim of disclosing various phases of society. We read various world literatures in the context of multiple issues regarding the social condition and cultural ambience that emphasize serious social concerns disturbing the consciousness of those at the lowest rung of the society. These particular literatures specially and specifically talk about them who are deprived of something by birth, facing abjection at every level and doomed to accept putative silence. The literatures of different countries deal with these issues, namely, race, heinous social taboos, caste et cetera but their sensibility remains the same as they are emerging with a view to interrogate and recover marginalized histories. These literatures also resist the boundaries of this divided, hegemonic system. This sensibility presented through the literatures is the other name of that awakened knowledge and consciousness of the subaltern, marginal, and oppressed folks who were rewarded with banned voice and silencing for ages. These subalterns are unjustly enmeshed in every sphere be it social, political or economic to create and maintain hierarchies of power. *Subaltern Series Studies*, released in 1986, is regarded as a watershed in scholarly inquest of the South Asian past and present. ‘Subaltern’ means someone of ‘lower rank’. As Guha describes it in the first volume of *Subaltern Studies Series*:

Word ‘subaltern’ in the title stands for the meaning as given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, that is, ‘of inferior rank’. It will be used...as a name for the general attribution of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way (19).

The above statement by Guha makes it clear that subaltern is someone who is lower in any context. In India such subalterns are called ‘Dalits’. Before we proceed to discuss the Dalit aesthetics, it is pertinent to ponder over the term 'Dalit' itself. Dalit, the word has its genesis in Sanskrit word ‘dal’ that means broken, oppressed and crippled, and all the words define the very existence of a ‘Dalit

person'. It came into light when used in some Marathi and Hindi newspapers as a translation for the 'Depressed classes' the term used by the British colonizers. Even Baba Ambedkar used the term Dalit while delivering speeches in Marathi. But the word got utmost recognition with the Dalit Panther's manifesto issued in 1973. These people are crushed under the weight of their lower caste. They get insulted, abused and slurred due to their lower caste. Their particular 'Dalit identity' has increasingly become the focus of concern to discern the social milieu. Thus Indian democracy has remained perplexed by the issue of caste, an inextricable dimension of a Dalit's life. Dalit's voice represented by Dalit literature raises qualm about the present condition of dalits and their abject position in the Indian society. It concentrates on the political spaces in which Dalits operate. They have been perpetually subjected to daily humiliations and atrocities and their literature literally brings out this issue as it peels off every layer of their horrible past which confines them to the prison of fatalism. They are confronting their past to question their present subaltern status. This is the ultimate aim of their writings as it always seems "peeling away the protocols of disciplinary power to reveal the presence of the obscure, subaltern subject" (Chakrabarty 5). So, if we squint at the topology of Dalit historiography we will get to know that our Vedic scriptures and teachings of 'dvija' Brahmins strengthen and consolidate the idea of a Dalit's despicable existence and traps them in this dichotomy of pollution and purity till the end of their lives. Similarly, Ghose brings out the perception of the privileged class with her remark on Dalit that "he is perpetually filthy" (84). An extremely holy hymn 'Purusasukta' given in 'Rig Veda' describes the origin of all four varnas. According to it, *Brahmin* (priest) is born from the mouth of Brahma, *Kshatriyas* (warriors) from the arms, *Vaishyas* (traders) from the stomach, and *Shudras* (servants) from the foot. Untouchables were not even included in these four *varnas*, they were out of it and considered as 'fifth Varna', the most repugnant, repulsive and repellent in their existence. These untouchables are today's 'Dalits'. The caste identity of these Dalits is based on laws of status and social ordering. There is discrimination within the varna divisions of caste society, such as *jatis*. There are, divisions within the divisions, which make this caste system an extremely integrated and indivisible part of Indian social culture and present an onerous challenge to Indian democracy. The situation of these Dalits can be compared with that of African-American as their experiences of injustice, inhumanity and violence seem alike. As Zelliott comments:

There is no difference between *the place* of the Negro in America and the step or the level of the untouchable in India....Both were confined in the prison of fatalism. To prolong this

imprisonment, the whites found authority in the Bible's myth and symbols, and the clean castes in the Vedas and Manusmriti (280).

In this manner both the Blacks and the Dalits are living under the hegemony of unjust social power structures and bearing their respective stigmas of 'black Skin' and 'lower caste' at every step of their lives. Instead of getting certain constitutional measures to protect themselves against any discrimination, the situation of Indian Dalits is not very good. They and other weaker sections revere the Constitution as the ultimate guarantor of their rights but this custom of caste is still unquestionably running into the minds and actions of upper caste people. It shows the spontaneous obedience and conformity of these powerful folks for this unjust culture of caste. Prior to 1935 they used to be called as 'depressed class' in census by British rulers and now they are termed 'Dalits'. India has completed 70 years of its independence, but caste still exists and discrimination based on it manifests itself in different forms.

In the past, the Dalits were believed to be so impure that caste Hindus considered their presence to be polluting and used to defile their very existence. The impure status was related to their historic hereditary occupations that Hindus considered to be polluting or debased, such as working with leather, working with night soil and other dirty work. Still some Dalit men are indulged in such occupations as sweeping, cleaning dirty gutters, skinning the dead animals and manual scavenging (although abolished by law in 1993 and later in 2013) which is still prevalent in some parts of India. According to Socio Economic Caste Census 2011, 180,657 households are engaged in manual scavenging for a livelihood. These people who are engaged in such activities are considered polluted beings, or untouchables. It has become a common feature of daily newspapers to bring horrible incidents of violence against Dalits, for instance- stripping them naked, burning them alive, and many other inhuman punishments given to them for trying to cross their limits and doing some harm to upper caste's superiority. As Rao says, "[D]alit body continues to be the site of recurrent stigmatization, making it a historical and a contemporary subject of suffering" (14).

Condition of Dalit men in the society is deplorable and they have shared it through their writings. They have come up with a range of literary genres to represent their condition. One of the pertinent examples may be Daya Pawar's autobiography *Baluta* (2012) which became a sensation in the world of Marathi literature. Pawar published his first poem in *Asmitadarsh* in 1967. Baburao Bagul, one of the pioneers of the Dalit Panthers, the Marathi writer, shot into fame with his 1963 collection

of short stories *Jenvha Me Jat Chorali Hoti*. His other major works of fiction were *Maran Sast Hot Ahe* (1969) and *Sood* (1970). Namdeo Dhasal's first collection of poetry *Golpitha* (1972) was another commendable collection voicing the life and concerns of the Dalit.

Ravikumar, co-founder of Navayana, a publishing house that focuses on issues of caste, has founded many little magazines. He edited *The Oxford India Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing*. *Venomous Touch: Notes on Caste, Culture and Politics* is a collection of his non-fiction work. Kanwal Bharti is also a noted Hindi Dalit writer. Surajpal Chauhan, winner of the Hindi Academy Award, is a prolific author of both poetry and prose. His poetry collections include "Prayas, Kyun Vishwas Karun", and "Kab Hogi Wah Bhor". Raja Dhale, another founding member of the Dalit Panthers, the Marathi writer, edited multiple little magazines. He published "Atta", a pamphlet-like 'unperiodical' in 1964, "Yeru" in 1967, "Tapasi" in 1968, and "Chakravarti" in 1969. His collection of poetry "Sthitichi Kavita (The Poetry of Circumstances)" was published by his own 'Atta Prakashan'. Raj Gowthaman worked with Tamil literary magazines in the 1980s and became known as an intellectual in the 1990s when Dalit writers took on the orthodox writers in Tamil Nadu. His critical work dealt with Tamil literature from a Dalit perspective and questioned the literary history of the language. Dev Kumar started the Apna Theatre group in 1992 to arouse Dalit consciousness in Uttar Pradesh. His popular plays are "Daastan", "Bhadra Angulimaal", "Chakradhari", "Sudharshan Kapat" and "Jamadaar Ka Kurta". Kailash Nath, another Dalit writer, is known for his autobiography *Tiraskar* (1999), which talks about the humiliation he had to face as a dalit. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) is considered one of the *tour de force* of the kind for its portrayal of sheer pain and piercing agony of a low caste sweeper boy, Bakha. Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalits Life* (2007) is another laurel of Dalit literature. It is an autobiography from a Dalit heart which compels one to reflect upon the humanly virtues. A very recent work by Manoranjan Byapari, *Interrogating My Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit* (2008) which is the translation of his remarkable memoir *Itibritte Chandali Jivan* presents the poignant outcry of a Dalit man who thinks he is cursed forever for being a Dalit. All these works make us rethink about new formations of anti-Dalit violence.

Plight of Dalit women is even worst as they suffer double marginalization due to their caste and gender. They are equally mistreated by the upper caste men as well as the men of their own community. They face sexual humiliation, economic deprivation, social expulsion, because of

being a ‘Dalit among the Dalits. The National Crimes Records Bureau data also brought out that most of the crimes against SCs reported were crimes against women, including assault, sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism and insult to modesty. Some of the women of Dalit section got educated and raised voice for their own community. These women come from different regions of India but their consciousness as a person from the Dalit caste remains the same. They are radical in their approach as they want to shake the powerful system to draw its attention towards their grave concerns. A system that is ready to take their services in every sphere of their lives but never wants to make them a part of it. Shantabai Krishnabai Kamble’s autobiography in Marathi named, *Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* (1986) is considered the first autobiographical narrative by a Dalit woman writer. Meena Kandasamy is an Indian poet, fiction writer, translator and activist who is based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Most of her works are centered on feminism and the anti-caste Caste Annihilation Movement of the contemporary Indian milieu. Meena has published two collections of poetry namely, *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010). Two of her poems have won accolades in all-India poetry competitions. From 2001-2002, she edited *The Dalit*, a bi-monthly alternative English magazine of the Dalit Media Network. P. Shivakami’s *The Grip of Change* (2006), and *The Taming of Woman* (2012) are also commendable additions in the list of publications by dalit women. Sujatha Gilda has very recently written a novel named, *Ants among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India* (2017) which describes the story of an untouchable family from Andhra Pradesh and their struggle against the stigma of untouchability. Marathi Dalit academician Kusum Pawde’s classic essay, “The Story of my Sanskrit” (1981) unravels extremely moving and inspiring account of her own journey from manual scavenger in rural Haryana to Sanskrit professor in the capital. This particular essay is an extract from her autobiography *Antasphot* (1981). The most consequential aspect of these narratives is the strong sense of individual assertion and factual yet unsentimental tone.

The study of all these particular narratives written by these Dalit females show the most vulnerable, deprived and underprivileged section of Dalit community living at the margins of society. It shows their collective political will to topple the massive social structure which is profound, shattering and furious. But the unfortunate reality is that prevailing forces of orthodoxy and reactions demonize, humiliate and attempt to subdue whosoever confronts the gigantic caste system. But we can still find some bright spot in these narrative as they demonstrate a craving for getting into the centre which is extremely important for one’s emancipation. As Spivak observes that: “I think it is

important to acknowledge our complicity in the muting, in order precisely to be more effective in the long run” (309). Dalit women are using their past experiences which might be slightly varied due to the different regions they come from but their aesthetics, consciousness and the feeling of being lowly remain the same. These experiences need to be portrayed on the literary canvas. As Scott says: “When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject ... becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built” (305). The past through which these females have gone can never remain detached from their whole psyche as their development at every step of life comes from their location in society. The location of an individual, which is a very important element of Standpoint theory, signifies not only one physical location rather it is also a symbol of their overall growth. It indicates their thinking process, their response, and their way of perceiving certain situations that take place in the society regarding one’s community and its condition. The issues which these Dalit women bring up were probably neither taken seriously by women’s movement nor by the Dalit movement in general. As Manorama says, “The lives of Dalit women have been characterized by ‘culture of silence’, as they have lacked a political, economic, and social ‘space for utterance’ for centuries” (259).

Smith, a leading proponent of Feminist Standpoint reiterates the same:

There is a gap between where we are and the means we have to express and act. It means that the concerns, interests, and experiences forming “our” culture are those of men in positions of dominance whose perspectives are built on the silence of women and of others (*The Everyday World* 19).

Aforementioned extract divulges the fact that this kind of discrimination is very much a part and parcel of contemporary India where we now and then hear, read and watch mind-boggling and spine-chilling atrocities against ‘Dalit women.’ The heinous reality of a Dalit woman’s life needs grave attention but still it gets minimal inspection by the other literary people and above all by our country.

This parochialism of literature has been put to question and now the Dalit writers are looking for alternative literary traditions which find their material in the otherwise discarded lives and experiences of Dalit people. Although since the beginning all the women are treated as secondary to men and considered weaker in relation to their male counterpart; the condition of Dalit women is more deplorable compared to other upper and middle class women as they are triply excluded

from society. They are facing humiliation every day because of their caste, class and gender. They were least represented by those in power. Even the movement led by upper caste females for liberation of women did not address the grave issues which these lower caste women face in their daily lives. Under the pseudo agenda of sisterhood, they were keen at addressing their problems rather than having any genuine concern for their lower caste sisters. Even in the literature of these upper caste people these Dalit females make appearance as stoical, impassive, and uncomplaining. Guru supports the argument in unequivocal terms:

Beneath the call for women's solidarity the identity of the Dalit women 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 appearances in a text or a speech of non-Dalit women and instead organized on their own terms (Dalit Women Talk 2549).

Above mentioned quote makes it clear that the scanty role of Dalit women in every social activity halts their progress. However, they are taking a step ahead by the boon of education and coming up with a literature of their own. Their literature has got popularity after 90's, first it came into regional languages for instance, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu and later got translated into English and other languages. This is the reason that this literature by Dalit women has got wider readership in India and across the world and now is making a unique recognition of its own as Dalit Feminist Literature. Its aim is to sensitize the rest of the world about the plight of Dalit women and draw attention of government and upper caste people for the betterment of their social, economic and political conditions. As of now they are destined to be led by some authority or some hegemonic structure that can interpellate them in the name of providing some significance and substance to their lives. As Marx says, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (qtd.in Grant 57). This particular quote by Marx accumulates a whole lot of significance in the context of the mentality of hegemonic institutions which have branded the Dalits as the ultimate legislators of misfortune and tribulations. Such hegemonic power structures discourage these lower caste groups to rise upward and raise a voice against the horrific kind of discrimination they get in society. Casteism affects the life chances, opportunities, and freedom for these Dalits in many spheres, including loving someone and living peacefully. The Indian constitution provides various measures to protect its citizens from various kinds of discriminations. It provides certain legal safeguards to the Dalit

community, as in context of untouchability, inequality and injustice of any kind prevalent against them. Article 14 gives equality in front of law, Article 17 prohibits untouchability in any form and has been considered heinous as well as punishable. The Civil Right Act of 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Act of 1989, aim at ensuring equality and protection to the marginal people. But unfortunately the social reality proves contrary to all these safeguards and seems to subserviently genuflect to upper caste Brahmanical hegemony. All the tall claims seem futile when we read in newspapers and watch on social media that Dalit people are being beaten and paraded naked, not only in rural areas but also the urban ones have become an epicentre of all such unfortunate activities. Dalits also face discrimination at their work places, educational institutes or anywhere where they have to share a common space with upper castes and powerful people. In our country they are just victims of seer tokenism and lip-services in the name of emancipation provided by higher authorities. The issue of Dalit community and Dalit women has not only been taken up at domestic level but at the international level as well. For instance, 2001 ‘Durban Conference’ in South Africa, that was specially conducted for the rights of minorities and underprivileged all around the world, ‘Hague Conference’ for ‘Human Right and Dignity of Dalit Women’ and very recently special rapporteur Rita-Izsak-Ndianye’s report presented in UN on caste based discrimination is a candid proof that these issues are taking a global form and the whole world understands the severity and gravity of such subhuman/inhuman practices. Now the time is changing and the subsumed voices of these subalterns are getting a new breath by a literature of their own, which is coming into prominence as ‘Dalit female literature’. The literatures produced by these females allow for a unique manner of circulating their subjective experience. They radically work as instruments of collective resistance and interrogate the system which relegates them to the margins of society. Through their literature, Dalit females are taking a stand for their condition and making us aware of the despotic realities of their lives. We can use the accounts of these less powerful people through their literature to gain insights into how power operates and to reveal differences between what is “claimed” to be true and what these Dalit females actually experience.

The central aim of their literature is not to disrupt the social order but to give voice to a reified Dalit experience. It represents their womanly consciousness which seeks *shiksha*, *svavalamban*, and *svabhiman* (Education, Self-Reliance, and Self Respect), things that have been denied to them by the privileged dominant groups for centuries. Writings by these subaltern females are *ipso facto* a

symbol of their growing female consciousness. Learner describes female consciousness in her work, as:

The awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but is societally determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternate vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination (155).

The source of Dalit women's awakened consciousness is their movement, known as Dalit feminist movement. They became aware of the harm done to them, to their basic rights and this made them aware of their social condition. Tracing the history of their movement, it has passed through various phases. Initially females, in general, have raised their voice for their rights for different reasons, as they were always considered inferior and lesser than their male counterparts. But the consciousness has always remained alike. The core of their distress has always remained a desire for getting rights and privileges equal to their men and counterparts from other upper castes. Dalit women were bearing the curse of their fate, their identity as a lower caste poor person. But these movements got started much earlier in the west. In the western countries, women raised their voice at the very beginning and later it inspired the women in other parts of the world to seek a path of emancipation for themselves. Travelling from west, this movement has engaged women at global level in its coverage. Although a proper feminist movement came at a later stage the signs of angst and dissatisfaction were present since a long time regarding the choices, space and freedom of women's lives. It can be observed from the work of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Bronte sisters, and Sylvia Plath etcetera; all of them show a kind of repressed exhaustion towards the prevalent social norms. These women were somewhere the crusader for the beginning of a formidable feminist movement that became an incentive to spur the consciousness of millions of women towards their rights, space and freedom in western society.

Let's ferret out the beginning of feminist movement. It is a benediction of women of the western countries, who raised their voice for voting rights, social equality and legal rights. These women can broadly be categorized as radical, liberal and socialist in their approaches while dealing with their concerned issues. They have covered all those spheres of their lives where they were treated

as unassertive, yielding and subservient. In the beginning some women known as 'Protofeminist' (they were feminist before the actual feminist movement started) came in France as described by Simone de Beauvoir (Extremely famous for her feminist work "*The Second Sex*") for instance, Christine de Pizan who wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love) in 13th century against dominant clerical misogyny, Modesta di Pozzo di Forzi, a venetian writer famous for her posthumously published work *Il merito delle donne* (The Worth of Women, 1600) and some others were also there who were raising voice for the emancipation of female rights such as: 'Marie Le Jars de Gournay' (*The Equality of Men and Women* (1622) and *The Ladies' Grievance* (*Les femmes et Grief des dames*, 1626) , Anne Bradstreet, an American author, had written many works dedicated to females and 'Francois Poullain de la Barre' wrote during the 17th century. Arrival of these Proto feminists on the global scene was a turning point of the feminist movement, it provided a boost to the confidence of other women who were craving to reform their individual as well as social conditions.

Feminist movement can be divided into three parts popularly known as 'three waves of feminism.' First wave (begins in early 19th century and till 20th) basically was for the 'right of suffrage' means for voting rights. Most famous feminist thinker of this wave was Mary Wollstonecraft, who had written *A Vindication of The Rights of Women* (1792) based on the democratic rights of Rousseau. Second wave (Around 1960) focused on sexuality, family and workplace, reproductive rights and de facto inequalities. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, was the most popular text of this period. In second wave only bell hooks, Audre Lorde and other black feminists advocated for some extremely serious issues of black women's lives. They introduced the world to the black woman's life, which is trapped into various interlocked systems of power. They developed the concept of intersectionality which was given its name by Kimberley Crenshaw. This concept is of the view that women experience subjugation in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. All these oppressions are not only interrelated, but also bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. This concept can also be correlated with the conditions of a Dalit woman's life how various power structures suppress her life to create a matrix of domination and strangles it into caste, class and gender. Third wave feminism which came around 1980s raised voice against gender violence and rape, reclaiming reproductive rights, and transgender rights etcetera. All these waves were a little different regarding the intensity and issues but they always

touched upon one of the perennial foci that is, Equality. Equality in every basic right, be it political, social or economic.

These three feminist movement waves can be divided further into three categories and it shows a gradual kind of progress in the consciousness of womankind. It shows how the raised voices of these women also impacted the work written by them. These stages were defined by Elaine Showalter in her work *Towards a Feminist Poetics* as (1) The Feminine phase (1840–1880) in which women just imitated the writing procedure of males. (2) The Feminist phase (1880–1920) in this phase women reacted against the way men were writing and challenged them. (3) The Female phase (1920-) in this phase, women paid much attention towards self –discovery and experiences of their own. These movements raised by western females inspired the women worldwide to raise their voice against the inequality and humiliation against them.

Indian feminism also got inspired by the global feminism. But due to the social, political and cultural differences in comparison with western society, it becomes important to lay out a specific history of feminism in India. As we get to know the history of Indian feminism, we notice that the emphasis of Indian feminism has not been on the individual's issues but rather on collective issues with significant political ramifications.

There were many active groups in India from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, including the Brahmo Samaj, The Arya Samaj and the National Social Conference, who aimed at making India a modern nation by their teachings and philosophy and one of their major concerns was improving the condition of women in Indian society. Tarabai Shinde, a revolutionary participant of Satyashodhak Samaj, wrote a revolutionary article in 1882 namely *Stri-Purush Tulana*, which described the status of women at that time. Talking about the post-independence period Desai and Krishnaraj say, “women have been looked upon either as victims of social practices or targets for development as in the post-independence period, but never as participants in development”(qtd.in Ghosal 799).

If we consider the mobilization of Indian women, then it starts with their role in India's political struggle against imperialism. They came out of their homes to accompany Indian leaders. During their role in Indian National Movement, some females voiced their own concerns as females, as Jackson makes a remarkable comment here, she says, “[t]he activity of women in the nationalist movement radicalized some of them into articulating their own grievances, drawing parallels

between imperialist oppression and patriarchal oppression”(Introduction 5). Initially Gandhian socialists conducted several women’s movement against alcohol consumption in north India and anticorruption and trade unions in west India. There were several Maoist groups also that were working for the cause of the females namely: The Progressive Organization of Women in Hyderabad and The League of Women Soldier in Aurangabad but both were crushed under the wake of state emergency in 1975. First socialist–feminist conference took place in Bombay in 1978 but these groups specifically focused upon the problems of their region and in the same vein ‘Delhi Group’ came up. By 1979-80 such movements spread all over India, and their main focus was dowry murder, police rape (Mathura case). First demonstrations came against Dowry murder started in 1979 which caught the attention of media. Public/private dichotomy broken as women came out of home and work places to demonstrate their anger over the system.

India women’s movement has been considered a broader phenomenon in Indian politics yet it seems quite elusive and evasive concurrently to frame Indian Feminist Movement in a rigid timeframe but through the historical sources it seems to have emerged in its final shape in mid-1970. Initially it was decentralized as it had various tendencies, for instance, there was differences in the urban and rural based movement, at the level of region and at national level also demands were different yet complimentary. At the time of colonial rule in India, question of women condition was central to most of the social reform movements. As Jackson says,

There was no uniform movement for reform of gender practices, but different campaigns on specific issues were taken up at different times in different parts of India. The main issues included sati (widow burning), female infanticide, child marriage, purdah (female seclusion) and restrictions on female education (4).

These spatial differences in movement were also responsible for the different ideologies working behind it. Various organizations were working within the movement with the paramount aim of influencing and compelling the government to take an urgent notice of their issues. Movements were raised for the sake of Community as well as Individual empowerment. Different types of movements were effective at promoting different goals. Movement raised in 70’s had a miscellaneous group comprising members from wealthy, educated middle class, socialist and communist etc. Initially their purposes were: 1) To awaken the consciousness of women and to make them aware of their inferior position compared to their men. 2) To declare that their inferior

positions are neither acceptable nor moral. These women wanted liberty, equality, protection under law from various kinds of violence. As it has been mentioned that different parties were also the part of Indian feminist movement, it had people from the Right wing also but this particular group was not utterly radical in its approach towards the division of gender roles as it seem protective of the institution of family and refrained from attacking the relation between men and women. Right wingers were against dowry murder but not against the concept of it. They were demanding equality based on gender, improvement in women education, health, and best legal remedy in the event of rape, dowry deaths, and violence. It was in that sense contradictory to the western feminism. Democrats and Modernizers were also part of the movement who were primarily focusing upon the protection of the basic human rights. These divisions further led to conflicts. As there were various groups from different parties, “these include the Janata Party’s Mahila Dakshata Samiti, the Communist Party of India’s National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), the Communist Party of India-Marxist’s All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA), and the All-India Coordinating Committee of Working Women (AICCWW)” (Calman 943). There were other agencies working since the time of Emergency in the nation (1975) namely- All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) and Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). AIWC worked voraciously for women education and later it collaborated with Women’s Indian Association and formed National Federation of Indian Women. There was Mahila Dakshata Samiti, which was based in New Delhi with affiliated branches in different states. There were certain organizations which were working as autonomous groups as *Saheli* in Delhi and the Women’s Center in Bombay. These organizations used to provide counselling to women who were facing problems as health issues, domestic violence and low wages etc. In the same vein there were empowerment groups which were working to empower individual woman and dealt with their employment concerns. They were primarily concerned for the empowerment of poor women at individual as well as community level in urban and rural areas. They were giving voice to economic and social rights rather than civil rights. They were of the opinion that a woman should have the right to determine her own rights and well-beings. These empowerment wings names were: SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association) founded by Ela Bhatta in Ahmedabad. It was a kind of Gandhian socialist union of women vendors. Annapurna Mahila Mandal in Bombay was founded by Prema Puro. WWF (Working Women’s Forum) was founded by Jaya Arunahcalam. There were certain urban think tanks as the Research Unit on Women’s Studies of SNDT University in Bombay and Center

for Women's Development Studies in New Delhi. Their tasks were to empower women in decision making, economic self-reliance and social development. The release of the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) named *Towards Equality* in May 1975 created a similar effect as the creation of the President's Commission on the Status of Women in USA in 1961. It created an immediate demand for government action. The report was an extensive account of the deteriorating condition of women in all the spheres of their lives be it family, education, religion, health or political arena. It could not make much impact due to national emergency (1975) and much of its recommendations could not be implemented. Various journals came up which were printing about these movements namely: *Manushi* in 1979, *Kali for Women* in 1980s and *Streelekha*, the most prominent ones, which worked as keeping the record of these social uprisings. According to the upper castes providing justice was the responsibility of the state whereas the Dalit women found the state unable to reform their conditions. 1980's marked a new turn in the movement. In India feminist movement was treating the sufferings of all women at an equal line so the real tragedy of the 'Dalit women' could not get sufficient attention. As Ghosal says, "In colonial India social reform movement's modernized gendered relations in some upper caste families while dispossessing lower caste women of their rights in attempt to homogenize the women as a group renouncing caste and community specific practices and problems" (794).

The women's liberation conference in Patna in early 1988 gave a major boost to the Indian People's Front and Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini in eastern India. During 1990's women started demanding quotas in women's reservation bills *Shibir*s were there to share and build ideological understanding and make plans for collective action. Small *Tarun Mandal*'s were also there for decision making. The Chipko Movement was also a part of the broader Indian Feminist movement. It was conducted in Uttarakhand, which was part of Uttar Pradesh state at that time. It added one more dimension to the feminist issues as these women conducted demonstration to save the tree and opposed deforestation. These forests were a mandatory resource to save human lives as well as the provider of their livelihood.

Indian Politics was taking a turn and there was the rise of Hindutva forces after 1980s and later there was an emergence of caste based parties which made efforts to organize Dalit women independently. With the activities of these caste based parties National Federation of Dalit women came up in 1987. Tomar, a perceptive critic justifies it by pitching for a different consideration for

marginalized women: “Dalit women are not only marginalized within feminist organizations, but also their concerns are not recognized” (23). Dalit women always got sidelined by the feminist movements because of their degraded social standing. As a result, a need was felt for an organization that will fight for the rights of the Dalit women. Ruth Manorama and *The Dalit Mahila Sanghata* formed ‘The National Federation of Dalit Women’ in 1993 taking a leaf out of the 'Hindu Code Bills' (1955-56) proposed in the Indian parliament by B.R. Ambedkar, the then Law Minister of India. “An independent and autonomous assertion of Dalit women’s identity found its first expression in the formation of national federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) at Delhi on August 11” (Guru, *The Women Talk* 2548). First national level meeting of Dalit women took place in Bangalore under the auspices of the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement. By introducing all these changes these women increasingly became aware of their social position. It became the first step in recognition of the pervasiveness and depth of prejudice in society. The 1990s has a unique significance in the history of Indian feminism, precisely this was the time when Dalit women started asserting their rights and questioning the attitude of upper, middle, and high caste women towards them. They also questioned the privileging of upper caste women over them.

Dalit feminism can be seen blooming in three ways:

- Theorization of intersectionality of caste, class, and gender by the Dalit female writers.
- Publication of autobiographies, which express the doomed existence of these Dalit females under the burden of their low caste and their gender as being poor females, by Dalit women writers
- Assertion of Dalit identity through creative and critical works by Dalit and non-Dalit female writers.

Feminist movement, led in India by upper caste females, was basically raising issues related to domestic violence, dowry, unequal wages and land reforms, issues typical to middle class upper caste women, but nowhere the issue of caste was ever raised. As Rege comments “A new need was felt among the feminist groups to critique feminism’s blindness to caste” (23). After the Report of Mandal-Commission, set up by the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai to provide help to socially and educationally backwards, the Other Backward Classes (OBC), Schedule Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) were provided reservations in certain government jobs. Upper-caste people

declared that they totally deny any kind of reservation for these non-meritorious groups. This kind of attitude of upper class people shows their caste prejudice. This kind of upper caste attitude affected all the people of these marginalized groups. Even upper caste females did not strongly advocate for the cause of Dalit females. Rege says that “the present Brahmin leadership of the women’s movement universalizes the experience of women by treating ‘women’ as a category and promotes personal politics” (qtd. in Datar 2965). The quote mentions that women were treated as homogenous group by Brahmin women rather than reflecting upon their specific problems and concerns. Most of the scholars have neglected the intersections of gender, caste, and class and their impact on the lives of Dalit females, as it has been observed by scholar Chakraborty: “Caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organizing principles of the Brahmanical social order and despite their close interconnections neither the scholars of the caste system nor the feminist scholars have attempted to analyze the relationship between the two” (Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy 579). It can be comprehend from the above quote that Dalit women are trapped in an intersectionality of gender, caste and class that makes their condition more infuriating and vexatious. Their life is on the axes of oppressions that further make a matrix of subjugation upon them. The issues and oppressions of these Dalit women are different and excluded But to solve the core concerns of the Dalit females, such an intersectionality of various issues has to be taken immediately under consideration.

The life-conditions of Dalit women were never taken into consideration with suitable solutions. Even the foregone discourses have presented them in a very subdued manner like feeble and helpless creatures. This kind of polarity and differences were present in the past and are still going on in some form or the other forcing Dalit women to fight their own battle. Upper caste society and powerful people have always tried their best and used their agencies and apparatuses to control and to subjectivize the whole identity and ideology of Dalit women. They have consumed all their social, political and economic freedom from every sphere of their life. They are just trapped in the dark ghettos of marginality and subordination.

The mainstream women’s movement did not consider the caste based discrimination and violence of the Dalit women. As Subramaniam says: “[E]mphasizing women’s common oppression as a fundamental basis for unity in struggle did not address reality. The inability to accommodate intersecting systems of class, caste, ethnicity, and religious power relations in organization building

created tensions and divisions” (637). Indian feminist movement has always remained part of social and political movements in India but it has never taken the question of Dalit women seriously who were reeling in the pain of being an extremely marginal creature. They were and still are caught in an intersectionality of triple burden of being poor, Dalit and woman which has strangled their lives. This gravity of their issue has never been considered seriously by any feminist movement in India. Gupta makes a noteworthy comment regarding the role of these reformist groups in the lives of ‘untouchables and says that, “The upper caste ‘reformist-nationalists’ sought to reclaim and incorporate the ‘untouchables within a putative Hindu community and nation...through a politics of pity, coercion, care and control” (The Gender of Caste 57-58). The above mentioned quote rightly points towards the hypocrisy of the upper caste people who want to keep the paradigm of their superiority and cleanliness under their pseudo affection for the lower caste people.

All these situations bring to light the perpetual sorrow in the lives of Dalit females. Since the time the whole nation was reeling under the cruel dictatorship of colonizers, these Dalit women were facing several other problems too except caste. This problem was of Dalit patriarchy. Dalit men were replicating the same mechanisms against their women which their high caste adversaries had used to dominate them. All this made these Dalit women Dalit within the Dalits.

As a whole, Dalit women remain excluded from all those reforms which could have reformed their individual identity and life conditions during pre-independence. But in this direction the first remarkable step was taken by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule by opening a school for untouchable girls and widows in 1848. All these sufferings relegate the identity of a Dalit woman to a particular location. Location denotes the kind of place they get in social hierarchy. As Moi apprises, “what is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies” (qtd.in Staniland, 100).The position of these marginal people defines their own perception on their conditions which ultimately construct their ‘standpoint.’ Jagger also comments:

[B]ecause the ruling class has an interest in concealing the way in which it dominates and exploits the rest of the population, the interpretation tactics of reality that it presents will be distorted in characteristic ways. In particular, the suffering of subordinate classes will be ignored, re-described as enjoyment or justified as freely chosen, deserved or inevitable. Because their class position insulates them from the suffering of the oppressed, many members of the ruling class are likely to be convinced by their own ideology (370-71).

The above mentioned extract makes it clear that the people in position of power always describe the society in its all benefits, everything as perfect without giving any heed towards the pain of dispossessed groups and people who are suppressed, ignored and always under the threat of danger. The painful situations of these ignored people give them power of perception that they can actually see the injustice and wrongs done to them and can criticize the existing interpretation of reality made by powerful people. In this manner, these marginal and ignored beings can develop a new and less distorted view of the existing society.

The dimensions of Dalit women's sufferings and violence are different from other women of upper castes. Their lower caste status always brings havoc upon their day to day life. They go out for work, earn for their family, perform filthy tasks also to earn for a living. But the society never accepts them and instead considers them filthy, dangerous and deceitful for performing all such tasks. The condition of upper caste females is different as the title of upper caste always gives them an edge over everything else. These females do not have to prove their purity as their privileged upper caste status has considered them eternally pure. As Gupta says, "The image of the morally virtuous dominant caste woman was conjugated against negative portrayals of the Dalit woman, who was seen as loud, raucous, unfeminine, uncultured, and shameless" ((MIS) Representing the Dalit 156). But these Dalit females are very much aware of their deteriorating situations. So by their narratives they want to portray these naturalised gender-caste difference societies in history where one is always privileged over the other, power is in the hands of those who are economically strong and secured by their caste and creed. So Dalit literature is also the product of all these situations which expounds the historical realities in which individual is conditioned by all social and ideological apparatuses, and interpellated by experiencing the hegemonic order of the power structure. Dalit women, forming an essential part of the Dalit castes, have been treated in a grossly unfair manner by the upper castes as well as by their own men. They have been trapped in the web of socio-cultural prejudice and inequality, and crushed under the feet of patriarchal system. The historical realities of their society have always prevented them from active participation in the social practices as they have been pushed to the margins with almost negligible education. As a result, the Dalit Literature by Dalit women is a rare commodity and its *raison d'être* is to bring all those conditions on the social portal that make these Dalit females the most marginal and deprived being. It is also an event which came into existence much later compared to the other disadvantaged groups. For centuries, they had been rendered 'voiceless' by the society and they seem to be

lamenting the inability of caste society to treat a human being inhumanly. But now they are raging a rebellion against an injustice that seems *ad-infinitum* onerous to solve. These lines by Lanjewar seem appropriate in her poem 'Caves'

I have been silent all these day/Listening to the voice of right and wrong/But now I will fan the flames/For human rights.//How did we ever get to this place? /This land which was never mother to us? /Which never gave us even /The life of cats and dogs? /I hold their unpardonable sins as witness/And turn, here and now, /A rebel (qtd. in Dangale 19).

Above lines of the poem reveal the repressed anger of a Dalit woman's heart and also her craving to belong to this nation. She wants to get associated with her country in a humanly manner, wants to get treated equally like other countrymen. These lines denote the desire of those millions of Dalit women who have subdued sorrow and restrained exasperation at the same time. They are bearing the burden of centuries old prejudices and customs, which are hard to die. Although these biased customs are getting waned slowly by some constitutional measures but still those institutional frameworks which nurture and sustain them linger upon their lives. That is why there is an earnest need for the Dalit community to get determined for themselves and create that consciousness in themselves for the upliftment of an individual and all. Limbale says that, "a Dalit writer must possess a particular consciousness...he must have commitment. When he removes consciousness and commitment, he will no longer be a Dalit writer" (158). Geetha delineates about the writings of marginal beings that "literature produced by historically marginalized communities, it has been argued, can function as an important tool for social change. However, much depends on how this literature is received and interpreted" (10). Limbale again asserts that "the Dalit is untouchable" (136). They are the people who belong to the lower caste in the hierarchy of caste system in Indian society:

Harijans and Neo-Buddhist are not the only Dalits. The term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm-laborers, the suffering masses, nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word, it will not do to refer only to the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to be included (Limabale 11).

Dalit scholarly trajectory propagates the fact that the whole poetics of it is based upon the inexorable and relentless nexus between resistance and repression. This recognition or awareness of this

repression leads to resistance that comes in the form of Dalit literature. The present research presents this nexus as an ever existing phenomenon in the lives of Dalit people in general and Dalit women in particular. Their literature is a 'literature of protest'. Dalit women are also involved in using their might for portraying the figure of their tragic conditions on the literary canvas challenging the Universalist claims of both caste and female subject. As Deo says that for Dalit women writing then becomes an avenue for recording, protesting, and expressing personal as well as group experience, "theorizing their epistemological and ontological locations within their community by writing the tales of their suffering" (Dalit Literature in Marathi 302). The particular statement made by Deo signifies the hidden cause in the writing of Dalit women. Their writings expresses as well as examine the hidden causes behind their tragic condition and it also challenges the factors responsible for their exclusion and derailment in society. One's location determines various things including their social conditions, economic as well as psychological status. Location also denotes the manner in which a person reacts to the outer world or gets impacted by it. In case of Dalit people, they are well aware of their social location, which determines their social conditions. The lower caste identity of Dalits has engraved them as eternally filthy worthless trash destined to be at the bottom to get crippled at every step of their lives. Social spectrum contains people with various mindsets and various approaches towards certain social problems. In India also various non-Dalits raise their voice for the causes of this marginal section but their empathy and shallow pain is inadequate to understand the depth of real Dalit experience and the grave concerns of their lives. Dalits ask more than empathy. And that is why it seems that only a Dalit can understand the real pain and sensibility of his/her people and that is what makes their discourses a candid description of their tragic life and raises a strong voice for a 'Dalit standpoint'. According to Dangle, "The Dalit sensibility shows a deep concern for the Dalit point of view and an outstanding work of Dalit literature would be born only when Dalit life would present itself from the Dalit point of view" (270). The words of Dangle seem to be penetrating into a Dalit's sensibility. He tries to bring out what these people actually feel when they write? Why their point of view is necessary while making any kind of opinion regarding them. The reason for all these issues is that because a Dalit lives as a Dalit and gets treatment everywhere as a Dalit. They know the kind of difference that exists in society between them and those (upper caste powerful people). They are very well aware of their conditions as well as the conditions of those who are responsible for their

oppression and subjugation. That is why their point of view is extremely necessary for any transformation.

The roots and history of Dalit literature can be traced back in the teachings and works of Gautama Buddha, Chokhamela, Mahatma Phule, S.M. Mate, and most importantly in the works of B.R. Ambedkar. Before Ambedkar, who has always inspired his people to rely on self-help and self-respect, there were some other writers for instance, Gopalbaba Valangkar, Pundit Kondiran, and Kisan Phagoji Bansod etcetera, they were all from Maharashtra, which is said to be the major place for the birth of Dalit literature. Now this Dalit literary canon has come to its full bloom as there are a large number of Dalit male writers who are publishing their works. Writings of B.R. Ambedkar add a laurel to this Dalit literary world for instance, *Castes in India- their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1916), *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) and *Who Were the Sudras* (1948). According to Dangle, “Their literature is, thus, characterized by a feeling of rebellion against the establishment, of negativism and scientificity” (237). Dalit, the term can be categorized as those people who were declared as untouchables according to Hindu scriptures, especially, *Manusmiriti*, written by saint Manu, this text does not even include these untouchables in ‘Varna system’. Now a days these people are considered as SC (schedule caste), ST (schedule tribe) and other tribal folks. The term ‘Dalits’ now includes all the marginalized and subaltern groups of society. As Dangle reiterates:

Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles of those in the lowest strata of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principle of negativity, rebellion, and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary (264).

Dalit people are unfortunate not to have a dignity of their human existence in the eyes of upper class people, but Dalit women are more unfortunate and in much stressed condition as they have been objectified by both their own men and upper-caste males and females simultaneously. These Dalit women live under the threat of power relations, which create suffocation in the lives of these downtrodden females. Hence, they need to know about their standpoint, to which they are conforming by writing the narratives of their past, of their own people, and their community. As Poitevin makes a remarkable comment in this context:

These memoirs reveal much more than stories of degradation and repression: they narrate hidden feelings of rebellion and symbolic ways of denunciation specific to women. They

focus on the concrete steps that women in local communities took in order to challenge a repressive socio-cultural order. These testimonies stand as witnesses to the resilience of these women (179).

So it can be noticed and taken into cognizance by the above extract that Dalit literature emanates from Dalit realities and it is indeed an outcome of their miserable past and humiliating present which create a space where the marginal and unspeakable voices can be heard.

Limbale argues “Dalits may attain educational, social, and political success, but their unique Dalitness remains” (11). These people are facing humiliation, insults, and tortures for having taken birth into these poor lower caste groups. ‘Dalit Literature’ is the saga of unraveling these pains. According to Dangle, “Dalit Literature is nothing but the literary expression of this awareness” (2). Overall, Dalit people are subaltern but the condition of Dalit females is more vulnerable, they are seized in a matrix of domination, for instance, they are marginalized by their very caste of being a ‘Dalit’, then by their class means they are poor, and lastly, because of their gender, being a ‘female’. With the growing consciousness of their plight, these Dalit women are protesting against the unjust treatment to them through their writings. They seem to be getting a real idea of their present situation by analyzing the factors responsible for it by ‘praxis’. According to Hartsock, praxis is a concept that means, “one can only know and appropriates the world (change it and be changed by it) through practical activity” (216). The comment made by Hartsock seems valid in the context of Dalit females as it says that to bring some kind of change in one’s conditions, one has to bring all his/her plans into action and it is only possible by a serious contemplation upon one’s own conditions. Now there are a good number of female writers who are giving voice to ‘female sensibility’ through their Dalit female narratives, which also show the social conditions of their community besides presenting the horrible situation of Dalit females. They are assessing the Dalit female standpoint by focusing on the actual Dalit female experiences. These standpoints are not easy to get, a person gets these after much speculation and introspection, As, Hartsock says, “the concept of a standpoint depends on the assumption that epistemology grows in a complex and contradictory way from material life” (221). Hartsock’s comment again fits on the social condition of Dalit women, as it talks about the epistemology of a marginal being. Here we will get to know about the knowledge construction of Dalit women through their situations. These women work in fields, work as rag-pickers, and indulge in all kinds of degraded jobs, which are responsible for

making their social image constraining and derogatory. These situations denote their material life conditions which provide them experiences that are extremely raspy to hear and exacting to cope with. These Dalit narratives provide a space giving recognition and value to the experiences of 'Dalit females' through which they show how this venom of untouchability has destroyed the whole existence of their lives. Guru also reiterates in this context:

Untouchability as a dynamic reality is bound to produce experience which is always in excess of its description. Hence, the available description is often inadequate to capture the totality of the meaning of the experience. To capture the full experience of untouchability, one requires to invoke other perspectives and methods (Archaeology of Untouchability 49).

Writings of the Dalit females are very much the result of their world view, and their location within this world. A person's standpoint is always determined by his/her viewpoint, perspective, outlook, and position. In the outer world they are continuously facing the threats of upper caste people and inside their homes they are continuously facing the fear of their own men. These Dalit females are not mild and soft bodied maidens destined to take bliss of their female existence, but they work hard, earn for their houses, and take care of their homes, and the reward they get is abuses, insults, thrashings and bruises. All these atrocities and repressions make them more aware of their life situation and develop a perspective and a standpoint of their own as no one can consider their issues better than them as they have lived these experiences in reality. Their situation rarely gets adequate attention even in the literature as Jogdand also asserts in this context: "Women in Dalit politics figure only in number and are also caught in 'our women' framework" (45). The above quote mentions that women in the writings of male writers have been shown to be living in a very pathetic condition, like a creature destined to lead an existence as invisible being. These women are the passive sufferers of their fate. These lower caste females have a keen knowledge about their social standing, as deep down they have perception about their powerless, spineless and invisible position in society. They are taking a stand for themselves and for their community by their writings and making standpoint of their own. Although they are recounting the historically denied rights to them but at the same time producing frames for further action and mapping strategies for change. Indian feminist movement also did not recognize them as equal partners in similar cause rather they always nourished the binary of upper and lower in their movement. This is why there was a need for the

Dalit women to recognize their standpoint. In this context, Rege, a renowned Dalit theorist, observes:

The Dalit feminist standpoint is about historically locating how all our identities are not equally powerful, and about reviewing how in different historical practices similarities between women have been ignored in an effort to underline caste-class identities, or at other times differences ignored for 'the feminist cause (qtd. in Real Feminism 40).

Dalit female's standpoint gets molded by the atmosphere they live in, the way they get treated in society and the difficulties they face in the world. In their narratives these Dalit women are fighting for restoration of pride, reaffirmation of identity and alternative history of inclusion, which does not include them. They are looking for an exclusive poetics, which helps them in the creation of a new kind of literature capable of voicing their distinctive worldview and typical world with all its glitters and glitches. They are trapped in multiple forms of oppression where their existence is always questioned and threatened. They are presenting an unspeakable agony and ugly reality of this world. The present researcher is looking into the cultural dynamics and power relations responsible for the crippled existence of 'a Dalit female'. During the course of study, it is found that much work has not been carried out with a focus on Dalit females. There has been much debate and discussion among scholars regarding the issue of caste and its implication over Dalit folks. But there is scarcity of works and researches upon the Dalit females which portray them as rational beings well aware of their situations and ready to take firm steps for a positive change. But now the time is changing and these females are getting educated and thus aware of their rights and privileges. However, the literacy is still not that high among them and continues to be a cause of concern. Their personal narratives stand testimony to the time. They show the epistemic injustice done to them. Epistemic injustice means, when any time marginalized community is denied credibility based on their status as 'other', acknowledgment is denied to them and claims of knowledge discarded by those in power. The present research proposes to bridge this obvious gap in Dalit studies and takes up four Dalit female narratives namely, *Kurukku* (1992) and *Sangati* (1994) by Bama, *The Prisons We Broke* (2009) by Baby Kamble, and *The Weave of My Life* (2007) by Urmila Pawar and analyses them using feminist standpoint theory. It says that an individual's own perspectives are shaped by her or his own social and political experiences. The synthesis of these experiences forms a standpoint: a point of view. These individuals see and understand the world by this point of view.

This theory gives voice to those who are living at the fringes as subalterns by allowing them to challenge the status quo as an outsider who is striving to come within.

Tracing the background of Standpoint theory, the original inspirations for the standpoint theory can be seen in the works of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a German idealist philosopher, who observed the different standpoints between slaves and masters in 1807. Hegel worked upon the terrible lives of these slaves under the domination of their masters. He claimed that the master-slave relationship is about people's belonging positions, and the groups affect how people receive knowledge and power. Karl Marx also discussed how the position of a worker shapes his or her knowledge. Later the observation and studies of these two philosophers inspired some socialist feminists for instance: Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, Alison Wylie, Lynette Hunter and Patricia Hill Collins. One among them is Nancy Hartsock who examined standpoint theory by using relations between men and women. She published "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism" in 1983. Hartsock used the ideas of both the philosophers to probe the gender relations. Standpoint theory often focuses on the social positions such as gender, race, class, culture, and economic status. Standpoint theory seeks to develop a particular feminist epistemology, means it values the experiences of women and marginalized groups as a source of knowledge. The theory basically stresses upon the issue that we should start research from the lives of those who are living as subalterns or as marginalized as these unprivileged groups provide the objective account of the world. Standpoint theory is a major part of socialist feminism and it can also be called standpoint feminism. It argues that knowledge stems from social position. The knowledge here denotes 'experience' of an individual or someone who belongs to a particular group, especially a marginalized one. Tracing the origin of this theory it has emerged from the Marxist feminism in 1970s. It is of the opinion that people from an oppressed class have special access to knowledge that is not available to those from a privileged class. In the 1970s Marxist insights began catering to the attention of some feminist writers who have written about how inequalities between men and women influence knowledge production. Their work is related to epistemology, a branch of philosophy that examines the nature and origin of knowledge, and stresses that knowledge is always socially situated. In societies stratified by gender and other categories (such as race and class) one's social position shapes what one can know. Standpoint theory further conceptualizes that identities are organic, fluid, interdependent, multiple, and dynamic. They are locations which

get socially constructed within historical context. The particular methodology got various key terms and claims since its origin. Many female theorists added certain concepts in it according to the demand and issues arising out of the society.

American feminist theorist Sandra Harding coined the term 'Standpoint Theory' to categorize epistemologies that emphasize women's knowledge. She is of the opinion that when a society is divided according to a hierarchy, a certain group of people will be dominating and other would be dominated. The oppressor groups can never be able to visualize or cover the whole life experiences of those who are being oppressed by them. On the contrary, oppressed groups are privileged to have wholesome knowledge about their condition as well as the conditions of their oppressors. It can be said that people at the bottom of social hierarchies have a unique standpoint which is a better starting point for a critical observation regarding their life conditions. Canadian sociologist, Dorothy Smith, looked at the experience of female academics and began to ask about life stories of these women. It was the time when the women's movement was in its early stages in western countries. She got inspired by Karl Marx, and turned her attention to the development of a sociology for women. She founded feminist standpoint theory, which looked at the social world from the perspectives of women in their everyday worlds and the ways in which women socially construct their worlds. Smith in her work *The Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (1987) argues that the world has objectified and ignored women and made them just like a worthless being. She claimed that women's experiences are best suited getting knowledge regarding their actual experiences and suited to pose questions in the context of their everyday experiences. For instance, Smith posited that because women have historically been the caregivers of society, men have been able to dedicate their energy to think about abstract concepts that are viewed as more valuable and important. Women's activities are thus made invisible and seen as 'natural' rather than as part of human culture and history. If sociologists start from a female perspective, they can ask concrete questions about why women have been assigned such activities and what consequences do they have for social institutions such as education, the family, government, and the economy. According to standpoint theorists, it is necessary to contemplate over one's perspective and experiences. Experiences are extremely important to make a standpoint of a particular group which is excluded. Knowledge created by all these experiences would be more coherent, embodied and self-critical. Nancy Hartsock argued that a feminist standpoint could be built out of Marx's understanding of experience and can be used to criticize patriarchal theories. Hence, a feminist standpoint is essential

to examine the systemic oppressions in a society that standpoint feminists say devalues women's knowledge. Standpoint feminism strongly argues that women's lives and roles in almost all societies are significantly different from men's as they hold a different type of knowledge. Their location as a subordinated and marginal group allows them to see and understand the world in ways that are different and challenging to the existing male-biased conventional social structure. Not all women have exactly the same experiences as there is inherent diversity in the way they get treated in society and because of this, there is no singular standpoint of all women. This led to the development of black feminist standpoint. Basically it is the epistemology of black women which gets constructed by their experiences in different spheres of the society, either social, political or economic. Patricia Hill Collins, an American sociologist, is the first to introduce the idea of Black feminist epistemology. She says that it gets extracted from their personal experiences of dealing with both gender bias and racism. She uses this epistemology to make these females realize about their self-worth and get hold of their own lives and master their destiny. She describes them as outsiders within, means that Black women have adequately experienced from the inside to understand where they lie socially while also having enough distance from the dominant groups to offer a critical stance upon them.

Hill Collins in her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) proposed a form of standpoint theory that emphasized the perspective of African American women. We can always observe a certain kind of similarity between the experiences of a Dalit female and a black woman. Both are deprived of certain qualities according to the inhuman norms of the society which prizes upper caste and white skin above any other humanly virtue. Collins describes about the concept of matrix of oppression—it is an interlocking system of race, gender, and experiences of class oppression and privilege. Basically she has used this term in the context of African American women. According to her they have a distinctive point of view from which they can understand their marginalized status. She showed that African American women have been suppressed by the economic exploitation of their labour, they have been denied the political rights, and they always get represented in disparaging images. The dominating white culture has controlled their cultural images to create damaging stereotypes of these Black women. Collins gives emphasis on and suggests that African American women can contribute something remarkable to feminist scholarship. She provides two main interpretations of the consciousness of these oppressed groups:

1. Those who are being dominated recognize themselves with the dominating groups and, therefore, have no effective self-governing explication of their own subordination.
2. The subordinate are lesser human than those who are above them and responsible for their degrading condition. This phenomenon is responsible for making them less capable of understanding and speaking of their own experiences.

Although Collins here talks about the life of Black women and most of them might have common experiences, but this does not imply that all Black women have carried the same experiences as one another. Their condition, thoughts and experiences may certainly differ from one another according to their respective location in society.

Standpoint feminism unites several feminist epistemologies to widen its scope and implications. Feminist standpoint theories also addressed women's standing in the sexual division of labor. An illustrious Standpoint theorist named Donna Haraway has given the notion of 'situated knowledge'. It is a very important concept as it gives us the context of some problem. Situated knowledge is that objective knowledge which gets constructed by one's experiences, by one's specific viewpoint after speculating over certain difficult issues. It also brings up the incapacity of those who do not participate in those real difficulties. This is the reason why their appraisals do not seem adequate to construct a standpoint. This particular theory is known to have substantially radical denouement because of its focus on power and the fact that it confronts and questions the idea of an essential truth especially the reality of hegemony generated and obtruded by those who have the power and authority. A standpoint does not only denote a plain frame of reference or a simple outlook neither it is occupied simply by the fact of being a woman. It can be attained by reflecting upon one's conditions which have been attained by the fact of one's socio-historical position. A standpoint is earned through the experiences of a collective political struggle. Both the oppressor and the oppressed possess different perspectives, however, the oppressed are much more successfully placed to achieve a standpoint. Only through such struggles, one can begin to observe underneath the appearances constructed by the biased social order. It is a unique way to check the actuality of the way a social order is constructed and sustained. Such a kind of need for a critical stance highlights the fact that a feminist standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement which can be attained through hard work and self-realization. A

standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by having a general opinion on certain social occurrences.

In the same vein the notion of strong objectivity was first articulated by feminist philosopher Sandra Harding. Strong objectivity made up on the insights of feminist standpoint theory, it argues that those who have been excluded from the mainstream, their experiences matter deeply to start research from their experiences and bring us closer to reality. These excluded people are extremely underprivileged and so they are left out even from the production of knowledge. Inquiry can be started from the lived experiences of women and marginal beings, those who have been traditionally outside of the institutions in which knowledge about social life is produced and classified. It is a reliable method to get more objective and relevant knowledge regarding the marginal groups. Harding argues that knowledge produced from the point of view of subordinated groups may provide stronger objectivity due to the increased stimulus for them to understand the views or perspectives of those in positions of authority or those who are responsible for their oppression. Harding validates that a research which starts from the point of view of strong objectivity will produce relevant knowledge for use as well as for revealing the relations of power that are hidden in traditional knowledge production processes. Strong objectivity affirms that the production of power is a political process and that greater scrutiny paid to the context and social location of knowledge producers, will contribute to a more pellucid and ethical results. Knowledge claims have always remained part of the world and their justification goes on concurrently and these justifications are necessary for the kind of reality that we seek to understand. These knowledge claims arise in particular circumstances and have real consequences. Such issues matter politically as well as epistemically. It is extremely important to make a sedulous inspection, for instance- which concepts are comprehensible, which claims are heard and understood by whom, which features of the world are incessantly paramount, and which reasons are understood to be apropos and dominant, as well as which conclusions are credible and valid to take further.

As the present research is peculiarly focused upon the Dalit female community, that is why it is obligatory to focus upon the standpoint of these females. Dalit women offer an alternative position that reveals a representation of others from a different perspective. Dalit Feminist standpoint aims to acknowledge the unique conglomeration of women by welcoming the views of other oppressed groups of women also. Unlike those in the privileged social groups, Dalit women have access to

knowledge about everyone. They seem well informed to understand the standpoint of most oppressed as well as the standpoint of extremely privileged. This is due to the fact that certain realities of oppression are invisible to those who are in the dominant groups because they do not experience such oppression in the same way as the oppressed groups deal at every step of their lives. The privileged groups may be completely oblivious about how their actions may affect the subordinate group. These lower caste Dalit women have a better perspective or different standpoint due to their direct experience and that can offer suggestions to help other marginalized groups of our society. They work as an outsider-insider that means as an outsider, they have proper knowledge regarding the kind of treatment they get in society and as an insider they are already informed by the desideratum of Dalit women community. These women can also be examined by their consciousness which may be termed as 'bifurcated consciousness' meaning the ability to see things both from the perspectives of the dominant and that of oppressed groups. Therefore they have a better knowledge of both the perspectives.

In this way only Dalit women have a unique perspective as they are known as the 'other' and they have a status as an outsider-within at the margins of caste, gender, and class. They are put in the position of active agents and are responsible to share their perspective and offer new insights. Standpoint feminism has been criticized by postmodern feminists, who argue that there is no concrete 'women's experience' from which to construct knowledge. In other words, the lives of women across space and time are so diverse it is impossible to generalize about their experiences. Standpoint feminism has absorbed this criticism, to an extent. This particular research does not support oppression of any section of society in form but it tries to bring out the kind of difference that exists at every level of society. Female oppression which takes place in highly posh buildings will definitely be different from the oppression that takes place in dark slums. It is the kind of difference that exists between the two divisions of a certain society and it is certainly difference that denotes the intensity of certain grave social concerns.

In the same vein many standpoint feminists have started acknowledging the differences that create division among the women categories of the society. It is impossible to claim one single or universal 'women's experience'. Because gender bias does not occur in a vacuum, it is important to view it in relation to other systems of domination and to analyze how it interacts with racism, homophobia, colonialism, and classism in a 'matrix of domination' and

intersectionality. Contemporary standpoint feminist theory perceives that it is a relational standpoint, rather than arising inevitably from the experience of women. Standpoint feminists have recently argued that individuals are both oppressed in some situations and in relation to some people while at the same time are privileged in others. Their goal is to situate women and men within multiple systems of domination in a way that is more accurate and more able to confront oppressive power structures. One of the critiques of this stance is that such an intense focus on the many differences between women obliterates the very similarities that might bond women together. If this is that case, trying to create a broad-based feminist community or building consensus on specific policy becomes difficult.

The present research will apply the above given situation in the context of Indian Dalit women, an excluded and dejected marginal section. The condition of Indian Dalit women has similarities in terms of experiences with black women. For instance- both the groups (Black women and Dalit women groups) are triply excluded from the mainstream society, because of the intersection of caste ('race' in case of black women), class and gender. The researcher analyses the Dalit female narratives using the framework of female standpoint theory to look closely into the world of Dalit females and to understand their point of view towards the upper caste section of the society. Their narratives describe the history of their community and the saga of their survival in the inhuman world which does not treat them as human beings. These writings can be treated as sites at which individual and collective identities are contested and forged, resistance and agency are asserted, and strategies for change get framed as Billingslea-Brown discerns that through these narratives these Dalit women "[e]ngages the historical experiences and shared cultural codes to reproduce and rediscover identity"(16)

Dalit literature is an emerging area in the field of world literature. There is no dearth of material related to Dalit studies though. Their history, origin, and all their struggles to find recognition are frequently reflected in various kinds of literary genres. Dalit writings came up first in Marathi language and later on in other regional languages of India. 'Dalit' is basically a term that comes from Sanskrit and later translated into Marathi and Hindi. Some scholars are of the opinion that it was first used by Jyotiba Phule in its modern usage and others say that it was used by B.R Ambedkar in 1928 in his Marathi journal 'Bahiskrit Bharat'. Mahatma Gandhi called these people 'Harijans' meaning 'the children of God' to make them special. Dalit people basically raised their voice

through their writings which emerged as a distinct literary canon called 'Dalit Literature'. At the initial stages Dalit literary discourse was entirely dominated and constituted by Dalit men in Maharashtra because of the influence of Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule, so we see so many works in Marathi only, and it includes not only novels but poetry, short stories and autobiographies as well. It starts with Baburao Bagul, who wrote a short story collection, named '*Jevha Mi Jat Chorli*' in Marathi (when I had concealed my caste 1963), Bandhu Madhav, and Shankar Rao Kharat etcetera. All these writers came up at the time of the 'Little Magazine Movement' that dominated Marathi Literature from 1955-1975. The subaltern communities were coming together to rebel against the cruel hierarchical system of caste with their slogan that 'Dalit is dignified'. The first conference of Dalit writers was held in the auditorium of Bengali High School, Dadar, on 2 March 1985. In reality Modern Dalit Literature came up with the article "A Discussion: Literature of Dalit, Consciousness, Direction, and Inspiration" by M.N Wankhede. The emergence of term Dalit Sahitya or Dalit Literature came up with 'Dalit Panthers' Movement' (29 may 1972) which had taken its inspiration from 'Black Panther Movement' of America led by African people. It was founded by Namdeo Dhasal and Raja Dhale. Dalit Literature is filled with rejection and rebellion, and it gives expression to Dalit consciousness. The earlier Dalit Literature may be said to have begun with Mulkraj Anand's novel *Untouchable* (1935) where 'Bhakha' a sweeper boy has been presented as a representative of all those Dalit people who were carrying the burden of their stigmatic caste for centuries and made to suffer due to their caste and profession. Other important writers of Dalit Literature include Om Prakash Valmiki, Surajpal Chauhan, Narendra Jadhav's and a host of others. Valmiki wrote *Joothan* (1997) in Hindi, which got translated into English and many other languages. Here he describes the pangs and pains that he had gone through for taking birth into a 'Valmiki caste'. Surajpal Chauhan has written '*Tiraskrit*' (2002). Narendra Jadhav's *Untouchable* (2005), although an autobiography, raises his voice for all the Dalit folks as to how can they stand for their own dignity. Through all these works these writers are exploring their Dalit identity. They have different aesthetics and most of their narratives are in genre of autobiography as it lends both authenticity and a certain sting to their voice. They want to introduce to the world their history and desire to sensitize the readers towards their situation. As literature is both timeless and temporal, their writings are making a whole lot of impact upon the human psyche and molding their views against this inhuman practice of untouchability. Dalit male writers have taken an initiative regarding writing the trauma of being a Dalit, but now Dalit females are coming up on the literary surface to

give voice to their pain and the truth about their conditions. Smith comments, “truth and knowledge are grounded in the foundational moments in which the social comes into being through language and through the sensory ground that human organisms share” (*Writing the Social* 128). It can be discerned by the comment made by Smith that, writing is an essential source of bringing out the truth and it is a medium through which individual makes other realize about the social conditions. In case of these lower caste Dalit female writers, it is not that they are writing only in one language but in different languages but most prominently in Marathi, Tamil, and Hindi, some of their works have got translated as well which this research is going to take up. These works are as follows, Bama’s *Karukku* (1992) and *Sangati* (1994) Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* (2009) and Urmila Pawar’s *The Weave of My Life* (2007). All of them were first written in the regional languages and then got translated into English. Whatever may be their language or the region or background they come from, all these works have a lot in common, as they all are focusing on the troubles of Dalit women, their hard lives and their humiliating experiences and “pushing them out into the open, not leaving them buried and dis-attended makes visible how people arrive at particular meanings” (qtd. in Campbell 7) in context of their knowledge about Dalit females. Their life conditions have chafed them and made their life vexatious. They show how the life of a Dalit female is caught in the vortex of a three dimensional storm of caste, class, and gender. They are not writing out of compassion but out of compulsion. While coming across the works and researches based upon the Dalit writings, the researcher has not found much work upon Dalit female narratives. So, the present project takes up these four works by Dalit female writers with an aim to analyze them using the female standpoint theory. The standpoint theory came into existence to provide a tool for the interpretation and critical analysis of the western subaltern females but the researcher has used it for the study of Indian Dalit female writers as the condition of these females is quite analogous to them in the context of gender inequality, class, and race/caste. They are also marginalized, oppressed and rejected from the upper strata of the society. In Hindi also there are a few works, and the most prominent one is ‘*Dohra Abhishap*’ (literally translating to The Double Curse) (2012) by Kausalya Basantri. Dorothy Smith gives it a radical direction by her words that “women’s standpoint arose precisely from their bodily connection to knowing” (qtd. in Women’s Perspective 8). One of the most important novels with a Dalit theme and characters is *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy, in which she boldly portrays the love affair between an upper caste woman and a lower caste man, Velutha. She shows the tragic end of Velutha, a Dalit,

how he loses his life even after his service of many years to an upper caste family. Some people called Dalit Literature a propagandist literature to which Limbale responded: “Dalit writers see their writings as a means of human liberation, expressing emotion is integral to the literature they produce. Intense lived and felt experiences cannot be called propagandist” (234). Limbale’s comment brings up a distinctive feature of the literature written by Dalits as he says that the writings of Dalit writers seem to have a noble purpose which is to spread egalitarianism and fraternity and it does not intend to create uproar in the world by creating fragmentation or raising just propagandas. It is a means to give voice to their past experiences with the reconfiguration of their present social state.

While searching for the critical material on the Dalit Literature the researcher came across many critical works. Many of them have been written first in the vernacular and then translated into English and broadened the horizon of Dalit literature. Rege, a very renowned critic and theorist of Dalit feminism, talks about Dalit female standpoint in her work “*Writing Caste/Writing Gender*” (2006). She has shown different Dalit female autobiographies from a critical point of view, and shows how these women were excluded from all the spheres of their lives either political, social or economic. She points out that, “there was thus a masculinization of Dalithood and *savarnisation* of womanhood, leading to classical exclusion of Dalit womanhood” (Rege, *Writing Caste* 42). The book “*Encyclopedia of Untouchables Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*” (2008) by Dr. Raj Kumar, describes the meaning of term untouchable or touchable. He also describes the meaning of term Dalit and what are their present conditions.

Karan Singh’s book, *Dalitism and Feminism/Locating Woman in Dalit Literature* (2011) strongly argues about the masculine side of Dalit female: how she is taking comfort of being a woman to decorate the home but she toils hard in the ground, breaks stones on the road, she has let herself emerge as a strong person. He says, “Dalit women are named by their ideological structures, they are defined by their gender, which is instrumental in making them victim of patriarchal social orders, gives them position of object and snatches their subjectivity” (8).

Uma Chakraborty, in her path-breaking work *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens: Theorizing Feminism* (2013), says that position of Dalit women is very different from upper caste females and this is not a contemporary reality but has existed since the time of Vedas. The term 'universal sisterhood' has never existed in the available literary sources. She says, “Since we are

tied by common bond of oppression to saying we do not have the same kind of oppression”. Chakraborty again observes with concern that

The women’s movement was also criticized by Dalit feminists for paying attention to the specific not more extreme form of oppression experienced by Dalit women who for a triple burden of: is Dalit from the upper castes as laborers from the landlords, as women from men of their own families and castes (4).

Gail Omvedt, in her *Caste, Class and Land in India: An Introductory Essay*, critically examines the possible causes of the plight of the Dalits and concludes that the caste and class are material realities and much of the problems of the Dalit may be ascribed to their poor material background. She says, “Caste is a material reality with a material base, it is not only form but a concrete material content and it has historically shaped the very basis of Indian society and continues to have crucial economic implication even today” (14).

Anupama Rao, in *Gender and Caste* (2005), says that the Dalit feminism would involve the re-examination of gender relation as fundamental to the broader ideologies of the caste; that we must understand the multiple and changing manifestation of caste in Indian society if we are to understand the particular form in which gender inequality and sexed subordination are produced.

Sharan Kumar Limbale, in his work, *Towards the Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* (2004) describes the way Dalit Literature relates with Ambedkarist philosophy, with Marxism, with African-American Literature and its aesthetics. It is a thought-provoking work that debates on the aesthetics of Dalit Literature and how it should be considered. Limbale makes a deep analysis of several questions for instance: What is Dalit Literature and its aesthetics? What is the difference in the writings of a Dalit and a non-Dalit? How should one acknowledge these works? And what is the actual meaning of being a Dalit?

Vijay Prasad in his acclaimed work, *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community* (2000) brings up his research upon the most deprived castes of Dalit section namely: Mehtars, Chuhars, Sweepers, Balmikis, and Harijans. The work gives details about the history of sanitation workers of Delhi. These people clean the night soil and remove garbage from the drains. These people belong to the lowest rung of society. This section took its name from Valmiki, who has written an extremely celebrated Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Prasad makes use of historical data to give

voice to the sensibilities of these people who are devoid of any kind of power and crushed by powerful social apparatuses. He poses some serious questions to the society and to government which are to be taken into consideration immediately.

Dalit Visions (2014) by Gail Omvedt, criticizes Indian tradition that links it with Hinduism, Hinduism with Brahmanism and tries to discover genesis of Dalits in the essence of Indian civilization. It also talks about the role of Ambedkar and philosophy of Bhuddism at length.

Kancha Iliah in his books *Why I am not a Hindu?* (2012), calls Dalit people as 'Dalit Bahujan', and makes a comparative study of Hindu culture, family, and rituals with Dalit families, cultures and rituals. He examines the socio-economic and cultural differences between Dalits and the Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Baniyas. The author also highlights the outcome of major cultural differences between Dalit Bahujan and other Hindus in the context of their family relations, Gods, market relations, power structure and Death rituals. It draws a great reflection upon Hindu ideology.

Arjun Dangle, in *Poisoned Bread* (2009), gives a history of Dalit movement and describes various speeches and short stories of famous writers and orators. In the very introduction, he describes two very moving and heart-rending practices that were being practiced with Dalit people. The most perverted practice of untouchability was that at one time the untouchables were compelled to tie earthen pot around their necks so that their sputum should not fall to the earth and pollute it.

Himansu Charan Sadangi, in his book *Dalit, The Downtrodden of India* (2008), traces the origin and development of the term 'Dalit' and also provides an exhaustive account of Dalit religion and reform movements' etcetera. He describes the precepts, problems, and politics related with it.

Gail Omvedt, in *Understanding Caste from Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond* (2011) describes the aim of Dalit Literature that, "indeed the impetus to challenge the hegemony and validity of Hinduism is part of the very logic of Dalit politics." (11) She criticizes Hindu religion for its orthodoxy and views regarding caste hierarchy.

In *Caste* (2012), a book by Surinder S. Jodhka, the writer describes how caste works as tradition, as a power, as humiliation, and its present condition. He asserts, "Viewed from 'below', the most critical feature of caste is the experience of untouchability. The line of pollution, which divided the untouchables from the rest, has been historically a critical point of distinction" (70).

Charu Gupta, in her paper, “Embodying Resistance: Representing Dalits in Colonial India”, mentions the conversion of Dalits into Christianity and their working conditions. She talks about the power relationship between upper and lower castes. She specifically mentions how the “constructions of Dalit male bodies contest, resist and absorb dominant images of hegemonic masculinity.” She also describes the images of upper caste females and lower caste females. She mentions about the arrival of missionaries who converted Dalits into Christians and formed their new identity. Dalit played a crucial part as soldiers in the British armies, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century.

T. Soujanya in her paper, “Understanding Dalit Feminism” records the history of Indian women movement and expulsion of Dalit women from these movements. The same caste and gender contradiction of the society sets a different form for upper caste women and Dalit women. While describing about patriarchy she says that “the very idea of patriarchy is all about gender inequality, dominance, power-relations and violence” (7).

Shweta Singh, in her paper “Representation of Dalit Women in Dalit Men’s and Women’s Autobiographies”, describes how the writings of these Dalit women are different from other forms of writing. She also shows how the word power helps women to achieve a social recognition. Besides that, she also comments, “In the narratives of Dalit women the everyday is very important theme. The day to day private life as depicted in the autobiographies reveals the dark side of a patriarchal structure” (43).

Dr. Samina Azhar, et al, make a thorough analysis of the plight of the Dalit in their paper, “An Insight into Mulkraj Anand’s *Untouchable* and Bama’s *Sangati*” (2014). They describe the trials and tribulations of Dalit community as a whole and Dalit female in particular. They discuss how in the narratives by Dalit females, women have been portrayed both as outspoken and vulnerable but in the novels by male writers they are just like puppets in the hands of destiny.

Ammu Joseph, in her paper, “Touch Me, Touch Me Not: Gender, Caste, and the Indian Women’s Movement,” talks about the growing awareness amongst the Dalit women of their condition which, they believe, is an outcome of the combined effect of class, caste, and gender. Joseph affirms: “As Dalit women began to assert their identity and articulate their special needs and problems, other women in the movement became increasingly sensitive to the urgent need to affirm and tackle the pernicious combined impact of class, caste, and gender” (33).

Amar Nath Prasad, through his work *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration* (2007), reflects upon the situation of works done by Dalits and their present condition by an assimilation of different research papers by scholars from across the country. Dr. Anita Ghosh, in her paper on Dalit Feminism, describes that the brutal patriarchy within Dalit communities is one issue which repeatedly appears in Dalit feminist discourse.

The researcher has not come across a single book length work on the Dalit narratives which have been taken for study using feminist standpoint theory. The present study endeavors to explore the hidden consciousness of Dalit women, history of their community and their own 'naturalistic' everyday experiences. It examines their past as Dalit and their situation inside and outside their houses. Their subalternism and marginality as a phenomenon is viewed as a procedure of discrimination triggered by their horrible past and humiliating present. The inherent qualities of these Dalit people have been erased by society but conspicuously they explicate the possibility of their emancipation. These people are turning their pain into power and finding a space for strength inherent in the life of their 'subaltern group.' Ramchandra Guha explains the term, 'subaltern' in a very significant way as "a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (35). All these parameters are quite apt for Indian Dalits that make them subalterns of Indian society

The perpetuation of the inhuman predication upon these Dalit people in general and Dalit females in particular has been taken up by various writers but now the oeuvre of Dalit female narratives is making a mark and leading itself towards the edges of literary canvas. Although these works do not get the same respect everywhere. Even Dalit male writers snide the literary output of Dalit women and tend to be dismissive of it. It shows that, it is not only caste and class identity but also one's gender positioning that decides the worth of someone's contribution. Dalit men are reproducing the same mechanisms against their women which their high caste counterparts had used to dominate them. (3) The experience of Dalit women shows that local resistance within the Dalits is important. The whole situation compels us to defend the claim of Dalit women to talk differently.

The aforementioned extract makes it clear that the situation of Dalit women is like 'Dalit among the Dalits'. Their issues have never been taken into much consideration and never looked upon as significant. The problem of caste always has been taken into cognizance as a whole but in reality it contains whole lot of problems in itself. Whenever the issue of caste comes up, it also has issues of

class and gender within it, but these two issues get lesser attention by the society as well as the government. So now these Dalit women are taking up this responsibility to speak and speak in a different manner by moving from the margin to the center.

These narratives also mark the depredation prevailing in Dalit women's world that was not taken much into consideration before. The present study confines itself to the novels of certain Dalit female writers, namely Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati*, Baby Kamble's *The Prison's We Broke*, and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. This study makes a critical literary analysis of these dalit female narratives to look for a standpoint of their own and pitches for an alternate aesthetics. These narratives are not rigidly autobiographical in nature rather can be named as socio-biographies as they also portray the history of their community and reasons for their present conditions. Smith describes this process as a methodology as she says to understand them you will feel like "locating yourself on their side and in their position" (qtd.in Cambell 15). Dorothy's comment seems valid because a particular person who has experienced some situation can better describe those experiences rather than people who will just stand and observe from afar. If a person wants to know how a Dalit feels, he/she has to go through all those embarrassing situations which a Dalit person confronts on his/her daily basis. Location matters in the construction of one's social, physic and economic experiences. The foregone discourse on Dalit people in general and Dalit females in particular postulates the subjectivity of Dalit people to ideological repression in Indian society. It also represents determination of their particular space that can be seen emerging out of their particular social and economic conditions and other aspects of the social apparatuses. Various scholars and critics have made a sound analysis of 'Dalit issue' and have devised their own ways and methods to show their strategy and their confrontation on their condition. Critics like Gail Omvedt, Anupama Rao, Arjun Dangle, Sharmila Rege, Uma Chakraborty and Gopal Guru have written at length and dealt with various issues of caste. All of these have been discussed above. Besides taking up the Indian critics this study also takes the help of non-Indian critics, for instance, Dorothy Smith, Sandra Harding, bell hooks, Audre Lord, Michel Foucault etcetera. The discussion is concluded with finding out a standpoint of the 'Dalit woman' by promulgating their natural, everyday experiences. The present study on the one hand proposes to explore the past of Dalit caste groups in search of taking out the reasons of their existing conditions and it also aims at looking into the constructs that influence the process of marginality. Further it delineates bifurcation of the Dalit consciousness which provides them with an opportunity to critically examine their position

in society. The special emphasis has been laid on the Dalit women in particular and Dalit caste as a broad and general concept. Bifurcation of consciousness – Dorothy Smith uses this term to refer to a separation or split between the worlds as you actually experience it and the dominant view to which you must adapt to, for instance, the points of view of upper caste men and women, and the point of view of Dalit men. The notion of bifurcation of consciousness underscores that subordinate groups are conditioned to view the world from the perspective of the dominant group, since the perspective of the subordinate group is embedded in the institutions and practices of that world, while the dominant group, on the other hand, enjoys the privilege of remaining oblivious to the worldview of the subordinate group. The marginal group is fully expected to accommodate these world views of the privileged group. It establishes two modes of knowing, experiencing, and acting for the marginal, one located in the body and in the space that it occupies and the other is which they confront in their day to day lives.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, the thesis relies heavily upon textual analysis and has also extensively drawn upon the critics and theories of Indian as well as non-Indian authors which support and prove its proposition of finding a Dalit female standpoint. The thesis has been divided into six chapters including introduction and conclusion. A brief preamble of each proposed chapter may prove to be a lighthouse through which the thesis can be viewed.

The first chapter titled “Introduction” traces the whole trajectory of Dalits and explores different methods that have been adopted and appropriated to explore and trace the history of Dalit people. The major methods on which the chapter delineates are related to feminism and Dalit female standpoint as methodology. The chapter further proposes the objective that is based upon the gap located after the close examination of the synchronic and diachronic literary corpus which is appropriately related to world of the Dalits with a special focus on historical realities of their repression and resistance against the upper caste hegemonic masters. With regard to the novels of Bama, Urmila Pawar, and Baby Kamble, the study gives a graphic adumbration of each chapter which may underline the overt or covert contents of the chapters. This chapter strives and proposes the objectives that are based upon the gaps to critically analyze the situation of Dalit women under various power structures and cultural dynamics through the above mentioned narratives. It would also draw instances which show that how the Dalit females rebuild and reconstitute their own self in the face of unending and unresolved pain and suffering. It has taken a form of new Dalit feminist

revolution in all the social, political as well as literary arena and “that’s what revolution does...if we follow a feminist path, this is where it leads” (hooks 23). The social conditions of these Dalit females determine and make their writings authentic. It seems significant in the manner as they are raising some unresolved questions and perspectives about this extremely negligible group. As Guru asserts:

It assumes that the social location of the speaker will be more or less stable; therefore, 'talking differently' can be treated as genuinely representative. This makes the claim of Dalit woman to speak on behalf of Dalit women automatically valid. In doing so, the phenomenon of 'talking differently' foregrounds the identity of Dalit women (Dalit Women 2548).

It makes an inquiry into the social conditions of the Dalit people and records the ways of their resistance. It also proposes to explore their ‘naturalistic experiences’ (the experience of their day to day life). It examines the concept of sexual division of labor and complexity and diversity of Dalit female’s labour inside and out of their houses. It also makes a study of the bifurcation of their Dalit female consciousness. This study takes help from the above mentioned Dalit female narratives to disclose and describe how they combine Dalit self and their history with their efforts for caste resistance. Study is directed to those aspects that draw the material aspects of the lives of Dalit people and it is also reflexive to understand the contours of their existed and exiting life situations. Certain things are not possible to examine from the writings of non-Dalit writers because of the social standing and location. Both of these conditions matter a lot as it describes the actual perception of reality which may become more valid and authentic if written by the pen of those people who have experienced those situations or are experiencing in their present.

Second chapter of the study, *An Outsider Within: Subaltern Resistance in Bama’s Karukku*, focuses on *Karukku* (1992), written by Bama Faustina Soosairaj, a Tamil Dalit female writer. Basically it is an autobiography and records her own predicament and pains but it also represents the condition of her whole community. She describes the condition of Dalit Christians that how they could not get solace even in Christianity which had promised complete transformation in their lives. As Gupta quotes one missionary pamphlet in her work *The Gender of Caste* (2016) which describes that the “the depressed classes are governed by their heart rather than their mind. They are not cunning like many of the upper caste Hindus, who have exploited these simple men in a clever fashion. It is

much easier to win them over and mold them according to the true teachings of Christian faith” (17).

Though they have converted to Christianity but they are being referred to with their caste name. She mentions the clashes among various sub castes and also the hypocrisy of Christian religion which follows the polarity of being high and low on the basis of caste and class. It also traces the underlined condition of discrimination and disillusionment that prevailed in the church. Bama beautifully depicts how a woman lives in troubles from all social spheres. Her poignancy of words shows the cartography of their life existence that resolves at the point of intersectionality. Here these lines by Lorde aptly support the condition of a Dalit woman’s heart “[f]or each of us bear and face that hatred seeks, and we have each learned to be at home with cruelty because we have survived so much of it within our own lives”(146). Some of these people seem to have internalized their condition as their society compels them to be at their same downtrodden situation. This chapter also strives to unravel a detailed description of uncanny prejudice that prevailed in the catholic churches. It describes about that power structure and social hierarchy which evicts the dispossessed, impecunious, and marginal and leaves them at the edges of being and considered a ‘subaltern’. The antinomy of power does not allow them to get out of their existing conditions and forces them to remain static in the eminence of domination. They are trapped in their conditions that make them rebellious for upturning the existing conditions. Society has provided specific locations to them which work as starting point for making the standpoint of a person. Location matters in the construction of one’s social, physic and economic experiences. Along with the location of an individual, lived experiences are extremely important for a person to achieve a standpoint as Naidu says that one’s standpoint has “maintained as having as its starting point the lived experiences of real women and their lived context”(41).

They are now able to recognize the differences that exist in the society. It can be observed through their narratives that these Dalit Female writers have “[u]nabashedly mined every variety of experience” (Gurumurthy 129). These variety of experiences only help further to situate their positioning in the social order. They also use various symbols and metaphors to keep their issues in front of society as Bama has used the metaphor of ‘Karukku’ to show the turbulent psyche of Dalit mankind and their rebellious spirit that now they are “like the double edged karukku, challenging their oppressors”(Karukku 14). They have been emotionally damaged by continuous

hatred of upper caste Christians (by birth Christians). In this manner, Bama through her narrative, *Karukku*, based on her life as a Dalit Christian and also about her Dalit Christian community, delineates the oppressive and exploitative power structure that forces them to remain in the whirlpool of grief and affliction. Further, the novel explicates the condition of a Dalit woman, her subjectivity and her efforts to speculate over her condition. Her condition as a subaltern finds full view at the time of her work as a teacher in church school. All these incidents provide ample support to the fact of a woman's subjectivity and subordination. It is a saga to recollect the gone enthusiasm and continued search for more liberal and justified world.

Third chapter Women in Panopticon: Subordination of Subaltern in Bama's *Sangati*, another novel written by Bama, explores the underlying conditions of the generation of Tamil Dalit Christian women, their life stories and the devastating and devastated way of living. Their life is closed in a 'panopticon', a term used by Foucault, a French philosopher in his book, *Discipline and Punish*. The "panopticon" refers to an experimental laboratory of power in which behaviour could be modified, it is a symbol of the disciplinary society of surveillance. The term panopticon has been used to denote the lives of Dalit Christian women, whose lives are always under the surveillance of upper caste folks. It is a startling insight into the lives of Dalit women who are living an insipid life under the burden of staid rules and it also explores the compounded inequalities and poverty faced by these Dalit women. They belong to 'Paraya' community, a lower caste group in Tamil Nadu. The narrative contains some very powerful stories of different individuals. Bama shows the disparity that prevailed among boys and girls in her community. Boys are free from all the responsibilities whereas girls are responsible for all the toilsome tasks of household and around. They (girls) do not have access to education and they get unequal wages compared to their men. Power rests in the hands of men. Bama describes physical violence towards women and their traumatic condition which lead them to their belief of being possessed by spirits. This novel shows some different and astounding ways of a woman's life that how she can be strong to shy and fierce to fearful. It also presents their courage and self-respect. The repressive and subaltern condition of women is located in the process of subjectivization which is a direct result of their social and economic realities.

Fourth Chapter "Subaltern Status: Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke*" depicts the horrible and filthy life conditions of 'Mahar' community living in Maharashtra. The trials and trajectories of

their lives bring havoc upon them. How the ruling apparatus of society has made them a symbol of 'nasty beast' and their humanly existence all seems veiled in lack of the knowledge of proper living conditions, hygiene and education. They are bearing the burden of a collective hatred towards their community. The retrospection of Baby Kamble is specifically on the Dalit women who lead a painful existence in the reign of patriarchy. Kamble also shows the motherly side of Mahar women and their rituals and customs that represent the ancient past of this lower caste. In *Veeragaon* death rate was high because of the lack of medical facilities and poverty and ceaseless starvation. Eating stale leftovers was their fate. The author also describes how Mahar women get pregnant at a very tender age and how their in-laws hurl abuses at them at home. At the end, the author mentions the impact of Baba Ambedkar on the Mahar community and makes it plain spoken that the emancipation of Mahar community depends upon itself. Baba Ambedkar inspired his generation but its emancipation depends upon its own efforts. The narratives written by these Dalit females do not lack a trace of the teachings of Ambedkar. That is why it may seem appropriate to call these narratives as 'discourse of descent' (qtd. in *Dalit Women Talk* 2548). There is one more peculiar quality of these narratives that, these are not only narratives of trials and tribulations but of triumphs as well.

Fifth chapter "Discourse of Muffled Pain: Intersection of Caste, Class, and Gender in Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, is based on a narrative originally written in Marathi named as 'Aaydaan' that means, weaving. Urmila weaves her life from childhood to marriage and its later incidents but in between she has made a firm grasp upon the feminist sense of her book and condition of Dalit people. She very minutely depicts the issue of untouchability and also shows the construction of an epistemology of Dalit women. With her own experiences she takes her readers through all those spaces where talks as an individual within the context of a community. She also tries to address what Sonal and Singh calls the "issues of differences as well as the nature of subjectivity" (10). These are the differences embedded into the Indian society in context of Dalit community and specially centered on the Dalit women.

At the end, the sixth chapter Conclusion, presents the logical summation of the study that, it is expected, would consolidate the element of Dalit female standpoint palpable through these novels. It mentions the self-defined perspective and opinion of Dalit women regarding their oppression. It shows by implication how their standpoint transforms their consciousness as an oppressed being

and how the oppressive relations get transformed. The chapter makes a commentary upon how the Dalit female writers are finding opportunities in their marginalization and celebrating their exclusion making it a potent weapon to announce their arrival both in life and the literary arena.

Second Chapter

Presenting an Outsider Within: - Reading Subaltern Resistance in Bama's *Karukku*

'*Karukku*' (1992), a novel, hailed as the first 'Tamil Dalit autobiography' written by Bama, the nom de plume of Faustina Mary Fatima Rani, delineates a narrative through which she challenges the practice of untouchability in Christianity. The stigma of untouchability tries to subvert and subordinate her as a Dalit Christian woman and dehumanizes her community as a whole. Focusing on herself, she depicts the pain and pathos of those Hindu Dalits who had converted themselves to Christianity in the hope that they would not be discriminated against on the basis of religion, caste, and class. But still, they face triple exclusion from the state, from upper caste Christians and the main Dalit community. The nomenclature Dalit Christian is not very old as the historical identity of Dalits as Christians is parallel to the beginning of Christianity in India. In simpler terms, we can say that 'Dalit Christians' are those Dalit people who had been converted to Christianity from the scheduled castes but were excluded from the official list of scheduled castes, made by the government of India. According to Aleena, "There is discrimination and exclusion right from the choir to the Holy Chairs of the Church. There are even separate prayer services and functions that would even put Apartheid to shame. Even in death we are apart, away and outcaste" (10). It is a painful irony to observe that while practicing all such humiliating acts which encourage untouchability and inequality, the major church authority forget all the fear of the God. They even deny the priesthood services to these Dalit Christians. Such incidents which take place in Indian society present its reprehensible and opprobrious sides which seem to be a tough imperil in its progress. As Robinson says that "It has taken a long time for Dalits to gain centrality of focus. For Dalits religious conversion, especially in the nineteenth century, was often perceived as one of the ways of escaping from caste oppression" (5). To comprehend the quote of Robinson, we need to inquest the genesis of the past of Dalit Christians. Many lower caste communities took part in the conversion process of Christian religion because of the humanitarian works and preaching of its missionaries. The lower caste groups were hopeful to get rid of the stigma of untouchability while getting into a new religion, which aimed to spread equality, integrity and brotherhood at every stage of its demonstrations. These lower cast people are now known as Dalit Christians as they are the Christians of scheduled caste origin who converted to Christianity in the hope of salvaging their dignity and pride as human beings. There are about 25 million Christians in the country out of

which 16 million are Dalit Christians, and they form around 60 percent of the total population. Describing the role of the missionaries for the Dalit Christians, Suri says Christianity gave them “a sense of self-respect and equality, deprived for ages by Brahminical social order, opened avenues to secure education and employment, and gave strength as member of a religious community of rulers” (176). It becomes clear by the given quote that absorption into a new religion had provided many hopes for these lower caste groups. The lower caste Hindu groups were already at the margin in all the aspects be it social, economic, and political. So the new religion brought a ray of hope for them and these people started dreaming of a utopian society, where there will be no discrimination, bigotry, and injustice. But sadly it proved a *nine days' wonder* for these unfortunate beings as situations took a turn and conditions for Christian Dalit's changed completely. Now they (converted Christians) occupy a highly contested space in Indian social castes' hierarchy. They continue to be identified by their caste rather than by their religion. They have become the passive subjects without any agency. The Christian Dalits still carry their lower caste legacy with them and face discrimination and oppression in the church and society. They suffer from various kinds of alienations, for instance- they are excluded from the rest of the Dalit community, in-general Christian people and, cultural conflicts due to confusion in their identity. It has a deep background if we penetrate into norms of Indian constitution. Although our Constitutional article 25 gives freedom of faith, it sentences those Dalits who have forsaken their religion to get converted to Christianity. It does not give them reservation and protection under the prevention of scheduled caste/scheduled tribe atrocities act of 1989. Even paragraph 3 of the 1950 Presidential Order declares that “no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of the scheduled castes” (Mosse 161). A report published by Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front (TNUEF) which seems an eye-opener in itself as it mentions the blatant harassment of the Dalit Christians. Privileged castes for instance Reddiyar and Naidus are of the opinion that if Paraiyar want their influence as Christians they need to build their own churches. The Paraiyar (lower caste) should not be treated as equals as they attend the church build by the money collected from the other superior castes.

The report mentions that casteism can be noticed in every activity of the Church. Church authorities discriminated in formation of parishes, Dalit Christians have been denied the share in the administration of the parish, and there are separate chapels in the same village for Dalits and other lower caste Christians. As Aranha says: Among Christians, the legitimation of power centered on

around the Church itself. Church festivals and honors in church ritual became an important mode of signifying and constituting relations of dominance and prestige” (Bama, *Karukku* 170). Powerful and privileged people who demonstrate their influence and patrimonial holding over a Sacred place, Church challenge all the humanly and civil norms.

Discrimination is immanent in every aspect. Everything and every opportunity is being provided based on caste considerations. They are denied even employment opportunities and priesthood for Dalit Christians who belong to Pallar community (A lower caste group) is strictly prohibited. All these incidents denotes the callousness and inhumanity of diocese administration which openly flout the moral ethics and seem mocking at the teachings of Holy Bible that always inspire people to love and help others. That is why Dalit Christians are fighting for getting their identity back and solace from triple exclusion. There is one more section of this particular group that need a grave attention and that is of it women, Dalit Christian Women. These women are extremely conscious of the unsavoury treatment they get as a converted Christian which seems execrable in itself to interpose. Their social location makes them extremely conscious of the unjust treatment which they get in society as a lower caste women. The particular narrative *Karukku*, itself a heart-wrenching account of the awful condition of these people in southern part of India. Bama here depicts the collective experiences of her Dalit Christian community but she also illustrates some other serious factors which have contributed in the disintegration of various lower caste groups. Bama here writes as a Dalit female who is strangled at the two margins, as a Dalit, as a converted Christian and as a women. All the three identities lead to certain social location that ultimately help her in finding a standpoint of her own. Her adroit sense of depicting the things that are expected from a Dalit woman and the way these expectations produce an enormous difference in society in marvelously stupefying.

In the same vein, initially Bama depicts an extremely composite issue of Dalit Christianity in Tamil Nadu by her work, *Karukku*. It can be termed a testimony, an autobiography or a life-narrative. It is a saga of the conscience which is in dilemma of its true identity. Dalit Christians have already forsaken their Dalit identity to upgrade themselves socially and identity-wise but still they are leading a subaltern existence and facing exclusion in the society. Bama has employed various narrative strategies to knit this narrative, as Christopher points out, “she uses folklore, myth, ethnography, prophetic style, and reminiscence to narrate the marginalized community that has

been denied the right to narrate” (14). The above said remark makes the sort of discrimination palpable which a Dalit goes through at every stage in his/her life. It is a social paradox that a person can tolerate injustice, face humiliation but completely denied to pluck up the courage to insinuate his/her experiences regarding it. But Bama has speculated over these things which is the first step in making a stand for her community. The present chapter will deal with this Outsider within image of Bama means the way as an outsider she understands the treatment given to her community and as an insider she understands the requirements of her people.

Further the chapter strives to expound and clarify all those elements which show the standpoint of Dalit Christian women from their real locations and real lived experiences, which also determine their vantage points. It can be called an honest self-appraisal, giving a candid description of their life conditions. Bama describes the way she faces social circumstances and becomes familiar with its ways means she becomes conscious of the kind of injustice that goes on in society towards them. She strongly recollects all her memories and experiences as a Dalit Christian. As Christopher describes that she had joined a convent to become a nun and serve people. But her observations disillusioned her as the proceedings in the convent were against the preaching of the Holy Bible and gospel of God. Bama gives words to her indignation and frustration in her narrative. She tells that the nuns used to oppress and humiliate Dalit people and the church authorities always used to treat them in an extremely unpleasant manner. Bama left the convent, and she met father Mark Stephen, who was not a Dalit himself but an enthusiastic supporter and participant in the *Dalit Christian movement* that later converted into the *Dalit Christian Liberation Movement*. He advised her to weave all her experiences of suffering and disillusionment in a written form that ultimately resulted in her novel ‘*Karukku*’. Through her narrative Bama recognizes and reacts to the forces of oppression in society and rejects the stereotypes that lead towards inequality and discrimination. She also traces the cultural, historical, social, and political factors responsible for their tragic situation. She raises a voice for her identities both as a Dalit woman and a converted Dalit Christian, whose angst and foreboding can be seen in her narrative, *Karukku*. As Nayar comments here, that “Bama is the narrative voice through which the sufferings and atrocities of the two communities, Dalit and Christian, are addressed to us” (86). Means through her writing, she (Bama) acknowledges an age-old frustration and resentment that takes shape in the form of aggressive writing. Bama describes her own individual background and the living conditions of her community. It seem adequate to thrill and stimulate its readers through its vivacity and authenticity

of the description of the life of Dalits as subalterns. She makes us visible the unique paradigms of a Dalit's world and shows how discrimination and prejudice importantly diminish the wellbeing of people who experience them. These subalterns are under the hegemony of Church and its authority. Dalit female writing which comes under the umbrella term 'postcolonial literary oeuvre' describes specific characteristics out of which protest against inhumanity, inequality, and dominance have to remain foremost noticed elements. As Haider reiterates: "In the works of postcolonial women writers, memory and the sites of memory are especially significant because they represent the possibility of creating a counter narrative to the hegemonic historiography dominated by the majoritarian, national, official and patriarchal discourses" (334).

The above forth comment delineates the significance of these narratives in the way embedded experiences are embedded in them and also specify their ardour to interrogate any form of injustice done towards them in past, going on in present or innate in upcoming future. In the same vein it also seem that female narratives are usually those memoirs which represent a resistance towards different types of hegemonies which try to subsume their opinion and viewpoints.

Bama draws an apt canvas of Tamil Dalit Christians and incepts to show the stronger side of the subaltern. She depicts the awe-striking prejudice prevalent in Tamil Catholicism. As Aranha comments here that: "If caste dynamics can be discerned throughout the whole spectrum of Indian Christianity, it is in Tamil Catholicism that they remain strikingly visible, giving origin even to violent clashes" (171). Even Bama mentions at the end about these community clashes and the way local authorities always overlooked the condition of these miserable Dalits. It is commendable how a Dalit woman (Bama) who was ostracized for writing such a narrative kept on writing and reiterates this saga of tribulations and triumphs. It is only possible through a critical stance towards a particular situation that makes one's knowledge regarding a certain condition valid and affirms the plausibility of injustice done towards them. She shows the disrupted lives of her people intertwined into the complicated rubric of power and politics. She also shares the space of a Dalit Christian woman and how it is distinct from the scope of other people of upper caste mainstream world, Bama underlines the difference that does not seem to be eradicating in any manner. As the narrative asserts that "*Karukku* written by a wounded self, has not been dissolved in the stream of time. On the contrary, it has been a means of relieving the pain of others who were wounded" (10). Through her own agony, Bama caters to the muffled pain of her whole peers. She expands upon the unshared

and invisible presence of these Dalit people by the influential upper caste folks. Gramsci's comment seem quite appropriate to mention here:

It signifies the social group in question. A subaltern group of great mass may indeed have its own conception of the world even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes-when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality. But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows "normal times"-that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate (qtd. in Fonseca 82).

Above quote unravels a thought that sometimes a subaltern group (Dalit Christians) under the compelling situations accepts that identity which is imposed on it by other powerful institutions (Church and its authority). It is the identity of being a 'Subaltern' from various angles: social, political, economic and religious. They are facing 'Bifurcation of consciousness, a concept given by Dorothy Smith, a theorist of 'feminist standpoint'. It underscores that at one hand a subaltern group is conditioned to view the world or situations from the perspectives of the dominating authority and on the other hand they experience it themselves by their real living conditions which creates a kind of split in their consciousness. Such is the case with Dalit Christian community which is living a life of exclusion in the country while following a religion that has instead of giving them any solace created chaos in their lives.

Bama shows the standpoint of the upper caste Church authority towards them and how they have constructed an ideology of their own. She is communicating her aspirations which always connect to her community's welfare, who have remained on the fringes for a long time and whose sufferings seem ad-infinitum to conclude somewhere. It is appropriate to quote Mill in this context, "The burthen is hard on those who attack an almost universal opinion" (*The Subjection* 186). Bama uses a judicial and analytical tone while questioning injustice and it is an arduous task to refute an opinion which is being followed by the people for centuries. It is certainly virile on the part of a Dalit women who is aware of the oppression through which she and her community has gone through. *Karukku* compels us to reappraise the precepts of our constitution, which always seems in covenant with the principles of equality, fraternity, and liberty to all its citizens. She excavates these

deeply rooted injustices and seems what Pandey calls the “re-examining the idea of difference” (qtd. in “Politics of Difference” 40). Bama seems examining all the differences through her literary discourse. Earning the privilege of writing about their experiences of dispossession has proved a vantage point for her and for her community as these are collective experiences and virtue of sharing the structural discrimination and predicaments with her people enables her to convey an unequivocal message.

Tamil word ‘*Karukku*’ itself denotes a pun; it means ‘serrated palmyra leaves’ like a double-edged sword that can be ‘destructive’. And, it also means ‘seed’ that is a symbol of ‘newness’. *Karukku* deals with self-damaging and self-renewing aspects of Bama’s life and the life of her Tamil Dalit Christian folks. As mentioned in the book,

“There are other Dalit hearts like mine, with a passionate desire to create a new society made up of justice, equality, and love. They, who have been the oppressed, are now themselves like the double-edged *karukku*, challenging their oppressor” (*Karukku* 23).

Bama is explicit in her narrative that it is not a propaganda or violent rebellion towards upper caste people, but it is her effort to connote that diversity and intersectionality of domination under which they are reeling since ages. The setting of Bama’s *Karukku* is Tamil Nadu, also famous for first ardent anti-caste movement, *The Self-Respect Movement* led by E.V Ramasamy in 1921. It is a movement that has illuminated the consciousness of Dalit beings to speculate over their situation and to stand for their respect. Bama starts her narrative by an extremely skillful description of her village. She says “our village is very beautiful...before I come to castes and communities, I have a lot to say about the village itself.”(*Karukku* 1) But she constantly and very frequently uses the term ‘our’ instead of ‘I’ which shows her community spirit. Her description of village covers some four pages and ends with a description of nature. It is an irony that such a beautiful village is resided by those people who divide and separate people by their caste and class. Here live people who have converted their religion from ‘Dalit Hindu’s to ‘Dalit Christians.’ Bama and her community belong to *Paraya* which is one of the lower caste Dalit Christian communities and considered ‘untouchable’ by the upper castes. They live at the periphery of the village lest their touch can pollute others also. The church is also very far from their locational space; it is in *Nadar* upper caste street. The clergy and other people of convent cannot accept that *parayas* are Christians too like them. The cemetery of *parayas* is away from the upper caste *nadar*’s cemetery. Bama here shows

upper-caste and lower castes groups, but she also shows the lower sub-caste divisions with different occupations of their own and one thing that remains common is the outcast status of lower caste groups. Here ‘*naicker*’ community is the landlord community, and most of the fields belong to them, and the most of their fields have separate names of their own. There are ‘*nadar*’ community groups who live beside some stinking shit-fields and climb palmyra palms for a living. ‘*koravar*’ caste groups sweep streets, and ‘*chakkiliyar*’ are leather-workers. ‘*kusavar*’ makes earthenware pots. ‘*Palla*’, ‘*Paraya*’, ‘*Thevar*’, ‘*Chettiyar*’, ‘*Aasaari*’, and ‘*Nadar*’, all these groups are lower caste groups including other mentioned except ‘*Naicker*’ community. Bama describes all their ways of living and even their petty quarrels from an individual perspective of her own. Visweswaran quotes Malinowski, who says “Novel, like ethnography presents a perspective on life” (6). *Karukku* can also be called a socio-biography as Bama describes her own community’s culture, people, and their way of living as well as the incidents of her life. In short, *Karukku* candidly seems to be “exploring the textures of Dalit subjectivities at the intersections of gender, caste, ethnicity, culture, and subjectivity” (qtd. in Haider 335) In this manner the narrative by Bama recognizes multiple forms and foci of disorders that they have gone through. The kind of disorders that Bama talk about do not only make us visible the plethora of doleful memories but it also delineate her individual experiences as a Dalit Christian as well as the collective experiences of her community. Experiences are essential to construct a standpoint.

Further, Bama manages to clench all the dimensions of her identity as a lower caste woman. Her circumstances and their critical speculation has constructed her consciousness as A Dalit woman and she could be able to observe the disorder prevalent in society towards them. Recognition and understanding of this disorder is extremely necessary as it has a prospective to upsurge their epistemology towards the prevalent disarray. Bama herself asserts this fact about her distinct narrative: “It is also in many ways an unusual autobiography. It grows out of a particular moment: a personal crisis and watershed in the author’s life which drives her to make sense of her life as woman, a Christian, and a Dalit” (*Karukku* 14). Bama alludes that her different identities are responsible for the prickling pandemonium of the saga of her life-narrative but it also provides an opportunity to critique the cultural norms and reflect upon the fragmented of self and other alike Dalit women. Bama starts with the real-life experiences of her community:

The driving forces that shaped this book are many: events that occurred during many stages of my life, cutting me like *Karukku* and making me bleed; unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating; my own desperate urge to break, throw away, and destroy these bonds; and when the chains were shattered into fragments, the blood that was split-all these taken together (*Karukku* 23).

Bama strives to show the present acclimatization of Dalit Christian community, and she reveals that their current condition is the result of their social location from where they can observe the outer world as they have the real knowledge of their life-conditions. This knowledge is called *Situated Knowledge*, because it comes from being in a certain situation. The knowledge gathered and presented by these subjugated beings are preferred, as such knowledge comes from critically examined conditions. These subjugated beings are well aware of the modes of denial as Donna Haraway calls it, that these denial modes are responsible for repressing their knowledge production. But still subjugated beings claims to be everywhere by virtue of their comprehensive view. By accumulating such observation, they (subjugated) make a standpoint of their own and produce a transformative, objective and adequate account of the world. These critical accounts of the world can be brought up by shared conversation responsible for constructing an epistemology and in politics it can be named as solidarity. For making a standpoint, collective standpoint is necessary and as the present chapter is about the Dalit Christians, a subjugated caste group. It is necessary to understand their views and vision that will ultimately construct a standpoint of their own. As Bama says: “There are other Dalit hearts like mine, with a passionate desire to create a new society made up of justice, equality, and love. They, who have been the oppressed, are now themselves like the double-edged *Karukku*, challenging their oppressors” (*Karukku* 24). Bama starts her narration by showing how she has become a part of the socially biased community, the stigma of being an untouchable never leaves them even after getting converted into the Christian religion. Caste is just like a hideous demon chasing them from everywhere as notion of casteism has been crystalized and cathected into the minds of upper caste people who support the idea of caste prejudice as blinkers and consider the lower caste groups as perpetually filthy. Bama makes a very palpable sketch of her village, which is divided on the basis of lower caste and upper caste groups. It delineates the ‘spatial dimension of exclusion’ (qtd. in Christopher 15). It shows the way location or a space of living create differences among people and again these differences create different ways of seeing the social realities. Bama say:

I don't know how it came about that the upper-caste communities and the lower caste communities were separated like this into different parts of the village. But they kept themselves to their part of the village, and we stayed in ours. We only went to their side if we had work to do there. But they never, ever, came to our parts. The post office, the panchayat board, the milk depot, the big shops, the church, the schools all these stood in their street. So why would they need to come to our area (*Karukku* 6).

Here the exclusion and marginalization of *parayas* show their interpellation by upper caste ideology and it also exhibits their connivance as they seem to be accepting this injustice done towards them as natural and leading to a subaltern existence. One can get a wholesome view of the prevalent injustice prevalent here as Bama does, in the form of a critical observer. She critically notices their subjectivity, it is multi-dimensional as they have been segregated at various axis for instance: on the basis of caste, class, gender, religion and hygiene level. She mentions about the cruel social power structures, which are at every place in which the filthy dwelling places of the lower castes suffocate upper caste Christian folks. She describes various hurdles, for instance, availability of one big school in 'Naicker' street to teach only the upper caste children. Poverty is their 'all-weather friend' as Bama says, "In the street, the children used to wander, bare-bottomed, both boys and girls. Even if a few boys wore pants, they would usually have slipped down, hardly covering what they were supposed to cover. Their bottoms were never as big as their bellies, so their pants would not stay up" (*Karukku* 8). McNamara's comment seems appropriate here, that "the absolute poor are severely deprived human beings struggling to survive in a set of squalid and degraded circumstances almost beyond the power of our sophisticated imaginations and privileged circumstances to conceive" (qtd. in Dieterlen 220). A few people of Bama's community were living in this abject and absolute poverty, where they struggled to sustain their breaths.

Bama shares her first encounter with untouchability but at that time she was too young to comprehend this social evil, she describes it like this, "When I was studying in the third class, I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced, and been humiliated by what it is" (*Karukku* 13). It shows her Dalit sensibility which can easily feel the disrespect shown to them for their low social status. It "seems to indicate the nature of Dalit poetics as well as its praxis" (Christopher 15). She shares one of her experiences that has constructed her Dalit consciousness and this experience has shaken her till the core and made an

indelible mark on her childhood psyche. In this manner, the reality of these Dalit people specially Dalit females denotes that from the very beginning this phenomenon of ‘us and them’ has nurtured their overall growth. This phenomenon has foregrounded the identity of Dalit women. Guru’s lines seem quite appropriate as he says in his article “Dalit Women Talk Differently” that:

Dalit women’s claim to talk differently assumes certain positions. It assumes that the social location of the speaker will be more or less stable; therefore ‘talking differently can be treated as genuinely representative. This makes the claim of Dalit women to speak on behalf of Dalit women automatically valid (2548).

Bama has a string of experiences to share which denote her own pathos in context of leading life as a Dalit. Her own experiences are akin to the experiences of her community. She describes through an incident that how a ‘Paraya’ caste man carries vadais (green banana bhajji) for the upper caste ‘*naicker*’ by holding the packet from its string, “*naickers* were upper caste, and therefore must not touch *parayas*. If they did, they would be polluted. That’s why he had to carry the packages by its string.”(15) We can notice the inherent paradox of the situation that ‘parayas’ are denied to touch the packet of vadais, but ‘Naicker’ can eat the inside stuff of it. This is an extremely dehumanizing and insulting incident described through a Dalit’s observation. A Dalit’s observation is valid as it is situated, convoluted and objective from given location. For an upper caste person, such an incident might seem destined or given but when a Dalit observes from a given vantage point through his/her critical instance, at that time questions arise why only us? In this context, Williams et.al expostulate “to be excluded, rejected, or ostracized is thus among the most devastating experiences a person can endure” (19). These people are misfortunate enough not to be included in society despite being embedded everywhere, they belong to nowhere. These anomalies and paradoxes refer to the web of power structures prevalent in Tamilnadu. Mills illuminates the idea of power propounded by Foucault that “Power is often conceptualized as the capacity of powerful agents to realise their will over the will of powerless people, and the ability to force them to do things which they do not wish to do” (*Michel Foucault* 35). Bama describes how her grandmothers used to work in Naickers’ fields and their little boy to whom she used to call ‘Ayya’ (master) he was courageous enough to call her by name and make her run for his orders. It demonstrates a peripheral atmosphere drowned into the deeply embedded notion of casteism, where not only elders are skilled in making a difference of high and low castes but their offspring are also dexterous enough to follow the legacy

of their parents. It seems a hard fact to accept upper caste people who follow Christianity and their counterpart; lower caste people also follow the same religion then how the teachings of religion can be different for both the group? Does it teach one to be a master and other to be a slave? Does it teach one to have a cruel authority over those who are lacking in resources and means to live their lives? Chatterjee makes an essential remark here, “Religions which succeed in establishing a dominant and universalist moral code for society as a whole can then be looked at from two quite different standpoints” (*Caste and Subaltern* 54). Bama draws our attention towards a ruthless practice by upper caste people towards the people who work in their houses that these people who take all the services of these poor lower caste people suddenly realize their grand prestige and essence of purity while providing these subjugated beings their leftover food and little water to quench thirst. This is the conditional base of these lower caste groups where they feel helpless and strangulated in these power structures which rule over them by the ideology of purity and pollution. As Bama describes, “The Naickers women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while Patti and the others received and drank it with cupped hands held to their mouths” (*Karukku* 16). These power structures remain everywhere with these people, and they seem quite feeble to resist them being an outsider, being a lower caste Dalit. Their feeling can be weaved into the words of Banville who says that “Public disgrace is a strange thing. Fluttery feeling in the region of the diaphragm and a sort of racing sensation all over, as of the blood like mercury slithering along heavily just under the skin”(12). These are the esoteric and arcane creation of upper caste minds which are staunch enough to break. Their condition is just like a bond slave, who is free to act physically but deprived from taking his decision, works under a dictatorship where they are breathing owes to other’ pity, filled with disgrace and disparagement. Dalit women collect leftover, unwanted food from the houses where they work as domestic servants, as Bama describes her Paatti and her daily routine as a poor Dalit woman:

After she had finished all the filthy chores, Paatti Placed the vessel that she had brought with her, by the side of the drain. The Naicker lady came out with her leftovers, leaned out from some distance and tipped them into Paatti’s vessel, and went away (*Karukku* 16).

Haraway denotes this kind of situation as ‘Informatics of domination’. Bama recollects the incidents of her school life that how there also they were considered worthless trash entirely. That place where they should learn to be a capable citizen, good human being and many other things to upgrade

their society, nation and their own lives there they seem to be facing a mental trauma of being untouchable, being separate and being an outsider. Whenever something wrong happens at school, all the students and teacher used to say “it must be one of the Cheri children who did it” (16). *Cheri* means in Tamil is a separate settlement for Dalits where they live. It is a systematic incapacitation which is prevalent everywhere. The system has made these people devoid of all the powers. Bama also describes that upper caste authority makes every effort to obstruct their intellectual development. They try to keep them away from their intellectual progress by keeping education out of their reach. They used to do all the work at school other than getting an education, for instance, carrying water to teacher’s house, watering plant, all this was their daily schedule. Bama describes how her elder brother taught her to work hard and study very well because education is the only thing that can bring them honour and up-gradation in society. He says, “if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities” (14). This advice left an indelible mark on Bama’s mind. She worked hard in studies and joined college. She mentions about the biased behavior of her warden when she went to pursue higher studies and was living in a hostel, “The warden sister of our hostel could not abide low-caste or poor children. She’d get hold of us and scold us for no rhyme or reason... These people get nothing to eat at home; they come here and they grow fat,’ she would say publically” (20). We can observe how at every sphere of their lives they get humiliated and struggle to achieve their fundamental rights. People cannot tolerate the fact the now *paraya* people are also studying and coming out of their incapacitation.

Bama describes how she has undergone a disparaging treatment while travelling in public transports even, people used to ask where she lives? And when she answers at ‘Cheri’ they used to get up and sit somewhere else. “They’d prefer then to get up and stand all the way rather than sit next to me or any other women from the Cheri. They’d be polluted, apparently. This happened to me several times...the pain I felt was not a trifling one” (20-21). Basu and Leenerts called these people as “Individuals with complicated individual histories and identifications” (157). These real lived experiences of a Dalit woman demonstrate the reality of our society and also present a new approach and a unique response towards the problem of casteism. On such instances, Bama’s mother used to say her not to reveal her real caste and place to anyone but she did not agree with it. These particular incidents as Spivak says “attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and “situate” the effect of the subject as subaltern” (13). These incidents try to essentialize the tragic situation of Dalits and demands for particular attention towards their status.

There is not only one but so many instances that Bama share and compel us to think why one stratum of society has always remained browbeaten. Humiliation and disrespect are the two words that define the conduct of other high caste people towards them. All these situations create a feeling of resistance in these subalterns. The social environment is noteworthy in considering one's condition means their living conditions are not being produced by the behavior and perception of the outer world surrounding them. Bama describes how she made herself and her mother proud of passing and standing first among Harijan students of the district. She says, "I felt a certain pride then, a desire to prove that we could study just as well as others, and to make progress" (21). Bama describes how she used to fill with anger and contempt when her teachers used to treat her in a disparaging manner by calling her "Scheduled Caste". Her hostel warden and principle deny her permission to go home for the first communion of her younger brother and sister. Communion is a ritual in Christianity when people eat and share bread and drink to show devotion to the god. They say sarcastically, "What celebration can be in your caste, for the First communion?" (22). These *sui genesis* hallmarks are printed on the mental psyche of upper caste people and they are impossible to rub off and the condition of these Dalit Christians is very much the outcome of that behavior. Schraube and Osterhamp comment here that "Human experiences, actions and emotional dispositions are neither directly conditioned by external circumstances, nor are they mere products of attribution of meaning, but are grounded in the particular individual's concrete life situation"(5). Due to poverty Bama faced a lot of problems during studies, as she recalls the days of poverty when she felt ashamed of her situation, she did not have a decent school uniform and she even pawned her small earrings to pay the examination fees. She describes one moving scene when she could not afford a decent sari to attend her final year party in college, "I made up my mind and went and locked myself up in the bathroom. I wanted to weep and weep when I considered my plight. And I realized how deeply shamed one can be for the lack of a few rupees in one's hand" (*Karukku* 76). We can notice the economic incapacitation of these people.

And there was casteism to aggravate their pain. Scenes of casteism and untouchability were everywhere, even at the teaching place of Bama. People were more interested in knowing her background than her teaching efficiency or tapping her academic potential. Observing all this, we can also call it a harrowing testimony ensued out of the personal experiences of the narrator. As Nayar says, "the victim witnesses her own oppression and pain but is also a witness to another's. Finally, s/he also bears witness to an unquantifiable, unspeakable human truth" (79).

Bama and the Hegemony of Truth

After getting education herself, Bama wanted to do something for the well-being of her community and their emancipation. So being educated was the only means to upgrade them and resist the oppression going on against them. She joined a school run by nuns. While describing the students of the school, she mentions that three-fourth students were from 'Dalit' families. While describing the attitude of nuns she says,

They run a boarding school which was nominally for the sake of destitute children, but in fact they made those children do every menial task that was needed. They behaved as if they were the queens there, and everybody else was there only to run errands for them (*Karukku* 103).

Bama describes her journey how she joined a convent and became a nun but she found that the preaching and teaching of the convent was nothing but shallow and hollow noise because there was no connection between their teachings and their actual practice towards poor people. "Bama joined a convent and became a nun. "There seemed to be no connection between God and the suffering people" (*Karukku* 106). They used to preach that God is one among us, he was also poor and died poor only, but if some poor person used to enter into the convent, they used to throw him out of convent without paying any heed to the teachings of God. As Bama mentions "With an ecstasy of devotion they claim in church that god was born into a poor family, lived among the poor, and died poor. But if by accident a poor and lowly person appears within the precincts of convent or the school, they'll fall upon that person like rabid dogs" (*Karukku* 107). Bama brings upon the demonic exercise of the power structure, and she also expounds and elaborates how a pathetic subjectivization of Dalit Christians takes place, and they get to turn into slaves in the name of God, and others live with so much delight while reigning over them. "These few assume power, control the dispossessed and the poor by thrusting a blind belief and devotion upon them, and by turning them into slaves in the name of God, while they live in comfort"(Bama, *Karukku* 108). She resigned from her teaching job and opted to become a nun in the church despite being opposed by her family. But she was determined enough in her decision as she postulates, "they say that caste-difference counted for a great deal within convents. But would I listen? In spite of everything they said, I entered the order" (Bama, *Karukku* 23). It shows a firm stand taken by a Dalit woman who is not helpless as she has achieved great confidence because of education and is capable enough to take a

firm stand against people who seclude them. Bama describes that how the convent was a completely new world for her. It was “like coming from the backwoods into a big metropolis” (Bama, *Karukku* 23). It was all quite contradictory to the aspirations of Bama that even convent was not devoid of the feeling of bias towards *paraya* people. Life of convent brought Bama in a spiritual turmoil and created an inner perturbation in her. She was awestruck and felt anguished by observing their opulence and comparing it to the abject poverty of her community. “Is there an understanding of poverty here?” (Bama, *Karukku* 21). Their attitude towards poor people was quite inhuman and repulsive. She realized that they are going contrary to the gospel of god and liberation of people is nothing but a means to keep their reign of magnificence intact and firm. Ruling class always tries to dominate their ideas upon every sphere of life which also includes molding the intellect of people according to their rules, and when these ideas do not match, resistance occurs and these elements make the core of the book ‘*Karukku*’ which has emerged out of the experiences of ‘Bama’. As Sen says: “To understand the world is never a matter of simply recording our immediate perceptions... we have to read what we feel and seem to see, and ask what those perceptions indicate and how we may take them into account without being overwhelmed by them”(8). It expresses the same notions of Bama that how she has reflected and made a perception of the situation of their ‘subaltern status’ in every sphere of life. Bama shows how she was determined to face the society and lead the life among them to change the perception and outlook of people towards Dalits. But now and then she used to get shocked by the discrimination prevailing in the society. When a Nun says to her at the end of her training “, they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns and that there was even a separate order for them somewhere. I was thunderstruck” (Bama, *Karukku* 25). They used to observe *parayas* with suspicion and humiliate them. These lines demonstrate the power ideology of Christian nuns who used to differentiate even among devotees who had become nun. In such conditions of subjectivization, these people (Dalit Christians) get both personal and social identity. Dorothy Smith calls it ‘bifurcation of consciousness.

Bama and her community’s location and situation describes the authentic experiences that were faced by them in person. Bama describes how she felt at heart when she realized that none of the places is free from the stigma of casteism. Bama laments over her situation, but at last, she struggled and became a nun. But here too she notices the power structure of upper and lower, rich and poor as she says, “Why even the nuns and priest, who claim that their hearts are set upon service to god, certainly discriminate according to caste. And in my heart I have even grieved over the fact that I

was born as I am” (Bama, *Karukku* 27). Nuns disparage her for being from low-caste, and they used to treat Dalit children in a very derogatory manner. Bama has filled pages after pages which reveal her angst and malaise over the prevailing situation of casteism, and they are doomed to lead a dark and wretched existence like a beast even after conversion into the Christianity. As Sabarwal (former director of Indian Institute of Dalit Studies) says:

Caste has been a defining marker of social and economic relationship in Christianity. Even after conversion, the characteristics of caste such as endogamy, residential segregation, restricted social interaction, hierarchies, caste-based occupations and graded ritual purity and pollution continued in one way or the other among converted Christians”(George, Foreword to “Dalit Christian” 5).

In this context only Christopher quotes Clarke who makes a vital remark essential to understand the real motive for converting the people to Christianity.

Religious conversion was not merely the result of inducement and the allurements of hapless and unthinking human beings. The whole emphasis placed on such popular discourse on conversions falls into the Orientalist’s pitfall, which accentuates the agency of western agents, whether colonial or missionary, and devalues the instrumentality of the native subjects themselves in such historical events (18).

Bama tries to portray all these injustices in the social scenario by bringing up the harsh realities of a Dalit woman’s world, and making its deficiencies more palpable. She draws our attention to the ontology of otherness and also presents the kind of resistance force she has in her heart to oppose all these situations. Identities of these converted Christians are both inside and outside their religion, but Bama shows that these subalterns can also be the maker of their destiny. They get a different kind of knowledge about their social standpoint, and it is absolute knowledge as it comes from the real social experiences of a social being. In this way, a complex structure of power circulates in society through these cultural apparatuses and also circulates and creates a circle of knowledge. The power of the dominant people circulates over these lower caste people and then these lower groups who are ‘subaltern’ develop a unique epistemology. Their epistemology is a very deep knowledge of themselves regarding their social situations and regarding the other upper-class powerful groups who remain ignorant towards the the insight and perspective of these marginal folks. When the power of authority circulates upon this subtle social mechanism, they (lower caste

groups) get a unique time of knowledge in these situations. All their life incidents give them an identity of marginal and subaltern existence, and through it, they construct a unique understanding. Their status is the result of hegemonic and oppressive power structures as Roseneil and Seymour says that “Identities are fundamentally enmeshed in relations of power” (3). Various social constraints cripple their actual identity. Whenever the upper caste people assert about caste, they bury themselves deep into the rigid theories of mythic past regarding impurity of lower caste people, it seem to be like a tortoise in its cathected shell who is adamant to be in it till the last day of its life. These stereotypical theories have made them unable to analyze the truth behind all the hereditary concepts of past and as a result it promotes inaction on the part of these people and intoxicates one’s image connected with his/her caste. The dirty intrigues of such resourceful upper caste people have enlivened castes into modern times, with the alibi of social justice and made the casteism enliven in every aspect of life. The Constitution has outlawed untouchability but not castes and ultimately caste structures have splintered people till the extent that every decision taken by them gets influenced by their caste status in society.

Dalit Christians and their internal society

Bama describes the internal fights of a different community in her village in chapter three. She shows divisive nature of caste, for instance, quarrels between ‘*paraya* community’ and the ‘*chaaliyar* community’ (a weaver community that is touchable) that used to turn into a full-scale fight. ‘*Chaaliyar* community’ wanted to grab the burial cemeteries of *Paraya* people to make it their playground. These *chaaliyars* were in much better position than ‘*Parayas*’. Wealthier *chaaliyars* made a plot against poor *parayas* and fabricated a complaint that they have attacked their houses and dragged their women to dishonor them and for this, they have paid a good amount of money to police to arrest and attack the *paraya* people. Bama presents a moving and pathetic picture of victimization of faultless *parayas* by the police. Police had beaten all men, women mercilessly, children of the *paraya* community, even a man died in their custody, they arrested as many men as they could and vent all their anger upon the *paraya* women. “They used obscene language and swore at them, told them that since their husbands were away they should be ready to entertain the police at night, winked at then, and shoved their guns against their bodies”(Bama *Karukku* 40).

Bama emphasizes the whole *modus vivendi* of these untouchable folks; they were disabled in all spheres of life. She describes a totalitarian regime in which these people were destined to live. Women are the only ones to adjust every time in such troubling times, “the women did all their usual work as well as that of the men” (Bama, *Karukku* 37). They kept on things going by taking care of families and taking food secretly for their men. It shows their resilience and resourcefulness during difficult times. Bama brings out the brutality and inhumanity of police authority when a woman tries to save her son, “At once a policeman put his boot against her stomach, kicked her aside, and took the money himself” (*Karukku* 37). Bama describes that how even *pallar* caste men helped the police to find the ‘Parayas’ and thrash over their lives. Bama describes how at the end *Parayas* won the case of the cemetery, but the frequent fights and quarrels were still part of their lives with other castes. As now verdict was in favour of *parayas* they called it miracle and blessing of saints:

“It’s that St Anthony who brought us victory”.

They thought our Paraya boys would be an easy game. But our lady exposed that thought for sham it is, dint she?”

“We must have a sung Mass, a Pusai in gratitude next Sunday”.

“Why must there be sung pusai di? Did this priest ever help us, even with the dust of his feet? When our men who were hiding in the church were caught and taken away, this priest was sitting at ease in his bungalow, his legs crossed, smoking his cigarette happily and watching it all” (Bama, *Karukku* 38).

Bama shows a complex and contradictory situation of Dalit Christians as they believe in miracles of saints but parallel they feel drastically dejected at their oppression and suppression by other powerful caste and church authority. They question this injustice done towards them. While describing the livelihood of her people, Bama says that they were just *pannaiyal*, bonded labourers to *naicker* families. Her Patti was a true servant, very dedicated to her work. Her Patti used to give extremely less time for her care as it is given and even Bama as a child used to go with her in the field where they used to pull up the groundnut crop and clean it. Even after hard labour, their income was extremely meagre, “However hard we pushed ourselves, it never came to more than five rupees in all. We’d take what we were given, and come home only at dusk” (Bama *Karukku* 50). Bama

and her family women used to gather firewood and cotton which they used to sell for goods but there also they used to become a victim of powerful ruffians, “Our hard work was exploited half the time by our Naicker employers. The rest of the time we were swindled by these tradesmen. So how was it possible for us to make any progress? ...but there is no way at all for the Dalit who sticks to fair methods, and who toils hard all her life, to make good”(Karukku 53). These are the lived experiences of these people which orient their self-concept and around which their lives unfold a unique history.

The situation of Dalit Christian women

This was the extent of their penury, but the condition of women was even worse as they never used to get their fair part for labour, as masters were biased towards the women, “Even if they did the same work, men received one wage , women another. They always paid men more” (Bama *Karukku* 55). As soon as girls reach the age of puberty they were put into the household chorus. Bama brings some instances into the light where she shows the condition of women that how they were just like a commodity and object in comparison to their husbands. There were certain instances of men beating their women mercilessly. But these women were the symbol of strength also as Bama describes how her mother used to take care of the family in her father’s absence even when they were facing a hard time because of insufficient means to survive. “It was my mother who managed to look after us, by picking up some coolie work...Sometimes, we children would finish off whatever gruel or porridge there was. Then it was my mother who had to go hungry” (Bama *Karukku* 72-73). It shows the agency and endurance of Dalit women in adverse conditions. How they are capable in upbringing and sustaining their children even in the absence of their male counterpart.

Bama and Dalit Theology

There were different types of customs and rituals for different castes. It was like on the first day of New Year they have to visit the priest of church and mother superior to garland them and offer them different things as gifts, for instance, biscuit or fruits. They were themselves unable to have those fruits, but they used to make every effort to gift these things to church elders, and beside this, they, “knelt before them in all humility, and received the sign of the cross on their foreheads” (Bama, *Karukku* 65). In this way, Bama mentions Dalit negotiations with Christianity.

Bama describes one essential aspect of the upper and lower binaries. The people who were poorly treated in the name of God, church activities and other things, were becoming aware of their actual origins. They realized their existence as human beings. As Bama says:

Dalits have begun to realize the truth. They have realized that they have been maintained as the stone steps that others have trodden on as they raised themselves up. They have become aware that they have been made slaves in the name of God, the Pusai, and the Church (*Karukku* 109).

Now they have got the consciousness of their own, and they gradually realize their worth. Their marginal positionality is enabling and offering them an opportunity to view the mainstream world by their experiences and take a standpoint of their own.

Realization of Resistance

Bama deals a whole lot with the actual nature of church people and their apparent hypocrisy. She says that their purpose was just to bind people with their self-beneficial ideologically. They do not have any genuine concern with the grieving masses and their sufferings. They can never talk about the efforts to reduce some of the pain of humankind. “They never asked, why people suffer, what is the state of this country, what Lord Jesus did for people, why to become nuns, how can we undo these injustices. Such questions never came out of their mouths” (*Karukku* 112). Church community used to speak about Dalit people in extremely derogatory terms which was embarrassing and humiliating for her. Bama also tells about her experience particularly as a woman from lower caste when she faces the outer world, how people treat her. Life of the convent changed Bama. But it had changed her in a positive way as she emerged as a new individual out of her past existence. She came to know that this is not the place where she belongs as she heard bitter words against her community. It pierced her heart and soul, damaged her mental peace. Bama is of the opinion that pain is essential to transform people and it gives them some hidden power and makes them efficient to trust themselves and move forward. After observing all these hurdles of life and going through the structural inequality she says, “[y]et I know I’m moving forward slowly step by step” (Bama, *Karukku* 122).

Growing through the challenges, facing problems, prejudice, and complexities make a person endure the pain and believe himself. And realities of life become much clearer, and at least he can

understand and become aware why he is the victim of biased structures as well as his failure to change his conditions means it is both systematic incapacitation and intentional incapacitation. As Bama reiterates, “Yet with all the pain, there still is a certain happiness in the depths of my mind. I have courage, I have a certain pride. I do indeed have a belief that I can live, a desire that I should live” (*Karukku* 122).

Conclusion

Bama has brought up an exciting narrative with a different approach and response. She has unraveled some new aspects which lied beyond consideration. While dealing with the predicament and quantity of Dalit Christian community, she mainly deals with their existence as a subaltern and later on their self-realization which is a symbol of their resistance. She shows, caste is a determining factor of Indian society, and even casteism plagues Christian religion also. Bama urges and inspires her community to resist these unjust and inhuman structures by their unity and solidarity. In this way, *Karukku* extends its noteworthiness as retrospective narrative which offers opportunity to negotiate the past, reflect upon the present and paves the way for future.

Third Chapter

Women in Panopticon: Exploring Subordination of Subaltern in Bama's *Sangati*

To know the cause is already a step taken in the direction of controlling it—Alison.M.Jaggar

The present chapter discusses the novel *Sangati*(1994) which means ‘events’ in Tamil language. It is another work by Bama, which continues her description of ‘*paraya*’ women, a lower caste Dalit women group in Tamil Nadu. It is an effort to unravel the historical trajectory and tread a path where one will get to know the narratives from different generations of women, that is, old, young and the newly born. Their shared oppressive and repressive past is woven by the outer powerful mainstream world and the internal patriarchal hegemonies. It can be called a saga of Dalit women’s subjectivity, objectivity, and experiences that have been all the way suppressed and dominated by caste, patriarchy, religion and even by the government. Although it unravels their beastly existence it also discloses the other side of Dalit woman’s courage and agency where she roars and propels upwards to break the shackles of bondage and obnoxious rules of her masters. All these tragic incidents are very much part and parcel of their lives. These cruel incidents are an integral part of their lives which seem contradictory to the true idea of ‘real democracy’ that aims at creating equality and fraternity in society howsoever adverse the situations may be. As political thinker Laclau describes Democracy as “an exercise in political commensuration that produces equivalence between unlike persons, objects, and qualities” (qtd. in Rao 20).

The novel *Sangati* is quite unique from the perspective of its technique and literary style. It depicts the Tamil socio-cultural view from the perspective of Dalit Christian women. As far as the technique is concerned it flouts received notions of what a novel should be like. The novel brings into account different anecdotes of various Dalit Christian women who belong to different generations to present multifaceted and polychromatic pain of their lives. Haider’s statement seems appropriate in this context: “The text captures the continuous fluidity of domination and resistance traditions, legends, and myths” (3).

The chapter reflects upon the mechanism of repression which subjectivizes and marginalizes Dalit women and brings their existence at the verge of doom. It explores the multifold oppression of these Dalit women. Instead of adapting to these biased norms and situations, these women retaliate to the circumstances. The study takes into account their unshared self and tries to explore the in-depth

realities of their existence which are rarely discussed or find inadequate mention in present literature. The study notices that these women are entirely trapped by the ideology and ideological apparatuses of powerful people and institutions respectively where it seems very tough for them to come out and claim their rights. But these women seem to be making every effort by available means to reduce the power of the dominating bodies and breathe in freedom. It studies the class structure along with caste stratifications, which manifest themselves in various forms such as social, political, cultural as well as economic. As Bama says in the very beginning of the Preface to the narrative:

In *Sangati*, many strong Dalit women who had the courage to break the shackles of authority, to propel themselves upwards, to roar (their defiance) changed their difficult, problem-filled lives and quickly stanch their tears. *Sangati* is a look at a part of the lives of those women who dared to make fun of the class in power that oppressed them. And through this, they found the courage to revolt (*Sangati* VI).

On the one hand Bama's *Karukku* is an autobiography of an individual, and a description of the ordeals faced by Dalit people when they converted to Christianity, on the other hand *Sangati* seems to be an 'autobiography of a community' as it "moves from the story of individual struggle to the perception of community of *paraiya* women, a neighborhood group of friends and relations and their joint struggle" (Bama, *Sangati* 15). Bama presents and exemplifies the "antinomian dimensions of subaltern politics" (Chaturvedi 14). The whole discourse and discussion of these novels *Sangati* and *Karukku* bring a new way to peep into the life and existence of Dalit women, their real life experiences and their struggle with their own people and the outer world. Their knowledge gets constructed in the vortex of different challenges that the society brings in front of them. Dorothy Smith calls it the 'relations of ruling' where these women are struck in between to prove their humanly existence. Bama shows their mechanism of suppression and sanction and how their position as a subaltern compels them to reflect over their situation and makes them realize to get rid of it by empowering themselves. The present chapter describes the subaltern ideology as well as their mechanism of subjectivization. It also deals with how acculturation and web of power structures mold the consciousness and psyche of Dalit women. The present chapter is replete with several horrible tales and gruesome incidents of different generations of women. Further, progression of the chapter lights upon the possibilities of inculcating a sense of resistance and

confrontation in the Dalit women towards mainstream hegemonic world. It explores the role of history and politics in making of the Dalits as subalterns.

Through these various narratives of different generations of women, Bama seems to depict the fragmentary episodes and incidents of their lives and tries to uncover the unheard and unseen facets of Dalit women's lives. She unravels:

My mind is crowded with many anecdotes; stories not only about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but also about their lively and rebellious culture; their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them, but rather to swim vigorously against the tide; about the self-confidence and self-respect that enables them to leap over their adversaries by laughing at and ridiculing them; about their passion to live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment; about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories (*Sangati* Introduction ix).

Along with the voice of these women of different generations there is a narrator's voice also, which seems thoughtful and introspective pondering over her lived experiences and of the women of her community. The conversations of women in between the narrative also paint an image which brings forth the changing perspective, changing standpoints as well as gains and losses of their lives. Their existence of servitude and pain has been taken up by Bama with minute observation. It is always traumatic and excruciating to narrate one's tragic life. The pain of being trapped and shackled in the suffocating bondage is very much clear from the writings of Bama. Maracle describes it in her work, that, "bondage is paralyzing and removing chains is painful. When the chains are bound to you by internal attitudes and beliefs created by external world conditions, removing them is both painful and humbling" (8). The socio-political positions occupied by Dalit women can become a site of epistemic privilege for them and it can also be a productive initiative point for inquiry into the lives of these socially and politically marginalized women as well as in the lives of those who have occupied the position of suppressers. This makes us see a less distorted and less partial view of Dalit women's lives and also the life of the upper caste people in hierarchically divided social world order.

This bondage seems to be an integral part of the lives of these women. It is bondage of hierarchy, casteism, and prejudice which depreciates them from a human to subhuman. The powerful people try to create a hegemonic control over the future of these individuals and construct a social reality before them declaring them powerless and making them realize that these social constructions and

rules are natural and unalterable for them. The powerful upper caste society determines the situations and actions of these downtrodden Dalit women groups. In every anecdote or incident mentioned in narrative, Bama tries to present relations of domination where she reconstructs relations of power from Dalit women's perspective. While these incidents and anecdotes are fraught with the questions of identity, experience and desires of Dalit women, they also indicate and reinforce hegemonic conceptions of servitude, subjection and slavery implied by the upper caste people, folks who control everything by the power they hold due to their upper caste lineage and better resources in society. Discursive and practical operations of this power as led by authoritarian upper caste people is having a sole purpose that is to claim their supremacy in all the spheres be it political, social or religious. As shown in *Sangati*, how powerful and crooked politician becomes mild and well-mannered towards the lower caste people just to grab their votes and to win his superiority over them.

Bama also exposes the magnitude of Dalit patriarchy and penury through *Sangati*. Dalit women's own men i.e. their husbands, brothers; etcetera have made their lives worse than hell and penury has withered their body before time. Lives of these women are always under the hegemonies of different people, traditions and social institutions. Dalit men do not get adequate wages or they are unemployed so these women are under compulsion to go out and earn for their respective families, keeping their life and honour at stake. Bama seems to be making great efforts to capture the ingrown consciousness of Dalit women, their pain and their suppressed desires. She reveals that it is not an individual's consciousness and condition rather it is a collective consciousness of millions of Dalit women who share the same atmosphere and society. Dalit women are going through a severe identity crisis and that is playing havoc with their life and existence. They are facing a kind of bifurcation of consciousness. Their identity is split into two parts one is how they actually experience it and adjust towards it and second one is that identity which they must have to adapt keeping in mind the points of view of the dominant groups.

The chapter observes these Dalit females in their stigmatized subaltern forms as well as in their revolutionary role at certain places. Bama has made use of many words from Tamil, her native language, to give her narrative an authentic touch. She has shown it when these Dalit women use extremely rude, vulgar and gross terms which are even hard to utter to pour out their anger. They use these words out of frustration towards their oppressors. Perspectives of the upper caste people

are embedded everywhere in every facet of this society and they remain quite oblivious towards the conditions, situations and perspectives of lower caste groups as they rarely have to adapt to that inferior and marginalized condition because of their upper caste status. The views of these powerful people present a distorted and an incomplete picture of the life of Dalit people and specially the condition of Dalit women. Bama's narrative presents counterargument to this notion by presenting her Dalit women with a new vigor and courage to uphold themselves against the whammies of life. Bama has also shown their determination and strength to bounce back all the odds of life. Her narrative depicts the strength hidden in subordination, power hidden in pain, and veracity hidden in falsity. Keeping the above mentioned scenario in focus this study evinces their historical conditions and analyses their present conditions. It shows how they meet grave consequences for their trivial mistakes. All these horrible and sinister incidents of their lives necessitates to create the chimera of opposition.

Bama seems recollecting these incidents which are reiterated and initiated through the incidents described by narrator's Paatti, Vellaiyamma Kizhavi, who used to attend every childbirth and helped in bringing the baby in outer world but upper caste people never used to call her because of her '*paraya*' woman identity. There is a streak of exasperation and resistance when she recalls her life incidents, for instance, this sentence brings up that hidden pain when Patti says that, "if you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man. Born as women, what good do we get?" (Bama, *Sangati* 7). It delineates their viewpoint towards the social opinion that means by having a womanly existence, they are not going to get any benefit, their presence is inherent in their absence and they are just like usable petty objects. At every step of their life they pose resistance towards such grappling power structures. Such temporal and spatial phenomenon of resistance arises from their positionality and social standing at the subaltern periphery, which imbibes in them the vision of the world which is different from the inner powerful and cruel center. Thus the resistance that Dalit women strive for and aspire to exhibit brings them a hope to achieve the centre where they could be able to raise their voice and shout out their problems and worries. In other words the chapter aims at contextualizing the Dalit women's individual experiences with the larger world of gender inequality, oppression and dichotomy of center/periphery which helps them to realize their oppression and also to resist the injustices inflicted upon them. As Channa adumbrates this fact and says that, "untouchable women had agency and a capacity to fight back even when faced with the greatest odds" (Introduction xxxiii).

Sangati basically depicts the life of Dalit Christian women and also their painful situation in 'Perumaalpatti' village. When nobody helps them to come out of their gruesome situations, they are emerging themselves out of their hell like existence. It can be called the life of a Panopticon (it is a circular prison in which cells are arranged around a central wall that makes observation of prisoners possible all the time) but they seem to be enjoying this phase of their lives. It defines and brings into light the epistemology and ontology of Tamil Dalit Christian women under various power structures. The power structures have turned these females into extremely pitiable subjects. Under these power structures they also get to know their 'difference' from the mainstream world. These powerful hegemonic structures reign over their lives and make it a living hell and impose a kind of servitude upon them. They have left their Hindu religion far back in hope of getting rid of their subaltern situation and to come out of the pain of being trapped in the hell like conditions. Bama describes how these people have got converted to Christianity:

They promised that if our people joined their faith, their children would get a free education, it seems that all the parayas became Christians. None of the other communities, *pallar*, *koravar*, or *chakkiliyar* did so. All of them remained Hindus. Why on earth paraiyas alone became Christians, I don't know, but because they did so at that time; now it works out that they get no concessions from the government whatsoever (*Sangati* 5).

Women make the core of the novel *Sanagti*. Birth of a girl used to make the environment gloomy whereas birth of a boy was always an occasion to rejoice and celebrate. Narrator describes how her maternal grandmother (Vellaiyamma Kizhavi) used to attend every childbirth but people of upper caste never used to call her at their house because she was a *paraichi*, a lower caste in Tamil Nadu. She (Patti) has been shown as an extremely dignified woman without any formal school training, but she is an extremely dexterous and skillful woman in manner of doing her work. She worked as a mid-wife and although it was totally an honorary job she used to accept betel leaves and nuts from some houses. Vellaiyamma Kizhavi was narrator's maternal grandmother. She was married at the age of fourteen but she got deserted by her husband, who went away with some agent from Sri Lanka and never returned. Narrator describes the changed life and appearance of her 'patti' (maternal grandmother). She describes the awful condition of her 'Perimma' (Aunt) who never used to wear a '*chattai*' means sari-blouse because "lower caste women were not allowed to wear them" (5). Gupta comments here in her paper, that, "[m]arkers of social status such as lifestyle,

clothing and behavior were constantly invoked to project Dalit women as different, to permeate a collective mind-set-an 'us/them' mentality- and a hierarchical social construction of womanhood"("Embodying Resistance" 104).

Pondering over the comment mentioned here brings out the fact about the condition of Dalit women that they are represented in contrast to other upper caste females and their living conditions are far different from them. The problems of Dalit women are very unique and different, that enable them to make a standpoint of their own, and that can be called a 'Dalit female standpoint'. The condition of Dalit female, their subjectivity, and subjugation with their defiance have been shown in the narrative in a very deft and dexterous manner. Oppressive ideologies stigmatize them and create a dire need for Dalit women to re-define and reproduce better life conditions for their existence. Bama has skillfully embedded the pain of these women who are trapped in the cage of patriarchy and casteism. She astutely deals in the narrative with different stories, which everyone should know about the lives of Dalit women. She minutely portrays the stigma of lower status which the upper caste people assign to Dalit women and the way they always keep them at bay in the context of class, status, and everything in their lives. She highlights the bleak side of their dominated existence. As Chatterjee comments that "the dominated, by virtue of their very powerlessness, have no means of recording their knowledge within those instituted process, except as an object of the exercise of power" (12). Above mentioned quote makes it clear that Dalit women are just like vehicle of exercising domination over these lowly beings as they are muted and incapable of voicing their experiences. These material conditions, in which these Dalit women lead their lives, are responsible for the construction of their reality as well as their ideology towards the outer world. Bama has valorized the 'difference' of these women from the outer world and clearly brought on the surface this dichotomy of center and periphery. By showing the diversity of Dalit women's experience, Bama brings out the truth of their subjugation and suppression. It is a discourse that includes the lived realities of Dalit women and it also takes into consideration their life which deals with threat of rape, torture and miseries.

They are subjectivised by all apparatuses of power structure and ideology and hence they are not left with the choices of their own to reform their situation. But at certain places it can be noticed that these women strive to question the prevailing hegemonic power structure. They seek to reconfigure the complexity of their marginality where caste, class, gender and other social divisions

are interconnected to make it a lived reality for them. All these situations demonstrate that they are the subalterns who desire a kind of recuperation and strong remedy for their pain. Their subalternity seems gulping their life force and transforming them into marginal subhuman destined to live in a 'panopticon.' As Spivak defines 'subalternity' that "it is the structured place from which the capacity to access power is radically obstructed to the extent that anyone escapes the muting of subalternity, she ceases being a subaltern" (qtd. in Morris 8). Being a subaltern denotes the idea of being under the domination of other and it is a condition when a person loses all the means to achieve something significant and worthy.

At first glance these women seem to be confined in the prison of patriarchal authority and insensitivity of their men folk. A close observation of their lives indicates the cruel and disrespectful treatment they are getting by their men. From morning till night it is compulsory for them to fulfill all the desires and needs of their men as men operate a mechanism of social control and their biased views towards the women serve their interests and compel them to be a willing slave rather than forced one. Bama makes a very poignant remark here:

It seems to me that society is arranged as if God created women only for the convenience of men. In daily practice, women have to make sure that men don't suffer discomfort that they are consoled and comforted, all their needs looked after, and all their bodily hungers satisfied. In short, they must be conscious every minute of their day that men are at the very centre of their lives (*Sangati* 122).

Above mentioned remark reveals the consciousness and perspectives of Dalit women regarding their situation. They always direct their action towards those in power. They are themselves engaged in reforming their social situation. They are subservient to their men. In this context de Beauvoir makes a very distinctive remark that:

When a woman is given over to a man as his property, he demands that she represents the flesh purely for its own sake. Her body is not perceived as the radiation of a subjective personality, but as a thing sunk in its own immanence; it is not for such a body to have reference to the rest of the world (qtd. in Secomb 46).

Aforementioned lines somewhere reflect the doomed existence of a Dalit woman's life. Their lives are committed to their male counterpart, their family and all the other beings, they have a sense of

servitude towards all of them and that is why they have lost their own desires and aspirations and zeal to lead an enthusiastic life. They have internalized their sense of care that has turned them into trivial servant for others. In this way these Dalit women bear all the hallmarks of a fundamentally in egalitarian society. They contribute to society; provide their services but still lack in honour that they deserve. The human body of these women seems like a collection of bones, flesh and nerves just like a skeleton which is the result of their penury and tough working conditions. Light of education has never been casted on the lives of these females because male folks never allowed sending their girls to school or any educational institution because they did not want women to know their rights, their strength and their powers in the existing society. “In the same way, they can’t stand it if a girl studies a little, writes a little, or dares to speak in public places. The men say, whatever it is, she is only a woman” (109). They have apprehension that if a girl gets educated she would marry a man of her own choice and will never listen to her family or community. In this way at every step they are the victim of hegemonic domination and poverty only adds salt to their wound.

By exhibiting their penury and destitution Bama has also shown and exemplified the phenomenon of casteism as well as class. Narration of certain life incidents by various female figures in the text gives us a candid view of all those devastating and distressing episodes which have turned them from human to subhuman. *Sangati* echoes the Althusserian concept of institutions being oppressive in order to construct an ideology through the constant process of ‘interpellation’ and it brings into account the subjugation of these lower caste people. Smith says: “Every moment happens twice: inside and outside and they are two different histories” (*White Teeth* 299). The concept of ‘Interpellation’ as given by French philosopher Louise Althusser can be implied on the life of Dalit females how the oppressive ideology of certain social, political and religious structures address and control their lives and impose certain strict measures upon them. There are certain customs and traditions that construct the ideology, consciousness and identity of these characters. As Brown describes “ideologies, it may be suggested, are systems of representation which are elaborated in such a way as to serve the interests of social groups by legitimating, naturalizing or rationalizing certain social relationships and practices”(660). Ideology of the upper caste people and church authorities serve their interest in every sphere and they get it implied everywhere because of their power and prestige. These authoritarian people and institutions can blame lower caste folks, they can make them do any filthy task, and they can give them the lowest rank in society because of

their resourcefulness and caliber in the society. They are powerful in every sphere either socio-political or religious to obstruct the progress of these lowly people.

Bama describes the existence and survival of her 'Patti' when her Patti lost her husband and raised her two children in dire poverty as she "struggled single-handedly to care for her two children" (*Sangati* 5). It has been shown to emphasize the endurance, fortitude, and forbearance of Dalit women. They are strong enough to repel their adverse conditions and fight back in every situation. They aspire to find their strength even in their subaltern existence. Boys of the community have the opportunity to study and do anything of their choice but as far as the condition of girls is concerned they are only destined to do the domestic household work and take care of small babies around. The narrator also mentions about her Perimma, (Aunt) who has no formal education because of the restricted way of living in their community. There is a systematic discrimination against girls at every step. The novel mentions a string of incidents that can make anyone awestruck at the condition of these women. The study discusses all these incidents further in the chapter.

Patti used to narrate many stories, and most of her stories have various elements which show the strength of the woman, for instance story of one guy name 'Katturaasa' and his mother. The story is about an incident that brings out the pain and persistence of Dalit women. She describes the way she had painfully given birth to her son while doing work in fields. She had done it all by herself. "She cut off the umbilical cord with the sickle; she had taken with her to cut the grass, dug a hole and buried the placenta, and then walked home carrying her baby and a bundle of grass" (Bama, *Sangati* 6). Women were just like 'reproduction machines' giving birth to children in a series. Their men were not ready to adopt birth control measures, as they thought it will affect their health partly they did not take these measures because of their manly arrogance and patriarchal ego. As they say, "they'll lose their strength if they do" (Bama, *Sangati* 36). Women are more concerned about their bodies and health because if they sterilized themselves in haphazard ways, by people without proper training, they will not be able to work in fields. "If they can't work, how will they eat? As it is the families keep going only because of the women" (Bama, *Sangati* 36).

Above paragraph unravels the kind of life these Dalit women have to live, where they have an urgency and dire need to earn and collect for the survival of their family rather paying any heed to their own health and adverse conditions in which they work. But these incidents also show the endurance of these subaltern Dalit women. These incidents and activities only give them a unique

and distinct kind of knowledge about their situations, as Hartsock says that, “activity is epistemology. Women and men create their own realities through their different activities and experiences” (qtd. in Hekman 343). Dalit women and Dalit men experience the world in a different way. They get to know the reality by their respective jobs.

Mostly the lives of all these Dalit women are same in one way or the other. They devote their whole life and blood serving their family and children. They have uniqueness about their marginal identity. As Patti comments here “Born as a woman, what good do we get us only toil in the fields and in the home until our very vaginas shrivel” (Bama, *Sangati* 7). In reality problems of Dalit women are horrendous and damaging in themselves. From fieldworkers to manual scavengers they are victims of absolute poverty, caste discrimination, sexual exploitation, severe condition of reproductive health, and many more noticeable severe issues, for instance, forced prostitution and illiteracy in today’s context. All these situations provide an edge to Dalit women over other people to observe their life conditions better and understand the status quo where they live at the periphery of marginality with their subaltern standard. Comment by hooks seems quite appropriate here when she says, “[l]iving as we did –on the edge-we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out” (Preface, *Feminist Theory* xvi). These mentioned lines present a point of view of Dalit women how they have a different approach and mental view towards their problems which is contrary to the narrative? How dominating groups describes about their lives? They understand their situation and life conditions as well as the condition of the people who suppress and dominate them.

If we observe the life of these Dalit women, they are not living like soft damsels who care for their skin, hair, and many other physical features rather these women work very hard in scorching heat and biting winter, they do not have complaint with their life conditions. They strive to sustain their respective families and for the people who belong to them. Their life is quite contrary to upper caste women who probably do not need to go out to work in the fields. That’s why they openly say,

Ask these upper caste women to do work that we do- to transplant paddy in the wet fields, to do the weeding, to reap the grain and carry it home. You’ll see soon enough. They will give it up in no time and go and lie down (Bama, *Sangati* 115).

Above lines make a difference in the life conditions of Dalit and non-Dalit women. Dalit women work wholeheartedly in adverse conditions and their pain is turning them tough. Dalit women mostly do domestic as well as outdoor works. From morning till the evening even in hot scorching daylight, they never think of having some rest in between, they work very hard and rarely get time to wash and clean themselves. Such a toilsome labour they perform day and night sacrificing their basic needs and desires. These women work whole week except Saturday and on that day, they wash all their dirty clothes, clean their houses properly and take bath as the narrative says, “For us even a bath was like a special luxury” (Bama, *Sangati* 115). Dalit women always get involved in such activities so their life and perspectives are very different from others. Their experiences differ from men in a unique way, as they have unique social and personal responsibilities and these different relations of personal and social sphere give them a unique point of view or we can call it a unique standpoint of their own. And this is the reason that their relations with the upper caste become extremely restricted and polarized.

In this Tamil Dalit community discrimination towards women is a very natural thing of their lives. Boys are all pampered and loved since childhood but “if it’s a girl, they’ll do it half-heartedly” (Bama, *Sangati* 7). Bama also mentions the behavior of Patti how she gives everything first to her grandson and then later to her granddaughters. She is also biased towards her grand-daughters, somewhere she is also of the perception that how worthless it is being a woman because of the kind of treatment they get in society, O’ Leary says that “structures of domination and exploitation are central to the dynamics of any society, those who experience forms of oppression will best understand those structures of domination and, thus, certain central dynamics of their society” (48). It is very true to say that people who experience the situation can best understand it. As Patti has faced all those adverse situations as a woman in her life so somewhere she has cultivated and internalized this notion that being a woman is the root cause of all the troubles and tragedies.

Women work here like poor laborers and upper caste landowners make them walk multiple times from here to there as Patti used to work in the fields of upper caste men. “They used to make her walk up and down ten times a day, like a dog” (Bama, *Sangati* 8). Moreover their lusty eyes were always ready to pounce upon their honour thinking these women as lowly and without any social standing. These Dalit women face multiple forms of jeopardy, afflicted by a fragmented self-identity. That’s why these Dalit women writers have been called ‘womanist-humanist’ because they

do not talk either about womanly issues or about humanly issues. Bama tries to show a palpable solidarity in their subaltern existence as Paik says that it will allow them to “conceive of liminality as a space of solidarity” (77). Their limits do not seem to be creating a hurdle for them but it seems like it is making a bond among them which makes them stronger than before and inculcates a sense of harmony among them.

Dalit women face not only the cruel world outside but inside their homes as well. Their men dictate them in a very cruel and vicious manner and these particular, everyday experiences of Dalit women construct their epistemology regarding their conditions. As narrative mentions “Sometimes men’s assertion of rights and social status of Dalits strengthened patriarchal formations and notions of masculinity in the community” (Bama, *Sangati* 85). Dalit women face double patriarchy by their own men and upper caste men, in their domestic sphere and outer world. In this manner social inequalities get expressed at the intersection of caste, gender and class and all these differences and distinctions have devastated the quality of Dalit women’s life. Foucault's comment looks pertinent here, “It is certain that the mechanism of subjection cannot be studied outside their relation to the mechanisms of exploitation and domination...they entertain complex and circular relations with other forms” (“The Subject and Power”782). That means all the oppressions done towards the Dalit women are co-constitutive and connected with each other and these discrete forms of suppression and oppressions shape the lives of Dalit women. Since childhood they are trained to serve others, then they serve their husbands and die serving the outer world. As Dube makes a comment here that “In order that women pursue these traditional occupations, they have to be trained in them from childhood and have to be socialized into accepting them as proper work which, within limits is destiny” (76).

Bama has shown an extremely terrible part of female’s life how their body has become a burden for them. By the natural phenomenon male and female bodies adopt various changes with age but where boys cherish their adulthood girls have to bear so many restrictions with these changes. When girls start menstruating, their community will stop them from their social development and put all kinds of restrictions upon them, for instance, as given in the narrative, a girl has to wear a ‘davani’ (half sari) so that she can cover her bosom properly. She cannot go to school after she come of age means start menstruating, “As soon as she gets her periods, you stop her from studying, hand her over to some fellow or the other and be at peace”(Bama, *Sangati* 9). As Simone de Beauvoir says

that “Woman has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature” (76).

Patti narrates an incident that shows the trajectory and tragedy of most Indian Dalit women. How they get treated cruelly by their husbands to fulfill their lust even at the time of pain and even at being exhausted after completing the back breaking household and outer labour. Patti describes how one of her daughters died after the tortures of her husband and by giving birth to seven and eight babies in a row. She says:

The man was crazy with lust. Because he wanted her after every single day. How could she agree to his frenzy after she worked all hours of the day and night, inside the house and out? He is an animal, that fellow. When she refused, he practically broke her in half. Once in my very presence he hit her with the rice-pounder (Bama, *Sangati* 10-11).

Masculine domination is the most horrible and worst form of torture towards Indian Dalit women and Dalit women are the worse victim of it. Mill has made a very poignant and striking remark in this context:

[e]veryone who desires power desires it most over those who are nearest to him, with whom his life is passed, with whom he has most concerns in common and in whom any independence of his authority is oftenest likely to interfere with his individual preferences...also, the possessors of the power provided by the subjection of women are better placed than any absolute monarch to prevent any uprising against the system (“The Subjection of Women” 8).

And in this way women are just like slaves to their men and they are destined to remain available with their services to their male counterpart anytime and everywhere. Manorama’s comment seems quite valid and appropriate that, “the lives of Dalit women have been characterized by “culture of silence,” as they have lacked a political, economic, and social “space for utterance” for centuries.” (259). Such experiences by Dalit women make them different from others. It creates an awareness in them that such situations must be challenged and questioned by taking ‘a standpoint of their own’. *Sangati* also depicts a major issue of difference between upper caste and lower caste women as it manifests in the way they dress up, the way they speak, and the way they react towards lower caste women. Patti’s description of upper-caste women’s living when she returns from town is quite

noticeable. She describes how upper caste women wear glittering sarees and keep their hair sleek with oil and fresh flower decorated upon them. She mentions that “when you look at them each one is like Mahalakshmi, a goddess. Every time you look at them, their hair is sleek with oil and they are wearing fresh flowers” (Bama, *Sangati* 12). It shows a kind of deep contrast between the way of living of Dalit females and upper caste females, that how they have some hidden desires to live like them but their circumstances and conditions of life compel them not to cross their boundaries and remain in the prison of poverty. They have a resisting psyche that reminds them at every step of their difference with upper caste rich people and introduces itself in the form of a dominant force always ready to subsume their life force. As Smith says that “From different sites of people’s experience, different social relations or different aspects of the same complex are brought into view and their organization explicated” (24). Dorothy’s point seems valid here to understand a social organization, how it is made up of different people and their different aspects of life. Lower caste women have a consciousness towards their social standing and this consciousness is nothing but a hidden desire in general as Butler quotes Hegel to make it more explicit that “self-consciousness is desire in general”(7). According to this quote the consciousness of the Dalit women can also be taken as their hidden desires through which they want better living conditions. But all their desires always get pulverized by the oppressive forces.

Patti is the only one who cares for the daughters of her deceased daughter. Their father does not pay any heed towards their problems neither is he having concern about the future of his girls Mariamma and Seyakkodi. Patti is much worried about the marriage of the one, who is sixteen year old and have not yet started having menstruations. Their father had no concern for them except dominating them for different works. Most of the men of their community have nothing to do with their respective families even they do not have any concern for their children’s education, marriage or their well-being. But they are always ready to oppress and dominate other females of their families. Foucault comments here that:

Domination is in fact a general structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found descending to the most recalcitrant fibers of society. But at the same time it is a strategic situation more or less taken for granted and consolidated by means of long-term confrontation between adversaries (795).

Narrator describes how women are not allowed to wander anywhere, because of the instruction of their elders. If anyone from upper caste will catch them then they can lose their honour. Upper caste men ravish them and later these women cannot complain anywhere and cannot get justice because of their lower caste background. Their condition is just like a victim and a disempowered being. When incidence of sexual violence and caste violence get intertwined they can only exaggerate their tragic plight. The situation of Dalit women is very much a consequence of their lower status in society and it is the basic reason that gives rise to other tragic incidents including rape by upper caste men, in this context Brueck quotes Rege that, “the Dalit women are rendered “impure” or “lacking in virtue” because economic circumstances make their labor outside the home crucial and thus rape of Dalit women may not even be considered rape because of the “customary access” upper caste men have to Dalit women’s sexuality”(156).

One more vulnerable issue that makes their condition worse is their ‘poverty.’ Because of the poor economic condition Dalit women are under compulsion to work outside their homes, so they can earn some wages by the public work that goes on in their villages. They work same as their men and get less wages; “the women, in any case, whatever they did, were paid less than the men. Even when they did the very same work, they were paid less” (Bama, *Sangati* 18). At every place Dalit women are bonded in shackles of slavery and exploitation. Whatever work, skill, or ability they present it would always be undervalued because of their low caste and filthy lifestyle.

There is a fear of upper caste landlords who are always having a vulture eye on lower caste females to disgrace them and blot their honour. One of the incidents in the narrative is that when Mariamma, who was carrying firewood from the forest was molested by upper caste man, Kumarsami Ayya. But later when she reaches the headman with her complaint the upper-caste man, Kumarswami, fabricates a story that Marriamma was herself with her lover Manikkam’ (grandson of Muukkayi) and was behaving in a dirty way in fields. So he just chased them away and he did nothing wrong. Matter reached ‘Nattamai’, headman of *paraiya* community. Kumarsami Mudalaali, just to save himself made a plot against trapped Mariamma. All the other folks of community were aware of the reality but nobody could say anything and they were whispering “Can we bring them to justice, though? After all, we have to go crawling to them tomorrow and beg for work” (Bama, *Sangati* 25). Poor Mariamma got humiliated and fined for two hundred rupees in front of the whole village. And village landlord gave the mandate for all the women of the lower caste, “it is you female chicks

who ought to be humble and modest. A man may do a hundred things and still get away with it. You girls should consider what you are left with, in your bellies” (Bama, *Sangati* 26). *Sangati* shows the power dynamics strangled with gender relations and these gender relations further get affected by the cultural identity and social class of these Dalit women. Their lower caste status is responsible for their economic position and constitutes their cultural identity. Girls of Dalit community get impeded at their homes because they have to follow certain code of conduct for everything as they are not expected to raise their voice higher than men, their laugh should be silent or without noise, they have to walk with their head down and have to eat only after the men of their respective families have their stomach filled properly with food as the text describes it in this way: “Why can’t we be the same as boys?...Even when our stomachs are screaming with hunger, we mustn’t eat first. We are allowed to eat only after the men in the family have finished and gone. What, Patti, aren’t we also human being?” (Bama, *Sangati* 29). Changfoot comments, “the experience of boys and men is fundamentally hostile and combative toward girls and women...boys will enact their autonomous and unitary selves as they mature into men” (450). It is the world where women used to get thrashed if they dare to eat before their men.

One can imagine the condition of women who are not even allowed to raise their voice and get treated like a worthless, valueless and insignificant stuff. It seems a part of this Dalit culture where being a women itself seems being Dalit. Culture is an element that sustains the very existence of human beings as Pandey comments that, “culture like a living organism can sustain and develop only when it shows adaptability in full abundance” (46). Their everyday experiences make them capable for reviewing this objective reality very clearly. Politics of their place itself appears crooked and complex as ruling through their domineering ideology and coercive power regulations. They try to create obfuscations and try to create a false view of the justice. As Gardiner quotes Lichtenstein who says that “society depends on the stable identities of individuals. When the cultural storehouse of available roles fails to fit the identity themes of enough people, the mismatched people may suffer identity crises and the culture suffer catastrophic change” (350).

If we go through the religious aspects of village community we will find that these women are not even allowed to participate in the activities of the church. During church festivals, ‘*Pusai*’ women used to take offerings to *saamiyaar* (clergyman). It was a custom where Dalit women had to take gifts for clergyman if they wanted to get the blessings of clergymen. It was necessary to take a box

and put grains and pulses depending on the season, into the box-paddy, maize, millet, pulses, sesame seeds, or beans, or whatever growing as per the season in their fields. Clergyman used to threaten them of ill-omen if they could not bring these offerings to him. Bama shows the corruption and immorality prevalent in the church community. There are so many wrongs done by the church authority towards those people who are converted Christians and especially towards the Dalit Christian women. The authority of the church has always made them feel of their inferiority and their identity of being an untouchable. Dalit women clean the church, “And do you know what they said? It seems we will gain merit by seeping the church and that god will bless us specially. See how they fool us in the name of God! Why, don’t those people need God’s blessing too?” (Bama, *Sangati* 89).

It is very clear from the beginning that from house to public places, from church to school, from playground to fields, patriarchy and inequality were an inseparable part of their lives. There were so many women who used to sing really very well but they were not allowed to sing in public. Their talent was crippled and so their creativity also buried deep within without a chance of getting expressed in outer world. They were not allowed to enjoy their lives rather they were trapped in a cage to shrink back in their dingy cells. They had to work in their household and also bear the tortures of their husbands. Various states of domination have congealed them physically and mentally and made them sharply resilient from inside. Also at certain time in social sphere they are constantly being reminded of their class and caste where they have been declared simply worthless subhuman destined to lead a miserable and hopeless life. They sometimes find themselves quite unable to resist the power relations and remain feeble to fashion their own identity. They have been constructed by certain disciplinary norms that have taken away their desires and aspirations. By showing an extremely bleak scenario of Dalit women’s lives Bama has embraced a deep rooted pessimistic and melancholic view of the possibility for social mutation. Bama here steers between both the aspects, social determinism and self-consciousness of Dalit women and bring into account their process of subjectivization by the outside mainstream world. Here the researcher observes the elision of binary aspects for instance rich and poor, upper caste and lower caste and of course male and female. This combination of dual aspects engulfed the lives of Dalit women till that extent where their liberation seems extremely tough. Deep reflection over their situation shows that although they are unable to subvert and thwart the oppressive external forces it is the lack of proper opportunities that throws them back and they have internalized and taken this condition for granted

for themselves. It shows their fear of powerful authority which is being exercised upon them in their internal as well as outer world of contact. This fear has taken roots in their psyche and led them to trauma, which has been derived from those who oppress them, impose their perspective, and challenge them as much as their self-identity becomes piled up and bonded with terms through which they are excluded, expelled and prejudiced against. Upper caste people, church authority and Dalit caste men all of them have constructed their own identity and try to shape and construct this notion of servitude and subjection in the head and heart of Dalit women by weakening them considerably in every sphere of their life and restricting their upward movement in the outer mainstream world. By reacting or asserting for their rights towards the dominating forces, Dalit women can just bring danger and play havoc upon their own life and existence because the ideology and perception of powerful people have taken such a deep root into the social circles that their destruction and end is only possible through their real empowerment and emancipation.

Life of women after their marriage is far worse than hell and story of Mariamma and Thaayi are proof to that. Their story is symbolic of the tortures and tragedies which most Dalit lower caste women are still destined to bear. Mariamma's husband used to beat her mercilessly like a bonded slave "from the time she was married, Mariamma suffered blows and kicks and beatings every day, and was reduced to no more than half-life, or even less" (Bama, *Sangati* 42). Same was the case with Thaayi "Thaayi's husband was beating her up again and again with the belt from his waist. She didn't even have a chatti on. Everywhere the strap fell on her light skin, there were bright red weals" (Bama, *Sangati* 42). He was such a ruthless man if someone tries to rescue his wife or used to prevent him from beating her he used to call her dirty names and humiliate and insult her by referring to her as 'whore' available to all men. He (Thaayi's husband) had gone to the horrible extent of cutting off her long traces and hang them on the door. "It's this whore's hair that I've cut off myself and hung there. Look at her neck-you won't find a single hair left. I cut her hair off to put down her pride. And he laughed" (Bama, *Sangati* 43). Foucault's comment in this context seems valid that "A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance, it has no other option but to try to minimize it" (789).

Bama has described about the beliefs of these people, especially, women have some beliefs that spirits and peys exist in their areas. They are so powerful that they can put on any face and change in any form to deceive people and take them in their control. All this shows the superstitions of these females born of illiteracy. They have many incidents to prove their beliefs in spirits and ghosts as Macchaan's daughter Manacchi became possessed by spirit. Irulappani's wife became possessed by the ghost of Esakki, "the pey only catches people who are scared. It's women who are always fearful cowards" (Bama, *Sangati* 50). "It's women who are polluted every month. It's when they are menstruating, they say, the pey will get at them. Men don't have this nuisance, you see" (Bama, *Sangati* 50). People think that the soul of Esakki is wandering here and there. Esakki married a man of Vanaan caste. Her family first approved her love and marriage outside caste but later her brothers made a plan to kill her by taking her in a forest at night and "there they dragged her out of the cart and without even caring that she was a full term pregnant woman, with one sweep of a sword they separated her head from her body. They sliced open her stomach, took out the boy, twisted its neck, and killed it" (53). Since then she is wandering for revenge. They call her one among 'Ayyankaachi troupe' (ghost troupe). These peys can put on any face out of community women and can even borrow things such as jewels from anyone and then they fight and blame each other. They can hear, watch, and sense everything. Narrator comments here, "I never heard of upper-caste women becoming possessed or dancing in a frenzy. The peys always seem set on women from the pallar, paraiyar, chakkiliyar, and koravar communities" (Bama, *Sangati* 58). Yes it's a point to be noticed here why only Dalit women. There can be various reasons but the most appropriate seems the hectic, oppressed and exhaustive lifestyle of Dalit females. As it has been mentioned here:

[a]t home they are pestered by their husbands and children; in the fields there is back-breaking work besides the harassment of the landlord. When they come home in the evening, there is no time even to draw breath. And once they have collected water and firewood, cooked a kanji and fed their hungry husband's pleasure. Even if a woman's body is wracked with pain, the husband is bothered only with his own satisfaction. Women are overwhelmed and crushed by their own disgust, boredom, and exhaustion, because of all this. The stronger ones who don't have the mental strength are totally oppressed; they succumb to mental ill-health and act as if they are possessed by peys (Bama, *Sangati* 59).

Dr.Kolk describes that “traumatized people have a poor tolerance for the psychological and physiological around. Their usual response to stress consists of either motoric discharge including acts of aggression against the self or others, or social and emotional withdrawal” (10-11). These Dalit women are delicate in physique but they have made themselves tough to take up the difficult and rigorous task because of the demanding situations of their lives which sometimes causes mental disturbance for them and makes their lives seriously traumatic and excruciating. Dalit women are obliged to serve all these people who have private possession and personal sovereignty over material apparatuses that confirms their power and authority. This phenomenology of Dalit women’s self-consciousness plays a crucial role in an apperceptive subject’s connection to the outside world and to their own self. Self-consciousness is a product of society and our inter-subjective connection with other social beings. These relations get us transformed and mutate us as a whole to recognize our conditions and our very real being. These oppressive value forces keep Dalit women under a dark shell and dehumanize them till they get into traumatic condition.

These situations that have been mentioned above coupled with abject poverty make the life of Dalit women far worse than any other thing. Patti is old but she can still relish meat, “even after she has lost her teeth, whenever they butchered a cow on Sundays, she bought the intestines and made a kuzhambu out of that” (Bama, *Sangati* 60). For other affluent people their food might be repulsive and disgusting but for them it was satisfaction as it was something that could sustain them in their difficult life conditions. Men do not have any impact of all these things on them and they were just fine and easy going with their patriarchal approach towards the women. Fight between husband and wives was a common incident in their community and sometimes it used to take such a violent form that it was beyond imagination whether it is a fight between humans or beasts:

It is always like this in our streets. After a hard day and strenuous work at fields, women have to come and prepare food and do all household chorus but men, they go towards bazaar or the chavadi to while away their time. Women are bond to do so many tasks for instance wash vessels, clean the house, collect water , gather firewood, went to shop to buy essential items, make kuzhambu or kanji and feed to all. And later when “they lay down with their bodies wracked with pain, they weren’t allowed to sleep. Whether she died or survived, he had to finish his business (Bama, *Sangati* 65).

Women are being treated as sexual bait available anytime and every time to pacify the manly hormones. As Mill describes women's condition, "all the moralities tell them that it is their duty, and all the current ideas about feelings tell them that it is their nature, to live for others-to set aside their own wishes and interest and have no life but in their affections"(80).

Dalit men cannot show their anger and frustration anywhere else so they pour all their hatred, frustration, and anger on their own family and especially their women. "Besides all this upper caste women show us no pity or kindness either, if only as women to women, but treat us with contempt, as if we are creatures of a different species, who have no sense of honour or self-respect"(Bama, *Sangati* 66). Upper caste women are also insensitive towards these lower caste women. The husbands of these Dalit women keep another woman for sexual gratification but Dalit women are helpless and unable to control all these situations. Only the women have to compromise and adjust with their men in every situation. Somewhere these women have internalized the thought of slavery and oppression by their men.

"When man makes of woman the other, he may, then expect her to manifest deep-seated tendencies towards complicity. Thus, woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other"(xxvii).

As Hartsock says:

[t]he psychological differences between girls and boys, girls being more relational and affective while boys are more autonomous, are reinforced by the differing patterns of male and female activity required by the differing patterns of male and female activity required by the sexual division of labor, and are there by replicated as epistemology and ontology"(296).

While describing about the penury, Bama gives reference to girl child labour. She describes about the story of a girl, Maikkani, whose real name is Seyarani and her life which is filled with sorrow and suffering, and the sole responsible person was- her father. Her parents frequently used to have fights. She had seen those fights and abuses for each other. Her father was just like an incarnation

of a devil. He had one more wife outside his marriage. But still he oppressed his first wife and used her to fulfill his desires -

“He comes home whenever he feels like it, and goes off again, leaving her mother with a child in her belly every time. Now she’s pregnant for the seventh time” (Bama, *Sangati* 69).

She (Maikkani) was an extremely beautiful girl but from her early childhood she has learnt nothing but to work outside in fields and do all the household work. Most of the time her mother has a baby she always takes care of her and manages to work in a match box factory for the livelihood of her family. She used to earn forty or fifteen rupees a week and in return she used to bear all reprimands and thrashing of the factory owner as she describes one incident to the narrator,

He beat me twice, Perimma. The first time was when I was sticking the matchbox labels, and he saw me throwing away two labels because I had used too much paste. He gave me a sharp knock on my skull. My whole head felt as if it was spinning. I’m only small, can I stand it when a big man like that hits me? You tell me.’ She rubbed her head (Bama, *Sangati* 73).

Royce makes a striking comment here

“An individual’s place in the social structure exerts a powerful influence on his or her economic prospects. Some are advantaged and others disadvantaged by their location in the network of social structures, social relations, and social institutions” (172).

As human beings we can definitely feel the acute pain hidden in above lines. This minor girl who works in match-box factory cannot even go out to attend nature’s call as her master beats her up for leaving her given task in between. She describes that children of some other streets use to call their names in derogatory way and humiliate them because of their caste.

Chatterjee comments:

Almost all Dalit women workers enter the labour market before the age of twenty years. Thirty one per cent of all girl children from Dalit communities are child workers. Girl’s labour is needed in agriculture and household works, and poor people choose not to spend money on the education of Dalit girls (“Dalit Women and the Public Sphere” 9).

All their childhood laughter, delight, and spark get lost somewhere in the hard work of the fields in scorching heat waves. Their hard work has made them faster than machines. Bama describes some community rituals for instance marriage functions in Paraya community. She gives a full description of *paraya* wedding and all its functions. It is unique in itself, “We winnowed gram seeds and cooked them for the wedding” (Bama, *Sangati* 80)

Dealing with the strings of women’s misfortunes Bama describes about one more woman named ‘Irulaayi’ whose husband was a great drunkard and he used to sell all household stuff to fulfill his desires. He was a drunkard and used to thrash her with his blows. Later on she couldn’t cope up with the situation and returned to her father’s home but her destiny as a woman was worst as her family even discarded saying after marriage her husband is everything to her and at any cost she is not supposed to leave her husband’s home and his family even after so many torments.

This makes it clear that for these women marriage is a one-way traffic. They were not allowed to leave their husband at any cost, he can do any harm to them but then also he is their destiny and everything after marriage. And if they think of leaving them and live separate then as in the case of Irulaayi, “people will keep on tormenting her and even drive her to her death. She has to accept that even if he is only a stone or a blade of grass, he is still her husband” (Bama, *Sangati* 93).

These lines seem quite absurd and compel us to raise only one question how two human beings can be so different from each other only on the basis of their gender ? Why one is super privileged and the other one is destined to bear abuses, tortures and torments by the other one? If a woman dares to come back from her husband’s home her family just used to say, “Give the girl a couple of slaps and tell her she must go and live with her husband” (Bama, *Sangati* 96).

Bama points out one more incident, when she met her classmate, Pecchiamma, who was married till then. She belonged to the community of those Hindus who had not converted to Christianity. She gets to know that she (Pechiamma) has married twice. Here Bama shows one more demerit of Christianity that in this religion if a woman is being tortured by her husband, she cannot get separation if he is alive. It is the misfortune of these Dalit Christian women who cannot get separation through divorce from their husbands till they are alive.

Bama describes how in east street, Aandakanni’s daughter who just had bathe in the well and was walking with her four or five friends, was suddenly seen by her husband who pounced upon her

like a hawk and: “It seems he took her home, threw her down, and stamped hard all over her...he’s a terrible man. It seems he locked her up for two whole days and wouldn’t let her go anywhere, even to shit. Wicked fellow” (Bama, *Sangati* 97).

Bama mentions some other restrictions on women of her community, for instance, they cannot go to watch cinema because if a person from other caste touches any of them, they cannot complain against them neither they can do anything themselves because of their lower caste background and lack of money and poor economic condition. It was impossible for a girl to marry outside her caste but for a boy- things were everywhere smooth and simple. Bama gives an extremely horrible description of a girl from their community, who was educated and worked for her living. She fell in love with a *palla* boy, who belonged to a lower caste and all this led to a horrendous incident:

The girl was beaten up in her house every day by her father and her brother. And they weren’t light slaps that she given, either...the younger brother hit her on the ear so severely that her earring was smashed to smithereens...he pulled her so hard by the chain she wore around her neck that it came apart in pieces that he threw away like bits of string... [h]e kept on lifting her by the hair and smashing her down against the floor. Her forehead was broken and bruised, blood poured over her face. While she was cowering, unable to bear the pain, he pulled her by the hair so roughly that it came out in bunches. He kicked her in the ribs again and again until she couldn’t even breathe. Her father...brought a piece of firewood and aimed four blows at her (Bama, *Sangati* 107).

We can see the extent of tortures. Even the village priest never used to interrupt in all these incidents because his order was superior. Priest always used to trap these people and take some kind of advantage for himself out of their problem. Community did not have any problem if a man married outside the caste but if a women dared to think of doing such things, her whole life, honour, and happiness turned into sorrow and disaster.

Bama describes how elections used to take place at that time and all the upper caste politicians used to come to their place politely asking for their votes. These people used to take elderly in their car to cast votes. But these Dalit people were very much sure that whosoever will get elected their situation and condition will never change. They still live in penury, still get humiliated due to their low social status, still women do not have basic rights, and still they face unemployment so it is useless for them to expect anything from the elections. As it has been described that, “Whatever it

is, what do we know about it; whether it is Rama who rules or Ravana, what does it matter? Our situation is always the same” (Bama, *Sangati* 99).

Rich upper caste people used to use them for their own advantage and after taking their votes they used to disappear like air without giving any heed towards their problems. “These rich men use us as dice in their own games” (Bama, *Sangati* 102). Patti describes that boys of their community work for different parties and later they fight with each other on the name of their respective parties and in this way parties are just following the strategy of divide and rule and making the use of ‘caste issue,’ “But they will never let us unite. They separate us in the name of party, God, priest and caste; they play games with us. And we are like grinning puppets in their hands; I speak angrily” (Bama, *Sangati* 104). All these conditions are responsible for their impoverishment and fragmentation. The upper caste men have the authority of every kind of possession be it political, social or monetary, they are safe from all the spheres. As the narrative mentions that: “These people have made us useless and gave us a subaltern existence in all the spheres of our lives. These people have their authority everywhere so till they will rule they will never allowed us to progress anywhere. They will befool us and keep us as ‘marginalized subjects” (Bama, *Sangati* 55). These power binaries are very much part and parcel of their lives and these elements only construct their lives. As K. Bereano comments here that “We are easier to control when one part of our selves is split from another, fragmented, off balance” (*Sister Outsider*, Introduction 9). Foucault’s comment also seems worthy to support it that: “

Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted “above” society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of...a society without power relations can only be an abstraction...power constitutes a fatality at the heart of societies, such that it cannot be undermined (791).

Bama says at the end that women are the only beings, who can bring change to their community. But it is only possible through self-realization and self-reliance. These women should cultivate unity among themselves and make a female bonding of themselves if they really want to change the ways of the world. The patriarchal structure never allows them to move forward and raise their voices as instead of helping they obstruct their path and the rigid caste structure never allows them to take part in mainstream worlds. Somewhere the situation of these women is the result of their internalization of their conditions and intentional incapacitation, as half of these women never go

for voting. How will they understand the outer politics and reasons for their situation? We can notice the comment of a woman Nagamma Kizhavi that “How can you compare a mountain and a deep pit? We donkeys belong to rubbish heaps and can hope for no better fate than until our dying day” (Bama, *Sangati* 112). Such thoughts of women show their reluctance on their part to upgrade their situation and passively accept whatever injustice is going on in society towards them.

Birth of a girl was just like a curse for these people. Birth of a girl child was the symbol of worries, humiliation and upcoming tragedies and nothing else. It used to remind them of dowry they would need to give in future for her marriage and if a boy takes birth that means income and prestige. Sometimes parents used to kill infant girls to save themselves from various problems. They never used to send them to school for getting education and later they used to marry them with some incapable fellow thus making their lives worse than hell

Bama says at the end that life of the Dalit women is caught in a tragical intersectionality. They are plagued by casteism, patriarchy and poverty but the life of Dalit Christian women is far worse, as they are under the authority of church. Bama describes about herself how a single Dalit woman without marriage will be pestered by the whole society: “Being a Dalit creates problem. On top of that being a Dalit woman makes it more difficult. The biggest problem of all, I realized, is trying to live alone as an unmarried Dalit woman” (Bama, *Sangati* 120).

She says that in her community it is extremely necessary to marry a girl at a certain age. They start talking and whispering if a girl has started menstruation and she is not married. Later on they just give her away to someone who does not care at all and just brands her with his name to suppress her and keep her under his domination.

“They seem to think once a woman is married and has a tali round her neck, she is also signed, sealed, and delivered over to one man. They assume that otherwise she is the common property to many fellows, and they will leer at her suggestively. Why? Why shouldn't a woman being to no one at all but herself?” (Bama, *Sangati* 121).

This attitude needs to be changed. People should bring up their children alike without any bias. Instead of thinking about their marriage they should think of their right education and better future. Bama talks about how she was made to feel ashamed and worthless by people due to her caste. She describes that people used to ask her about her caste and she never wanted to hide it and she wanted

to reveal in bold terms that she is a *paraichi*, and that's her identity. She says, "I have to struggle so hard because I am a woman. And exactly like that, my people are punished constantly for the simple fact of having been born as Dalits. Is it our fault that we are Dalits?" (Bama, *Sangati* 121). Bama says it was not only upper caste men but women were also a part of this system who used to chase us away if they got to know about our caste. Being a woman first Bama has message for Dalit women that they should be self-reliant. They should surely get to know their reality but do not let it internalize it as their destiny. They should make a consolidated effort. Bama says:

We must not live like people who choose to be blind though they can see. If we ourselves do no change our condition, then who will come and change it for us?...Then injustices, violence, and inequalities will come to end, and the saying will come true that 'women can make and women can break (*Sangati* 122-123).

If women will come to realize their power and strength then no one can brand them like a slave, no one will try to minimize them as 'worthless trivial object' and they can always make a way for themselves to achieve a standpoint of their own. As Foucault makes an extremely valid comment which emphasize upon the determination of the Dalit women.

We are not trapped. We cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it. So what I've said does not mean that we are always trapped, but that we are always free-well any way, that there is always the possibility of changing ...resistance comes first, and resisting remain superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with resistance (20).

Above mentioned lines deliver a message that there is always a possibility after resistance. Specially the struggle of women, when they think to raise a stand of their own, they can recognize their potential and use it in far better way than before and all this reversal of consciousness will change the situation for better. O'Leary quotes Reagon, "Today whenever women gather together it is not necessarily nurturing. It is coalition building. And if you feel the strain, you may be doing some good work" (68). Bama has shown all these elements of struggle and resistance in these Dalit women. She has shown both sides of Dalit women's identity weaker as well strong. While dealing with their ontology, she has dealt with their situations that construct their marginal identity and made a blow to the somnolent Dalit community to come up for their self-construction.

Bama has dealt with the temporal reality of Christian Dalit women. While expounding their repressive past she has dealt with a collective experience of Dalit women. They are subjected to patriarchy and poverty. Different social, political, and economic apparatuses try to subdue their life-force. But at some places these Dalit women seem to be defying the societal norms. They are conditioned by their extremely difficult working situations and destined to lead a subaltern status. The uncanny power structure has expelled them to lead life at the brink of subalternity. In this way *Sangati*, unravels the hidden spaces of Dalit women's lives, who are gripped into the vortex of different power structures. While projecting their explicit and implicit day to day life experiences. It also tries to awake their languid capacities and end at a hopeful note to Dalit women community that although they are the product of their history but they have the capability to shape their own lives in a better way by their own united efforts.

Fourth Chapter

Subaltern Status: Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*

“The ear is receptive to conflicts only if the body loses its footing. A certain imbalance is necessary, a swaying over some abyss, for a conflict to be heard” - Julia Kristeva

The present chapter strives to scrutinize the conditions and survival of the Mahars, a Dalit community, living in Maharashtra. While delineating the ideological clash between the dominated and dominating people, it also attempts to identify the process of resistance towards the upper caste hegemony. The ideology of prejudice continues to dominate despite the profusion of constitutional safeguards, legal provisions, affirmative action, policies, and political mobilization for the welfare of the particular subaltern section. The chapter deliberates upon and interrogates the basic nature of power structure that believes in confirming and configuring the dispossessed, powerless, isolated, and destitute to the periphery of subalternity. Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2009), originally written in Marathi language with the name *Jina Amucha*, was translated into English by Maya Pundit. It is an attempt to reconnect with the history of Mahars in order to scrutinize the subaltern lives of Mahar people in general and Mahar women in particular. It is an extremely heart-wrenching and plaintive account of Dalit Mahar community. Kamble has shown the filthy and abject conditions of the life of Mahar community in general and specially focuses upon the Mahar women.

Before delving into the narrative we can understand the astonishing tumult spreading in our nation regarding the condition of certain lower caste groups which have been segregated on the basis of their jobs, living conditions, attire, and looks. All these factors denote to Dalit culture, a culture which also contrive the social location of this section and constructs their experiences regarding it. In the same vein, it need to be observed that there is a large gap between the powerful and powerless in our society and this gap denotes various kinds of differences and disorders that take place in it. Such kind of disorders in society certainly lead to anarchy and chaos that ultimately lead to marginalization of certain sections. And ultimately this marginalization leads to their victimization, discrimination and humiliation at every stage of their lives. All these issues uncover an extremely brutal and vicious face of Indian society which turns its face without regard for the decrepitude of its fellow citizens. And it ultimately leads to an agonizing distinction between 'us' and 'them'. These differences ultimately bedevil the idea of an integrated nation where we have been taught the

divine mantras for the welfare of all the mankind. According to one of our immensely popular chanting mantra:

Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina Sarve Santu Nir-Aamayaah/Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyanttu Maa Kashcid-Duhkha-Bhaag-Bhavet/ Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih// (qtd. in Vaswani xviii).

Means a country which teaches its citizens about the welfare and well-being of every citizen irrespective of differences, which pray for the good health of all and aspire for the peace all around in the world emerges contrary to all its noble principles. Its citizens are embedded with conservative politics against their fellow citizens who are deprived of various resources. They do not give a give heed towards these people who are standing everywhere at the margins. Such disorientation of a society in itself is alarming and leads it towards further fragmentation and at the level of torpidity where its vision becomes completely burred to acknowledge all those factors which are responsible for hastening the complexity of situations for the marginal section which further accelerates the pace of distress causes to these negligible beings.

Further in the same vein the chapter explores the site of Mahar women's divergent experiences which are embedded in the society. These experiences have not taken shape in a vacuum rather they are the consequence of a deep critical observation and speculation derived upon certain experiences. These experiences signify the pervasive depth and hardiness of distinction infused into the psyche of powerful upper caste people which has amplified the pivotal dimensions of discrimination. It is the grim reality of the life of a Mahar which has bludgeon their innate capacities to make use of opportunities which are already available to other resourceful people and holders of the higher castes. These holders of the highest echelons remain reticent in such a determined manner which turn them into a crowd of the mute spectators of ongoing fracas in society. So dealing with the actualities of their lives, Kamble's purpose is to unfold a society from the standpoint of those who are living at the margins as 'subaltern'. It will ferret out the intersection of oppressive forces due to caste, class and gender which are further combined with lack of resources and poverty. Subalternity means as K.Nayar calls it "rise of the collective-sense within an individual's voice of protest" (65). Through her own life incidents Kamble seems to be giving voice to her voiceless Mahar community. It is the point of view of a female experience coupled with her consciousness that has made her recognize her competence, ability and capacity to raise questions for her situation as well as the situation of millions of women like her. These negligible women have a consciousness of

social reality that is distinct from that put forth by their male counterparts. These women communicate to each other about their unique personal experiences regarding their condition. The concept of experience is important because of the centrality of the roles they play as an individual and the idea of experience is an extremely powerful way to counter the systems of oppression, which are responsible for silencing these oppressed groups and manipulating their desires. The ubiquity of the biased norms have contributed a lot in constructing the epistemology of these subaltern groups which were maligned and denigrated due to the tasks they perform. But now due to their knowledge regarding the ways of society to treat them in an extremely disparaging manner, they could gather a collective consciousness which has helped them to impugn the calumny put against them.

Mahar community is one of those unfortunate people who are lacking in social honour because of their class and caste. They have lost their reasoning and rationality in the past as Kamble says here “Our reason was gagged” (*The Prison* 49). Through her autobiography Bama has raised various grave issues regarding the status and condition of Mahar women. *The Prisons We Broke* is the first autobiography written by a Dalit woman in Marathi. It brings out a graphic description of Mahar’s life conditions, their vivid culture and their filthy way of living, which make them polluted and untouchable. Their poverty is so overwhelming that it would awe-struck the readers and leave an indelible mark in their hearts. This kind of discourses also reveal the contingent nature of power and identity. The narrative talks about the difficulties of Mahar women, their traumatic lives, and their suppressed existence under the dominance of patriarchy. As Pandit comments in the introduction of the narrative: “If the Mahar community is the ‘other’ for the Brahmins, Mahar women become the other for the Mahar men” (*The Prisons*, Introduction xv). The social construction of the meaning of being a Dalit woman creates a situation where they occupy the subject position of the ‘other’. Due to their low socio-economic status, they often become the victims of domestic violence and sexual exploitation. From their very childhood all their aspirations get choked due to patriarchal fear and their sexual and bodily integrity get threatened and violated because of her extremely pitiable conditions. All such horrendous experiences transmit a severe trauma for these women. It entangles them in a vortex of severe negativity, which gets communicated to their upcoming generations also and proves fatal for their development. The struggle of these females is intersectional which is rooted in the multiple vulnerabilities. And

ultimately Each of these experience of struggle reflects a distinct feminist perspective on the contemporary Dalit society and Indian society as a whole.

Kamble mentions her own difficult experiences in writing a literary work and getting it published. According to her it is not easy, it is arduous when you belong to a lower caste and want a place among people of power and potential then your 'caste' will definitely create hindrances at every step. People will make you realize at every step that your significance is based upon the hereditary of your lower caste. But now Dalit women are being described by Dalit women. They are throwing a new light upon their exclusionary and obfuscating existence. They have a mission to bring realization to each and every Dalit woman about their existing social conditions. These Dalit women writers aim to lead their Dalit women society with a transformative insight and unique vision. They keep on reminding and writing about the legacy of exclusion and difference that they carry with themselves till now.

As she says "Hindu philosophy has discarded us as dirt and thrown us into their garbage pits, on the outskirts of the village. We lived in the filthiest conditions possible" (Kamble, *The Prisons* 18). Such kind of exclusion and ostracism substantially change the consciousness of a person and give them strength to discard the validity of those unfavorable opinions and evaluations which keep them at the bottom. All these past experiences are necessary for these Dalit women to produce the transformative knowledge through a process of collective feminist consciousness. They emerge as persistent and resilient interrogator against all the inequality which is being practiced in their world for centuries.

The struggle for recognition and acceptance is rapidly becoming the paradigmatic form of political conflict in the 20th century and their representation has still remained mediated and partial. It can be recapitulated that they want to push back those limits which hinder them. By each and every word of this narrative Baby Kamble shows the opposition of her whole community. Here a comment by hooks seems valid to cite "our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance" (28). There is a distinctive vigour to be noticed, when a Dalit women writes about the possibilities and gives her voice to the concerns of millions of women like her, who are going through harrowing experiences in their present and already gone through in their past. It helps them to build up a collective standpoint. Which definitely proves to be a hieroglyph in building up their new visibility, potency, and legitimacy in society.

The chapter proposes to delve into the horrible existence of Mahar people in general and Mahar women in particular. Mahars, the community of untouchables from Maharashtra, live under extremely difficult conditions and lead an isolated life from the mainstream world and it has silenced their voices and crippled their consciousness. Through the narrative we come across many issues related with the Mahar community, their separation from the rest of the world and fragility of their way of living. It explicitly reflects and unravels the kind of discrimination these people go through and feel fragmented and interrupted in every sphere of their lives. They do not feel accepted in the outer world. Baby Kamble has synchronized the 'Dalits as subalterns' by unsnarling their history which is the undercurrent of their situation. She has also deplored the immiseration of Mahar community. The Mahar community found largely in the state of Maharashtra, is included in the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes' category by the Indian government. Since the time of the reign of 'Peshwas' emperors they were recognized as "untouchables." Although it is an autobiography of Baby Kamble, we can call it a socio-biography of the Mahar community that recollects the trials and tribulations they have faced because of their untouchable status. Besides showing the Brahmanical creed that has sanctioned and perpetuated the oppression of Dalits, Kamble also shows how the women of this community are crushed under the hegemonic structures of masculine power in their domestic and outer social spheres. While weaving the pain of 'Mahar' women, Kamble also throws some light upon those episodes of their lives which provide some relief to them in their burdensome lives. These incidents seem working as dramatic relief in their extremely arduous life journey. Such as Arnold and Blackburn say that, "Narratives, in this view, are not just entertaining fictions but meaningful exploration of life which reveal emotional and social realities that otherwise elude identification and explanation" (4). Elaborating the quote in context of Dalit women we can say that, these women are aware of their subaltern situation. The operation of their personal insight can be observed at the level of their community where these alike women share and communicate their analogous life conditions and it indicates their status as women 'subjects'. Their identity as women is called into question as they are bonded within caste codes. But through all their dialogues one may come across all those life aspects of these people which could have otherwise deemed unworthy to mention anywhere. All these life incidents are also responsible for encouraging the consciousness of women as Dalit and raising their capacity and competence to broaden their mental horizon to better under the social space.

Further women make the core of this narrative as it deals with all their day to day schedule which also helps us to get a glimpse of the panorama of their lives. Their lives revolve around their own family, its chores and after marriage same schedule gets repeated at their husband's place. In every condition and at any time they are not ready to compromise their womanly virtues. As Kamble comments at one place about marital status, by referring to kumkum (red sign which a woman wear in the form of 'red bindi' or vermilion) which they wear for their husbands:

We are very protective about the kumkum on our foreheads for the sake of husbands. "We believe that if a woman has her husband she has the whole world; if she does not have a husband, then the world holds nothing for her. It's another thing that these masters of kumkum generally bestow upon us nothing but grief and suffering. Still the kumkum we apply in their name is the only ornament for us. It is more precious than even the Kohinoor diamond (Kamble, *The Prisons* 41).

Above mentioned lines assuredly show their (Mahar women) dedication for their husbands but more than that it shows their hidden discomposure and dismay for being deserted by their respective husbands. Lives of these women are so much entangled with their family, their in-laws, and their husbands that they hardly get time for themselves. This is the essence of their womanhood that teaches them servitude till death. Their condition just brings out these lines by De Beauvoire that "we are exhorted to be women, remain women, and become women" (qtd. in Moi 177). De Beauvoire's comment apprehends the condition of these women in an explicit manner that, these women experience various types of oppressions inspite of serving everyone and as a result they turn as the one who remains unaffected, unassuming, unpretentious in every condition. All these conditions make their lives trapped into a web of intricacies and make their lives exist at the point of intersection, where many forms of persecution and subjugation exist. Patriarchal oppression is one of these tyrannies where Dalit women live as a subjugated beings under their male counterparts but again this experience of living as a subject under patriarchy is prime. For these reasons Bama calls her narrative, *The Prisons We Broke*, as a 'Dalit feminist critique of patriarchy.' As it is a vital addition in their forte of self-reflection about the particular experience which further enables them to achieve an exclusive Dalit females experience. The subjugation through Patriarchy has signaled them their place within the social order.

We can notice the flow of knowledge for the Dalit Mahar women about themselves. It is far different from that of Dalit males and that only leads to its epistemological consequences, about society and the people around them. They are people from low caste, facing casteism and dire poverty and because of poverty and gender they have been rendered voiceless inside their homes and in outer world. Resourceful and upper class people always keep vulture eyes on their body and humiliate them in every possible way. Mahar women work for them, bring them firewood, and get an extremely inhuman treatment and bitter words by their masters. Here is a quote from the text which emphasizes upon this point how these Dalit women have internalized their sense of servitude when an upper caste orders them:

Listen carefully you dumb Mahar women, check the sticks well. If you overlook any of the threads sticking to the wood, there will be a lot of trouble. But what's that to you? Your carelessness will cost us heavily. Our house will get polluted. Then we will have to polish the floor with cow dung and wash all our clothes, even the rags in the house! Such trouble we will have to undergo for your foolishness! And how will the gods tolerate this, tell me? They too will get polluted, won't they? That's why I'm telling you, check the sticks well! (Kamble, *The Prisons* 55).

Above mentioned lines demonstrate a strong point that the people of upper caste have always kept these lower caste people at bay and crippled their self-worth. These Dalit Mahar people have internalized all these situations as they are conscious of their place in society. They reside in filthy, unhygienic, and murky places which denote their social location. There is a palpable interconnection between their extremely low economic condition and the filth they are trapped in. And it further worsens the condition of the Dalit community women because of their triple exclusion in the context of caste, gender and class. These women have suffered traditionally. They are devoid of all those things which turn a human into a human resource. They are uneducated, in poor health condition, and without any social security and all these conditions have turned them inhuman. The inhuman status given to these subalterns further turns them into a bonded labour who is completely prohibited to even utter a word against it.

Bama seems to be communicating some of these deep rooted beliefs of untouchability and impurity associated with Indian Dalits. These lower caste people have internalize their lower ritual status under various powerful social institutions. All these uncorroborated and unjustifiable cultural

sanctions make these people socially unacceptable. Social discrimination and unacceptance of these people reinforces all those barriers that prove cataclysmic for the progress of these people who are wounded by their unfortunate past. Due to their caste their identity has got besmirched. The society slanders their works and their whole existence gets crippled under various power structures. Their situation do not seem getting better instead of various constitutional safeguards provided by Indian democracy and that is why it presents an extremely brutal, ferocious and unforgiving face of Indian society.

It also unveils the various ways in which the construction of the resistant selfhood and subjection not only of a person but entire marginalized community take place. It is not a simple narrative of Baby Kamble's life incidents but a document of the pains of Mahar community as well, "An individual's story becomes significant in the exploration of group identity" (*The Prisons* 43). But women shown in the narrative are not passive recipients of forces acting upon their lives rather they deploy their agency in variety of ways, although they are leading a hellish existence but they seem to be very stubborn in their approach, and refuse to be subjects. It can be noticed how these people are compelled to eat carcass as food, have no decent work to do. Even their women are indulged in many field works to sustain their respective families. They have a strong work ethic, because their labour is central to their existence, so in a way besides being powerful narratives of exclusion, these can also be called 'radical feminist discourses' where these Dalit Mahar women are showing their knowledge of social condition and constructing their own Dalit feminist standpoint. These narratives also present split and fragmented consciousness of these Dalit Mahar women who always feel traumatized and tortured by their day to day humiliating experiences.

Village that is central to this narrative is 'Veergaon', the place to which Baby Kamble and her community belong to. Here people are living in ignorance and their lives are dominated by poverty and epidemics, death rate is high because of ceaseless starvation. In the very beginning Baby Kamble mentions an instance to readers about the condition of her mother when she says, "My father had locked up my aai in his house; like a bird in a cage. Whatever money he earned, he would squander away" (*The Prisons* 6). This is the general condition of women of Dalit Mahar community, they are Dalit among Dalits. Patriarchal structure disrupts and devastates the family structure of the oppressed and fractures their consciousness. Power of patriarchy is always there to crush them and subjugate them under its feet. The men of their community are not sensible enough

to know and value their women's labour. These women are not only doing household work, but also bearing and rearing up children. Mahar women are indulged the whole day in back breaking activities and at the same time subjected to the humiliating behaviour of their men. Diseases like epidemic are extremely merciless upon their lives because of poor medical facilities and unhygienic circumstances. As Kamble writes "Soon there was an outbreak of an epidemic. This disease had plagued them for ages. It killed many and compelled the survivors to migrate to distant lands" (*The Prisons* 3). These diseases are their destiny and they are unable to do anything because of the scarcity of resources and ignorance towards their rights as other human beings. They do not have medical facilities and because of taking birth into an utterly lower caste and having pauper like condition, they do not have access to physicians. People think them a trash destined to lead a filthy existence. Women suffer the most because of their sex, gender and patriarchy. One ray of hope, however, is their ability to challenge their circumstances and make better out of them as Chakraborty makes a remarkable comment in context of the female standpoint that: "They use their own positions as a place from which to interpret values and to see how the dominant values are constructed rather than accept them automatically as a predetermined set of values which they must accept" (8). They are leading a deplorable life without any excitement or hope for positive outcome. They perform all household chores and also do labour outside to earn a living for the family. They work incessantly which leaves them exhausted but do not make them deprive of their mental strength. It is their natural way of living, a very gripping status quo in which they reside. They are forced to survive under various power structures and patriarchy is one of them. They do not understand the real cause of their own oppression, nor the reason for their advancement but still they want to make their identity accessible and acceptable in the mainstream world. These are the experiences which Dalit community women need to contemplate upon to build up a standpoint of their own. Standpoint is not simply a point of view. It is an intense perspective as Hartsock says, "a standpoint is achieved rather than obvious, a mediated rather than an immediate understanding" (110). Standpoint cannot be formed in a day or two rather it needs a serious meditation on one's situation. These women are portrayed as irrelevant, dirty, illiterate, unprincipled, incompetent, and sluttish, which compel them to reflect upon their difference from others in society. Kamble refers to one of the instances,

“In those days it was a custom to keep women at home, behind the threshold. The honour enjoyed by a family was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house. When no one could see even a nail of the woman thus confined to the four walls of the house” (*The Prisons* 15).

This is the social paradigm under which these Mahar women lead their existence. Their social location has determined their understanding and given them knowledge regarding their social situation. They are the subordinated group and the power structures that subjugate them have removed some choices from their lives. People of upper caste behave in an extremely shameful manner with them to remind them of their extremely low social status. In the narrative Kamble has shown the behavior of an upper caste shopkeeper in the village which is extremely disparaging to a Mahar woman who comes to buy something at his shop:

“Appasaheb could you please give this ‘despicable Mahar’ woman some shikakai for one paisa and half a shell for dry coconut with black skin” (Kamble, *The Prisons* 14).

Above lines indicate the lowly status of these Mahar woman. She calls herself 'despicable' as she takes herself lower than others. She accepts her low status to survive but still gets rebuked and taunted by the upper caste people. The condition of these women is extremely vulnerable as the privileged class which has branded them as impure, untouchable and filthy always keep a vulture gaze to disrepute them and humiliate them publically in virtue of their caste privilege. Even today we can read plethora of incidents regarding the violence going on against the lower caste women because of their severely weak social standing. These women are subjected to multiple and overlapping form of exploitation which make them extremely conscious of their social position. When Dalit women contemplate over the invisibility and distortion of her experiences and her perspectives then it provides a basis from which to commence theorizing the lives of these women that aims to liberate women from their subordination. They are caught up in the vortex of power structures which aggregate their subjection to others. As Foucault asserts that “It is certain that the mechanisms of subjection cannot be studied outside their relation to the mechanisms of exploitation and domination. But they do not merely constitute the “terminal” of more fundamental mechanisms. They entertain complex and circular relations with each other” (*The Subject and Power* 789). They are caught into the power vortex. It is clear that various oppressive forces do not function in isolation rather these forces work upon each other to make a situation more complex and far complicated. This is the life condition of these women who suffer various social subjugations.

At some places we can observe that the cruel outer world has tormented these women so much that they have internalized this thought of being polluted as they accept it as their destiny and make others aware of their presence while standing somewhere. They think that their touch might pollute others so they always remain extra cautious. As the following statement makes it clear: “Take care little master! Please keep a distance don’t come too close. You might touch me and get polluted” (*The Prisons* 15). This kind of social exclusion has caused a psychological and emotion disturbance to these Mahar women. Kamble also focuses on the loss of reason by the upper castes as a condition that confines the Dalits. These people participate in relations of dominations which challenge and transform them. As Hartsock says “[A]nd one of the ways in which oppressed people are oppressed is, surely, that their oppressors control the information that reaches them” (10). It will enable them to hold their ground in negotiation and in the resolution of change. The narrative unravels a kind of dialectical play between exoteric and esoteric issues of these pauperized, marginalized, and dispensable people. They struggle for a new definition and a new insight for their existence. Social democratization seems arduous till socially constituted and socially constitutive maladies grip the lives of these unfortunate people. Their resources are inchoate, conjectured, and limited .but the condition of their women is far worse as they face triple conundrum. They are the alter-ego of the author and mostly occupy space of absence, silence and subordination. Their culture keeps them addled or on the edge of deprivation. As Scott says “It is not individual who have experience but subjects who are constituted through experience” (775). The atrocities on Dalit women are not to be seen merely in the light of their being women but must be analyzed within the broader framework of societal structure. Their experiences and subjectivation are necessary to bring forth their emancipation. Other humans of society struggle for freedom but these people have to struggle to be human first. They are not considered touchable by the society. Touch of these people has been considered polluting and vicious for upper castes.

Mahar women are following all the family rituals without any complaint and sustaining their families. Kamble is trying to retrieve the self-determining consciousness of these subalterns. They are also performing bathing rituals for their children in the month of ‘Ashadh’ :

It is a kind of ritual bath in Mahar community which would seem quite hateful and bizarre to their upper caste counterparts, Pressing him down immobile on the bath stone, she would bring out the dry piece of coconut from her blouse, break it into her mouth, and chew it into

a fine paste and spitting the whitish mixture of coconut juice and saliva on her palm, she would massage the child's head with it. When she was convinced that she had covered each strand of hair on his head, she would massage further and then wash it with hot water (*The Prisons* 15).

Above paragraph shows the naturalistic experiences of these Dalit Mahar women, their day to day activities and the services they provide to their house and the outer world. It mentions a part of their customs and rituals how they celebrate 'Ashadh' month by celebrating a ritual bath for their children. It also emphasizes the utility of naturalistic experiences and forms their epistemology and shapes their standpoint, through which they can be heard and understood by the world around. Women as social beings work as the caregivers and mothers but this is the identity of their gender provided to them by the society. The society has distinctly marked them responsible for these activities and that is why they have inherited these roles since the very beginning of their lives. These particular virtues what Carol Gilligan calls the 'ethics of care' are embedded in these women since young ages. Their socialization as caregiving reflects a typical feminist point of view. And these are the ways of constructing those experiences which further lead in building up female epistemology. These ways of knowing which were undervalued from the patriarchal standpoint are not getting an assertion by the strong awareness of these women. There is something remarkable about the experiences of women in virtue of their roles which has got constructed by the society. All experiences generate from a particular standpoint designed by the peculiar experiences of women which provide them an epistemic advantage.

These activities only provide what Sandra Harding calls 'strong objectivity,' that is, it will bring them closer to truth to understand the reality of being at the periphery of marginality. This division of labor is responsible for the different epistemology, difference in knowledge of men and women, as Hartsock says with regard to women's activities that, "they like men sell their labor power and produce both commodities and surplus values, and produce use-values in the home. Unlike men, however, women's lives are institutionally defined by their production of use-values in the home" (291). When a Mahar woman gives birth to a child she goes through a very horrible experience of labor pain as she is unable to get medical facilities. Helpless she would lie completely at the mercy of the women surrounding her. These historically suppressed people live the legacies of exclusion because of lower caste background. Their identities are refracted. They share a space of difference

and exclusion as they face male prerogative which exerts its manhood upon them. They are forced to lead an extremely sterile existence because of this totalitarian patriarchy. But it is a question of existence for them to be there for their husbands and it is their destiny as Beal says that “She must lead her entire life as a satellite to her mate” (155). In this way their men’s understanding and their interests of the world become their own and they do not develop themselves as individuals and are just reduced to only a biological function. The narrative describes the scene of childbirth in an extremely horrible manner which brings forth the lack of resources and penury of these people:

Her vagina would be swollen stiff as the surrounding women kept thrusting their hands inside. There would be several wounds and cuts inside, which throbbed with unbearable pain. For want of cotton or cloth pads, blood continue to flow. Why the girl would be fortunate if her family could not find even some dirty rags for her. This was the extent of their poverty (Kamble, *The Prison* 59).

These people are affected by the poor health and hygiene issues in virtue of their material circumstances. They are impecunious and incapable to reform their own conditions and the existing inequalities help in exaggeration of their tragedies. These marginal groups are not responsible for their condition. That is why it is riveting on the part of country to adopt some measures to reform their situations for betterment and it is also the ethical duty of those powerful members of democratic structure to take steps to transform their life conditions. All these conditions and troubles denote the multiplicity of social positions for achieving objectivity as these positions give experiences which are embodied in the standpoint of female. These situations also signify the social categories and map the patterns of power structure. In this way the standpoints are substantive as they keep Individuals record of miscellaneous people who have been allotted different social locations. These individuals get different experiences in various terms and spheres of their lives. These different experiences and locations appear from diverse social positions and backgrounds and are responsible to provide access to evidence. The construction the whole life existence of women of the Mahar community women. They have no proper basic need, education, and other resources to make their life better. Their men earn extremely meager wages and they outpour all their frustration upon their women. Their existence is being defined by what Fraser says: “Socioeconomic misdistribution and cultural misrecognition” (27).

We can observe various instances of misogyny in the narrative in context which a form of patriarchal oppression through which they treat their women in most disparagable manner and threaten them to be in their limits. They feel a sense of superiority over their females while torturing them. They try to pummel a sense of inferiority and worthlessness in their minds. These disconcerting incidents construct the Dalit female knowledge about themselves. Kamble here seems to be making an evidential and logical analysis of the position of Mahar Community women as for the achievement of a standpoint it requires certain political aims on the part of marginal person. It is required to produce the knowledge that would benefit the marginalized section challenges the systems of oppression. It charts the power patterns which make the way for prevalence of hegemonic ideology and create and maintain oppressive social relations which limit the health, life prospects and complete well-being of these marginal people. A standpoint requires an active stance, it requires a keen analysis and deep observation on the part of those standing at the line of margins. They are divided between the line as they are situated in-between. From the one side of the line everything is dreadful and the other side induces them to aspire for what they actually lack in. It requires understanding and revising our epistemic practices so as to identify understand and ultimately abolish the ways in which systems of oppression limit knowledge production. Standpoint should be understood broadly to allow for multiple conceptions of what counts as challenging systems of oppression or producing knowledge that benefits marginal groups, marginalized in virtue of belonging to groups that historically has been underrepresented and most seriously affected by a particular problem. To challenge the systems of oppression it is mandatory on the part of these subaltern, marginalized persons to broadly understand the panorama of injustice prevalent in their surroundings. As at one place In *The Prisons We Broke*, Kamble emphasizes that the labour of the Mahars has sustained the village and the upper-caste households as she says: “it’s not prosperity and wealth that you enjoy-it is the very life blood of the Mahars!...your palaces are built with the soil soaked with the sweat and blood of Mahars” (*The Prisons* 56). These harsh life conditions which Kamble mentions seem really horrendous to recall once’s memories but it is also an attempt to reconfigure their lives as subaltern and question that position given to them.

All these experiences which a Mahar community woman goes through make up her whole existence. But it opens up a new world of thought, observations and imagining which is of great interest and complexity. It shapes their life and underpins their personal identity. It allows them to discover that there can be alternatives to every disappointment, disillusionment, bafflement, fear.

They are going to organize around their own issues to redress wrongs and gain position. The reasons and solutions derive from being involved. In this process, they raise their consciousness themselves, and those of others. It provides them motivation, the impetus and the synergy to bring a change. In simple terms it can be said that experience is the very process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject owning certain identities in the social relations--- identities constituted through material, cultural, economic and intra-psychic relations. Mahar Dalit Women have turned into 'subjects' through their experiences. We can call it 'knowing subalternity' too, as these women are getting an awareness of their subaltern status by reflecting upon the incidents going on against them. It can be said that the positionality of the Mahar women constructs their consciousness. They make the center of all the aspects of their lives. They are leading an utterly voiceless existence where no one wants to hear them and solve their problems. On the one hand there is caste and class and on the other there is gender. They are following all the traditions and customs but then also they have been rendered voiceless everywhere and in every sphere of life. In this context Chakraborty says that, "women are regarded as upholding the traditions by conforming to them; men on the other hand uphold traditions by enforcing them not upon themselves but upon women" (146). The mentioned comment shows that male members of community always feel privileged in keeping their women as their subordinate. They want to make rule and give commands but they never expect the same for themselves as it secures their strength and make them proud over their manliness whereas these Dalit women are under various power structures that always add something horrible to their present condition.

The narrative by Kamble also highlights how these negative experiences of dominance, torture and exploitation sour the relationships between mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law as the former perpetuate it on the later thus sowing the seeds of further imbalance of power They outpour their anger and frustration over others. The following excerpt from the text makes it evident:

The other world had bound us with chains of slavery. But we too were human beings. And we too desired to dominate, to wield power. But who would let us do that? So we made our own arrangements to find slaves-our very own daughters-in-law! If nobody else, then we could at least enslave them (Kamble, *The Prison* 87).

Here a quote by Roy seems appropriate: "Some things come with their own punishments" (115). Dalit women are being tortured everywhere, insulted and rebuked by the elderly women and beaten up by their men. As the text points out:

Every day the Maharwada would resound with the cries of hapless women in some house or the other. Husbands, flogging their wives as if they were beast, would do so until the sticks broke with the effort the heads of these women would break open, their backbones would be crushed, and some would collapse unconscious. But there was nobody to care for them. They had no food to eat, no proper clothing to cover their bodies (Kamble, *The Prison* 98).

Above forth comment is extremely heart wrenching which denotes the condition of these women. Instead of doing all the chores and working so hard, they get thrashes and insults as reward. Their lives seem to be in endless ordeals. In every sphere they come across such experiences. Their struggle has three angles as they struggle against different forms of domination; it can be ethnic, social, and religious. In this context Foucault makes a powerful argument here that: "There are two meanings of the word "subject" subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (11). Foucault's comment supports the concept of bifurcated consciousness of these females, a term used by Smith to refer to a split between the worlds as you actually experience it in person and the oppressive view to which you must adapt to. For instance, a masculine point of view. The notion of bifurcation of consciousness defines that the subaltern groups are situated to view the world from the perspective of the oppressor group. It brings forth two modes of experience and knowledge. One is internal and the other is outer where one moves out and passes beyond resulting in two forms of subjection, one is by the others and the other is by one's own internalization of experiences and thoughts. As the narrative mentions that these people have been treated like animals so they have thwarted believing that they are more animal and less human:

We were just like animals, but without tails. We would be called human only because we had two legs instead of four. Otherwise there was no difference between us and the animals. But how had we been reduced to this bestial state? Who else, but people of the high castes! (Kamble, *The Prisons* 47-48)

The particular quote from the narrative denotes the awakened consciousness of these women as they are aware from their past and the kind of ordeal they have gone through. Kamble is giving voice to the repressed pain of these women. It is the outgrowth of a close observation and dialogue with the alike people who have shared the circumstances. It is an extremely essential requirement to make a standpoint. As it does not results from instincts. It is personal as well as political consciousness which can be achieved in degrees by a marginal group that employs a particular critical stance. It needs an inquiry from the particular group to the epistemic privilege. Mere availability of such marginal groups will not help them unless and until they would not critically observe every aspect of their condition. In the same vein, these Mahar people are facing this marginality for centuries. And especially the condition of their females is far worse as the narrative has several instances of it. As Tong describes it:

The condition of otherness enables women to stand back and criticize the norms, values, and practices that the dominant culture (patriarchy) seeks to impose on everyone, including those who live on its periphery-in this case, women. Thus, otherness, for all of its associations with oppression and inferiority, is much more than an oppressed, inferior condition. Rather, it is a way of being, thinking, and speaking that allows for openness, plurality, diversity, and difference (136).

Tong's comment supports an essential part of the vision of these women according to which an individual craves for those things which she/he does not possess. It can be observed that these women aspire for what they lack in for instance: they do not have basic education, they live in unhygienic conditions that further degrades their health, they lack in economic security, and last but very essential they want to belong to this society which looks down upon them with disgust and treats them far worse than filth. So to understand these missed out parts of their lives, they have to reflect from their margins, as those margins are the edges which exemplify the seized opportunities, robbed happiness, and obturated potential of their lives. So their sense of thinking out of their margins can bring them a perspicuous and explicit phase of the real situation. Problems may manifest differently for different marginal groups but examining the systems of oppression can produce truth and adequate beliefs about the world and ultimately will lead to promote social justice, challenge oppression and produce a sort of knowledge will can intervene in the unjust power structures. Such knowledge is needed to addresses the aspirations of these marginal groups. It can

be called epistemic privilege of these margins, which seem necessary to address those social blanks of a nation which need an urgent attention.

Here the narrative shows animalization of the humans. They were compelled to live like animals. It recalls the very real historical conditions of existence for many Indians who belong to low caste. The upper caste had never allowed these lowly castes to acquire knowledge. Generation after generation these people rotted and perished by adapting to such a superficial way of life. Their physical image has been maligned. They had to face various kinds of socio-economic injustices, for instance: exploitation of labour, economic marginalization, and denied an adequate material standard of living. Cultural domination means subjection to alien standard of judgment, non-recognition, subjection to cultural invisibility, disrespect, routine subjection to malign stereotype and disparagements. In this context Sartre's statement seems appropriate to explain the condition of Mahar women, "I do not say that it is impossible to change a man into an animal: I simply say that you won't get there without weakening him considerably" (6). The comment fits the condition of these people as their wretchedness is the result of the unfair distribution of resources, inequality of opportunities and thanklessness of the outer world for their labour. All of these factors have turned them woebegone and made their world lugubrious to reside in.

However, it does not seem to bring some conspicuous change in the condition of these people within a day. But the situation will change gradually with the rise in their consciousness and most prominently the situation of Dalit females need an immediate attention. Dalit feminism itself is a result of these efforts where the educated Dalit women are giving voice to other women and making them aware of their unrevealed determination. And as a result, they are getting education and getting aware about their rights also. Kamble mentions that it was the impact of Ambedkar that their community left eating carcasses. Kamble, while talking about the positive and transforming effect of the teachings of Ambedkar says:

Baba's words has become law for me since then. Social work became an alternative source of sustenance. A new fire began to burn in my heart. Meanwhile, the movement marched ahead. A new wind had started to blow all over the country. A new sun was rising on the horizon. (*The Prisons* 127).

As the Dalit movement had taken its first form in Maharashtra. Mahar community also participated in it and from here, they got inspired to challenge their conditions and performed marches, raised

agendas for change in the system which justifies and supports discriminations. They started sending their girls to schools. But as it is said beginning is always tough. These girl who got into schools were treated with scorn by the girls of upper caste. Things were never remain easy for Dalit's. Casteism has crushed the humanity and shattered the aspirations of Dalit's. It is an outrageous assault on their self-esteem. It has defined certain social roles through caste which are mandatory for the Dalit's to follow.

Ambedkar came as a messiah to free these so called untouchable people from the servility of ages and salvage some pride. He wanted these people, especially the Dalit women, to be self-reliant and invent their knowledge through their observation. Kamble refers to the recuperation of her community through the efforts of women as they bring a revolutionary change by making a decision of not eating animal carcasses and a path breaking resolution that they will make their children study so that they can also be aware of their situations and observe the society from their standpoint. The comment by Keetley seems very pertinent in the context: "Each individual must develop a high political consciousness in order to understand how this system enslaves us all and what actions we must take to bring about its total destruction" (45). This particular quote seems appropriate in context of Dalit women as it is extremely urgent on their part to change the antidemocratic as well as autocratic circumstances. These women must have to begin their resistance from below. This kind of subaltern resistance may not bring change within a day but it would surely draw the attention of outer world towards the awareness of these Dalit women and make their presence visible to others. Now they have better understanding of the kind of prejudice and bias spread against them. It would delineate the gravity of their concerns and also highlight the difference of their circumstances.

Dalit women's willingness to articulate their position in their own favor indicates their rationality to understand the major influences on their life. Their objective is to forward the reality of a Dalit women's experience. The point is to modify the picture of reality from a female perspective. Dalit women's narratives explicitly and implicitly state each Dalit to observe their past as the past was once their present. They also inspire each individual's right to liberate her mind and herself from the clutches of the biased world as these low caste individuals have also got all the potential to lead a free life but before that they must have to build this notion of possibility in their minds. It is about a new way of living life. As Kamble describes: "This slavery which they have imposed upon us,

will not disappear easily. For that we need to bring about a revolution....I appeal to you, my mothers and sisters, be the first ones to step forward for reform”(The Prison 65). It can be observed from these narratives that although they are rearticulating their subaltern history but they are doing this with a new insight and a vision that can help them to uplift their community. And because the past is never past that is why the kind of agony and affliction these people have gone through will always make the core of their subaltern history. As Pandey comments that domination and subordination are an inseparable part of the subaltern history, he asserts that: “It is the struggle to overcome the marks of an inherited subalternity on the one hand and to re-institute it on the other that lies at the heart of subaltern history” (Introduction 4).

Initially these Dalit women confront such horrible experiences. These experiences were always taken as deserved or destined and same experiences lead to their subaltern status. But now when a collective group of women is coming with similar experiences it highlights the pattern in their experiences and consolidates their identity as knowers, who do not hesitate to talk about their past. They could be able to identify the relationship between those patterns and oppressive arrangements. They could achieve an understanding of the systems of oppression and share their knowledge with others. In every subaltern history, dominated people ask questions about their condition and they try to make the difference palpable for others. Kamble’s narrative is not just a written document of her own pain but it is also a saga of trials, tribulations and triumphs which her community has gone through. It seem a collective effort to transform themselves individually as well as collectively. They want to create a space of their own by which they can affirm, interrogate and eradicate their subjectivity. They want to achieve and articulate their own sense of the world and want to progress to achieve self-efficiency and self-identity. Kamble mentions about the rhetoric of loss to her community. Now they do not seem passive receiver of worldly opinion rather they actively influence the behavior of their community. They break out the hegemonic barriers and better understand their individual relations to the mainstream world. As Radhakrishnan quotes Das who recapitulates that: “In this context the question is not whether we can completely obliterate the objectified character of social institutions, but rather whether it is at all possible to establish a relation of authenticity towards these institutions”(279). The comment seems valid for these Dalit female writers who are targeting the biased society and its unjust powerful institutions with their questions. They demand to know the validity of these biased structures. It can be observed that these educated Dalit women stand apart from millions of Dalit women in virtue of their education

but they are not ready to forget the horrible past through which they and their ancestors have gone through. So their consciousness towards their past is working as an outsider within means although they came out in center due to their knowledge but they are well aware of those who are still standing at the margins, they know what these people desire for ? As Sabin also reiterates that “In searching for subaltern consciousness through writing, projections of the writer’s own social position and values are always discernible” (4). Bama makes some inspiring remarks at the end that denote an emerging, energetic and enthusiastic Dalit community. She reiterates that:

We may be coarse and ignorant, yet you must admit that we have been the most devoted children of Maharashtra, this land of our birth, and it is we who are the true heirs of this great land. You played with our lives and enjoyed yourself at our expense. But remember, we may have lost everything, but never the truth (*The Prisons* 37).

In this way knowledge is making them sovereign for their free will and independent mind. There is a Transformative force in these women’s agenda. It offers hope in the face of the impoverished worldviews and deceptive ideologies, whose burdens are crushing them all. These people are taking inspiration from Baba Ambedkar and the words of Baba Saheb are working as a beacon to light up their dark path. Their strength lies in the unity of their community as Bama says:

We may be like rivers, streams, canals or even gutters; but all of us have to finally merge in the ocean. Our ocean is the community. We have to make it stronger. I may be an illiterate woman, but I speak truth which I have learnt from Baba (*The Prisons* 114).

Kamble's rise in consciousness may be attributed to her new found realization resulting from her awareness of their situation. In this context the following remark of Foucault looks very appropriate: “We have to know the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualization. We need a historical awareness of our present situation”(21). Kamble also mentions that apart from illiteracy their community has also been drawn into superstitions as the upper caste has never allowed them to get education. Their entire community has perished under a rotten existence generation after generation. She mentions that they were destined to work in the fields of upper caste ‘Naickers’ who used to thrash them for even minor mistakes. As the narrative mentions:

We’d...go here and there all over the fields where the groundnut crop had been pulled up, and use our shovels at random to hammer into the earth and rake it, so that we could pick

up all the stray groundnuts. The Naickers (upper caste landlords) were never happy about this, though. They would chase us, throw stones and pieces of wood at us and drive us away...if we found any groundnuts, well and good. If not, we had nothing” (Kamble, *The Prisons* 43).

Kamble is describing about the back breaking labour these people used to perform at the fields of Naickers and instead of getting some rewards, these people used to get rebuked by their masters. Kamble here uses her keen observation through her past and the past of that group to which she belongs. Kamble refers towards the damaged past of these people as her people have always received the disrespect of the powerful social groups. These powerful groups view the members of less powerful group as unworthy of respect and prevent them from occupying social roles which are valuable from all the aspects be it social, political or economic. They deny them entering into their desired social roles which can transform their condition for better. Further deprivation of opportunities makes them see the reality in different way. They start observing and knowing things in a distinct way. Their vision gets constructed through their location which they occupy and the kind of experiences they go through in society. It helps them ultimately in achieving a Standpoint, which is a resource for understanding power structures and producing knowledge that is more likely to benefit the particular marginal group. It needs a certain kind of objectivity which can be found in the observation of these marginal groups as they are capable of seeing for the sides, one is of utter prosperity and other is that of utter deprivation. For recognizing the way power structures shape and limit the understanding of an individual, close and critical observation is needed on the part of these people residing in destitute. These upper caste fellows display that a developed and pragmatic sense of self-hood exists only in the mainstream upper caste world. But it can be considered a myth as lower caste folks who work for others can work for their own upliftment too. As Foucault makes a valid comment in context of the Dalit Women: “We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed upon us for several centuries” (qtd. in Lewandowski 230). These are the systematically disadvantaged group. The microcosm of these individuals is made up of subalternity and subordination. At every step they feel a sense of fragmentation and meaninglessness. Due to this struggle and strenuous life conditions, their human nature has lost its unity and wholeness. Sometimes they feel alienated even from themselves. The intimate relations that they share with their community seem like, they are

actually the essential structures of their oppression. They are leading a hell like parasitism in their lives. But now the time is taking a turn as Gornick asserts that:

With feminist knowledge comes the realization that we can look at the world from a subordinated point-of-view or from the position of understanding the arrangement of that subordination and its implications and deciding how you want to live your life in light of that knowledge (qtd. in Casselman 16).

By affirming a standpoint these feminist thinkers can identify the ways in which systems of oppression limit the participation of members of marginalized groups and pursue inquiry in ways that remove or challenge these barriers. It provides a critical stance to those communities that were historically excluded from participation in any inquiry regarding their subjugation. Participation of marginal groups is extremely necessary for to identify and counteract upon prevalent biases. More rigorous, critical reflection, their experiences, are often precisely those that are most needed in identifying problematic background.

To stabilize themselves against succumbing to the regressive positions they have taken a standpoint of their own. And it begins how you perceive yourself to be a woman based on that knowledge. How you perceive yourself in relationship to society. It clears up the confusion about where we are supposed to stand in the turmoil of life because when we take this position, we already know that it directs us away from self-inflicted prejudices based on gender inequality. Here they are analyzing their life stories as a Dalit women. They are analyzing their own experiences without any alteration.

It will allow them to advance the absorption of the feminine principle in their culture. It will contribute to the growth of others who have been denied an essential part of life –the ability to acquire self-understanding as sovereign women. They are passing on a model for their upcoming generations so that they can find a solid base upon which they can build their own identities. It will help all of them to recognize that human evolution is a gift of nature, whose bounty is meant for all of them. Each of them carries within her the same potential to affect the reality around her for betterment

They have shown the vehemence of their mental strength where they are ready to thwart the influence of Patriarchy. The male counterpart of their community are also oppressed by various power structures yet they outpour all their anger and frustration upon their females to keep their

head up as a man and to protect their hollow pride. As Stoddart mentions that: “Subjects are therefore never located in a reified, unchanging position in the discourses and structures of power. Identity is fluid and constantly changing. A subaltern in a certain context can become a dominant oppressor in other context” (195) these women’s physical and cognitive image is impersonated in a powerful lenses by the male culture but they have changed it by the boon of knowledge. Nowhere is this umbrage more obvious than in the minds of those pathetic Dalit women, the one who want to bring a change in the outlook of the society. They wish to nail back the fragments of patriarchal ideology by participating in the dynamic conditions necessary for human beings and society to evolve. All this Dalit female awareness is rooted in Dalit feminist knowledge which get formed by their experiences. They are now reluctant to accept that a Dalit woman can not have the authority to talk about her oppression. They are not controlled by biased views that support their subordination. They do not believe in backing the authority that describe their situation with comparative pronounce. As Casselman says “We all do our part to emerge free from our own underdevelopment and that inevitably includes working with and helping others to the extent that we are able, within the context of our own individuality” (33). They arduously challenge that culture which does not embody, nor reflect an iota of what Dalit women contribute to the world. They are changing this amorphous condition by the clarity of their knowledge about their society and themselves. They are not ready to bend in front of the power of patriarchal totalitarianism. The situation of their past is imbued in their head and heart which makes the kaleidoscope of all their experiences and shaken their subaltern consciousness now. In this way we can observe how the Standpoint of a subjugated group provides them corrective lens for the myopia of dominant group. It recognizes the tension that occurs when the standpoint of an individual is at odds with that of a group with which she is identified. It will help them to get centered and realize that their core power lies in the innate strength of being a woman. Their standpoint will help them to build a true voice of their own and develop the language of common sense about their individual significance and status so that others can understand it. They will be able to access any situation from a stable standpoint, create a positive environment for themselves and others.

Conclusion: Through the concept of Dalit feminist standpoint, Dalit women show their self-proclamation and their voice resists against the unjust ways of society and its practices which are especially designed to oppress and suppress their voice. Their life is strangled in complex and shifting realm of power relations where they want to create a space where unlimited access to power

of knowing and transformation is possible. We come across the emancipation of Dalit women from age old shackles of ignorance and servitude through the standpoint of Dalit woman from where she looks at the world and observe it. These Mahar women got influenced by the thoughts of Baba Ambedkar and committed to upgrade their existence and remove the stigma of filthy life from their world. We also find evidences of how they celebrate their exclusion and look at their marginalization as an opportunity. It is a moral self-reflection, a conquering of inner fears and a realization of self –worth. This Dalit female standpoint helps them to create a new aura for themselves in this hierarchically divided world.

FIFTH CHAPTER

Discourse of Muffled Pain: Intersection of Caste, Class, and Gender Urmila Pawar's the *Weave of My Life*

“Often it is precisely our differences that make dialogue imperative” - Uma Narayan

The Weave of My Life is written by an extremely well-known, acclaimed Dalit female writer Urmila Pawar. She was born into Mahar community. She is vastly known for depicting Dalit consciousness and gender issues in her writings. Her novel *The Weave of My Life* was originally written in Marathi language with the title ‘Aaydan’ which means ‘weaving’. She has used the word weaving as a suggestive metaphor which relates to the weaving of her life narratives, which include her growth from a low caste girl to a Dalit female activist, her own family, her husband’s family, her neighbors and all those incidents and aspects which have shaped up her life till now. It contains a close proximity with the other intimate aspects of the author’s own life but it also touches upon the grave aspects that occur specially in the life of a Dalit female and Dalit people in particular. As Hunt asserts:

While Dalit politics portrays a very specific Dalit identity linked to social and economic oppression, historical disenfranchisement and a shared set of civil rights that must be regained, Dalit literature displays a much broader and more fluid set of characteristics and experiences that constitute Dalit identity (8).

Dalit literature seems a corollary of the Dalit culture which is enmeshed with its pathetic past and gloomy present. On the one hand the novel deals with the stigma of casteism and on the other it presents the struggle of Dalit women against the limitations and social boundaries to rise upward in the society and change their location in the social order. As Pawar says, “A man always has greatness thrust upon him whereas a woman has to achieve it” (*The Weave* 196). Through her powerful narrative Urmila challenges the naturalization of the discrimination done towards several Dalit females. She seems rebuking all those unjust social practices and customs which have branded a Dalit woman as destined to remain at the lowest rung of the society. Besides the caste, Urmila also raised the issue of patriarchal oppression. She has raised the two forms of patriarchal hegemony; one is domestic and other is public. This particular hegemony has devalorized women and stamped them as incapable and denigrated them in every sphere of their lives. Situations

become far minacious if the woman belongs to the lowest caste. Urmila also talks about the class position of these Dalit women as she says these women are not very learned or formally educated which further leads to their economic deprivation. Urmila here shows the arduous life conditions of a Dalit women, who are triply excluded because of the intersection of three challenging factors namely: caste, class and gender. As per Urmila, if a Dalit woman wants to change her situation for betterment, she must understand this intersectionality of her oppressions which create hurdles in the betterment of her life conditions as well as the conditions of other women who belong to the particular lower caste. Urmila writes about her own life and observations as a Dalit woman. She also discloses the ways in which she used to prove her mettle by using various dimensions of her Dalit identity and by cultivating in her an oppositional consciousness against the ruthless hegemonic structures of the society. These are the elements that make their writings quite unique. As Limbale says, “Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit, and it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of the writers. Dalit literature is demarked as unique because of this uniqueness” (32). Limbale’s words profoundly capture the distinctiveness of the literature written by the Dalit’s. It reveals the genesis of this particular literature which emerges from the consciousness of a Dalit’s lived experiences and uncovers the suppressed pain of these subalterns. This literature does not control the subjectivity of these people rather it gives voice to all those muted concerns which have remained hidden into the writings of the Non-Dalit’s. The writings of these Dalits emerge from their particular location or positionality which they occupy in the world and that location constructs their way of observation towards the society.

Urmila Pawar defines the word Dalit in her own way: “Dalit means people who have been oppressed by a repressive social system, and challenge the oppression from a scientific, rational and humanitarian perspective” (*The Weave of My*, Introduction, xii). Her definition of being a Dalit person does not just surround the poignancy and piteousness of their existence rather we can observe that there is not dissonance in their approach while giving a message to the society. Pawar’s narrative seems to be working as a testimony to assert the pain inflicted upon the Dalit community for centuries and provides them an empowering mental status to raise their voice. It further brings out the personal as well as the collective memory of Dalit women’s past as well as articulates their present status. It delineates the way author has achieved self-empowerment and self-reliance emerging out of the pains, suffering and low social–economic status. Urmila’s narrative bridges the history of Dalit female’s movement and the memory of victimhood and renders glimpses of

historical realities of the Dalit Mahar community in Maharashtra. It is an amalgamation of emotional pain and internal frustration that make us understand the magnitude of caste system and other oppressions connected with it. Urmila's autobiography reveals different aspects of the everyday life of Dalit people and the multifarious ways in which caste asserts and cripples down the people of her community.

In the same vein and in the light of the above mentioned issues, the present chapter takes into consideration the life of Dalit people in general and Dalit female's life in particular. It specially tracks the social, economic and political life of Dalit women and also depicts their anger towards the biased society which turns them into miserable marginal subjects. But they are not wailing upon their marginality rather they are celebrating it and using it as site of radical possibilities because it provides them an overview of the outer world where they are aware of their real life-conditions as well as the conditions of those upper caste folks who deny them humanly existence. Urmila Pawar herself is a symbol of today's educated Dalit women who have faced all the prejudice of the outer world but the boon of education has changed her and now she has the power to raise voice for herself and for her community. She resolves to survive and is not ready to accept the invisibility of her community. Through her voice she is giving voice to her people who want to bring it into the notice of the world that they too have the right to live and have all the fundamental privileges like other upper caste people. They want to awake what Smith calls the "systematically extended consciousness of society" (*Writing the Social* 25). Through their realization they want to reassert the ongoing social discrimination towards them and their society. Keeping all these issues in focus the present chapter will further examine the abject situation of these Dalit females and it will prominently focus upon the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender in the lives of these Dalit females.

By exploring an extremely thrilling and fascinating novel '*The Weave of My Life*' written by Dalit female writer 'Urmila Pawar', we would come across various undiscovered facets of a Dalit woman's subjugation. We will come to know a peculiarly distinct female point of view and their perspective for the liberation of a Dalit woman. Pawar makes us visible the doomed existence of Dalit people as she portrays their devastated, paralyzed, and blown out everyday life because of the stigma of caste associated with them. This phenomenon of caste and its unpropitious effects on a certain kind of people who belong to lower caste groups can be understood through the experiences

of these particular people (lower caste people) and it is also helpful to understand the ground realities and the bitter truths responsible for their untoward condition. They have been interpellated by the stringent and strict ideology of various institutions. Urmila Pawar shows the collective suffering of the Dalit community and epistemic transformation of Dalit women who belong to underprivileged strata of the society. She also shows the subhuman existence of an entire community which is a stark reminder of how they are shamelessly being tortured and humiliated by the upper castes, particularly the women. As Pawar says in the introduction to the novel: “It is a complex narrative of a *gendered* individual who looks at the world initially from her location within the caste but who also goes on to transcend the caste identity from a feminist perspective” (*The Weave of My* xvii).

These women have different issues as we will notice ahead and it is because of their ‘difference’ from the mainstream world. They have different experiences, different social location and different questions of representation. All these factors make their issues extremely grave and ask for a serious attention. Smith comments: “Women’s standpoint is a place to begin an inquiry into the social locates the knower in her body and as active in her work in relation to particular others. In a sense it discovers the ruling relations” (*Writing the Social* 4). Smith’s words seem to be supporting the active stance of these Dalit writers who are advocating for the cause of Dalit women. They are knowers as they know about their past as well as the past of millions alike people. All their identities get affected by the roles that they have to play in society. These roles construct a perspective of their own which they impart with their inhabiting world. This speculation and critical insight helps them in the reification of their Dalit-hood. Urmila shares her life-incidents from her childhood where she first draws attention towards the condition of her village women. She shows how their day starts early with collection of woods to sell somewhere in distant places and earn some living. Their life is arduous as it involves danger to their lives and their honour, but then also it is their courage and zeal to survive in spite of so many hurdles that push them on this dangerous path out of their houses. She writes,

Their loads would be heavy enough to break their necks. They would start their journey to Ratnagiri early in the morning. Between our village and Ratnagiri the road was difficult to negotiate as it wound up and down the hills. It was quite an exhausting trip (*The Weave of My* 1).

These women are so concerned about the well-being of their family that they can stake their honour and life to sustain their family members. They use to confront so many obstacles and so many perverts while crossing the hills. These perverts try to molest them and even attack them for not cooperating with them. “[t]here would be freaks and perverts, hiding in shrubs and trees, who occasionally assaulted the helpless women” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 2). But it can be observed by their courage that the paucity of resources and the strenuous life conditions were far precarious for them which used to compel them to be indomitable, plucky, and dauntless in every situation of their lives. And these conditions itself help them in development of a new sensibility as a distinctive Dalit female world view. Smith mentions here the Marxist alienation doctrine – the relation between work and external oppressive order is “such that the harder she works the more she strengthens the order which oppresses her” (Women’s Perspective 26). These women are alienated in this way and the oppressive system takes advantage of it. These activities are an inseparable part of their lives that keep sustaining their existence. They used to discuss about their respective husbands and the kind of ruckus these male counterparts create after drinking liquor at home. Every time when these women used to go out, there always used to be some women among them who have got beaten by their husbands. The particular women who have got bruise all over their body by the thrashing of their husbands walk with difficulty due to pain. As the narrative mentions “Every house had its own share of drunkards. There would be at least one woman among them badly bashed up by her husband” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 5). In this manner Pawar gives an extremely pathetic yet inspiring picture of the Dalit women’s existence. She shows that these women are just like other normal human beings in society and they are having all the rights, reason and responsibility yet their lives are deeply disruptive due to their lower status in society. But on the other hand we can observe one more phenomena of their lives that these arduous conditions create an empowering force and grim determination in them. They seem ready to shoulder any responsibility in the given adverse conditions through dwelling. Yet these experiences are tough and tormenting to recall even that’s why Pawar says that, “[E]ven today, after having experienced the horrors of the caste system, the same feeling haunts me” (*The Weave of My* 7). Urmila mentions at each step how this phenomenon of caste and gender remains strangled and interconnected since the very beginning. She mentions that even getting education was an arduous task for the girls of her village as they had only a school where girls were not even allowed to enroll. There was only a single school till the eighth standard in which girls were not permitted to enroll as it was not necessary for them to

get educated. Urmila keep on mentioning even single details about her life. She mentions the way her elder sister was treated badly while working in a hospital when her lower caste was revealed to all. Urmila's sister was treated badly and insulted even by her patients. These experiences work as a site for engagement, struggle, and conflict for Dalit women and compel Dalit women to get frightened and get hopeless sometimes. Pawar mentions about this particular situation of her sister when she writes: "Akka wanted to leave her job again. The mad woman in the hospital had come to know that she was a Dalit. A mentally disturbed woman was not willing to take food from her. She abused akka because of her caste" (*The Weave of My* 21). Pawar reacts strongly while recalling all these experiences but she is well aware and presents a strong opinion that these power structures can never remain excluded from the society. These forceful structures always react upon each other to make a powerful dominating structure upon the dominated people and make their lives worse than hell. O'Leary says that the "Structures of domination and exploitation are central to the dynamics of any society, those who experience forms of oppression will best understand those structures of domination and, thus, certain dynamics of their society"(47).

Standpoint of a marginal person is all about facing these hurdles and obstructions; it forms their point of view regarding the prevalent social conditions. In case of these Dalit women, they are also acquiring knowledge through the interaction with the world and gaining experiences regarding their situation in the outer world. Operation of these power structures at micro and macro levels would never allow any kind of change in their conditions so easily but it can definitely allow them to mold their mindset, to better understand their circumstances. These complex, volatile and dynamic life conditions of Dalit women pave the way to observe the new dimensions of Dalit female politics in India.

Pawar mentions about the spatial differences between Mahars and Brahmin families and recalls those memories: "The house of Marathas and the Brahmins were at some distance from our house. Bhandari and Kulwadi women could drink water from their wells but untouchable women were absolutely forbidden to do so" (*The Weave of My* 23). These kinds of instances make us aware of the ontological and identificatory problems connected with Dalit people in general. It shows how their body is still untouchable for the upper caste and their self itself is inscribed and engraved with those stigmas of past and perverse palimpsest of impure selfhood. The views of upper caste people seem a kind of decree for the lower caste folks that make it impossible for them to take a recourse

in some progressive change but then also these conditions have a kind of privilege for them as they can become better knower about their conditions and far conscious about the on-going prejudice against them. It is a part of outsider-within phenomena, where these outsiders are on the verges to get inside the mainstream through their joint efforts and collective endeavor. Urmila goes deep down to collect some serious issues regarding the condition of women of her community and talks about the prevalent norms and blind beliefs in her locality.

These women are compelled to suffer under the yoke of material deprivation, with the perpetuation of social injustice and also from the denial of their civil liberties. Their suffering has many dimensions which include physical, psychological, social, economic, political and cultural. This kind of suffering has the capacity to disrupt and damage every aspect of their personhood. Such kind of suffering takes place in experiences of bereavement and loss, social isolation, and personal estrangement which are very much the part and parcel of Dalit women's lives. These women are doomed to lead their lives under constant traumatic situations, that is why they have developed certain superstitions, such as possession by ghosts and spirits. Urmila shares this incident so that people may come across the fact that illiteracy, poverty, and isolation can doom one's existence, especially the life of Dalit woman. Dalit community used to believe in all these stories and "Ghosts generally possessed more women than men" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 28). In reality, it was nothing such as ghost or spirit but it was a horrible result of all those kinds of fears and secluded life existence that had kept on possessing Dalit women at every stage of their lives. These women always used to be trapped from all the corners at every stage of their life. In short their lives were always at stake. As Gupta says, "The demonizing of Dalit women became a surrogate for naturalizing their inferiority, for outlawing certain aspects of women's behavior, for strengthening caste patriarchies for glorifying upper-caste norms, and for making one to position in the civilizational ladder" (*Gender of Caste* 178).

Urmila talks about the ethics of these women as housewives, the way these women used to earn and work longer and harder to earn more for festivals so that they could be able to sustain their children and family members. As she says "Women worked hard to prepare for the festival and earn little extra money by selling more grass and firewood bundles, which they saved for the festival. They bought new clothes. Bangles, necklaces and such things for their children" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 31). Urmila is unraveling the hidden mental strength and physical endurance of

Dalit women that how amid the pain and torments inflicted on them by destiny and society, they are always standing firm with their family and folks. Hekman comments in this regard: “Women and men create their own realities through their different activities and experiences” (343). These peculiar and unique life conditions provide a different perspective to these Dalit women and help them to make a standpoint of their own in context of their conditions. Here in these narratives we would come across observing the layers of consciousness in the lives of these Dalit females. Hartsock argues that “an analysis that begins from the sexual division of labor...could form the basis for an analysis of the real structures of women’s oppression...an analysis which would expose the ways women both participate in and oppose their own subordination”(49).

Urmila here discloses the different aspects of Dalit women’s lives. She also shows the kind of treatment these women get in their household and get treated like commodity. To substantiate her point of view, Urmila Pawar shares the life conditions of her cousin and remembers the way her cousin was beaten up by her husband and mother-in-law:

I always remembered my cousin Susheela at such times. She was married to a man in Partavane. He was a drunkard and Susheela’s mother-in-law was a tyrant. Both beat her up mercilessly at the slightest pretext. They would drive her out of the house with her young children even on stormy dark nights (*The Weave of My* 33).

Through her cousin’s situation, Urmila shares the hidden dark truth of the lives of her Dalit community’s women. It can be observed that these “women are the only “welfare functionaries” (Hartsock 50). They were taken, used and thrown by their own people as well by the outer world because of their triply excluded life existence. Stigma of lower caste makes their lives far worse. And they have become what Hartsock calls “Isolated and abstract individuals” (50). Objectification of these women has led to hindrance in their progress and their subjectification has obstructed their growth. Their sexuality was exploited by the inner as well as the outer world that constitutes their domestic sphere as well as the public sphere respectively. All these situations have arisen out of the roots of casteism, class prejudice and gender-bias. These complexities have finally led to a fragmented and chaotic atmosphere in society. It is a complex mechanism of exclusion which desires to umbrage their lives under surveillance and effectuates the desires of those puissant folks who have usurped the throne of authority and substance. As Foucault also remarks: “We are

subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (*Power and Knowledge* 93).

Urmila mentions ahead that even the parents of the girls were unable and reluctant to help their suffering daughters after their marriage as they were of the belief that their husband is their destiny after marriage. As in the case of Pawar’s cousin, her cousin’s father “never confronted her parents-in-law about treating his daughter so inhumanly. He never gave her any support. Later she died a very untimely death in Partavane” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 33). These were very natural conditions for a Dalit woman’s life. Their own people were not ready to help them and support them in their troublesome times. That’s why Bansode comments here about lower caste women that: “they are already different. High caste women are established, but Dalit women must struggle for very basic needs...we have different problems. Our women don’t even know the meaning of *Shtri mukti*. Therefore, the movements are different” (283). All these conditions make a Dalit woman vulnerable and take a different step for transforming their lives. In this context Hartsock comments that “[F]rom the perspective of the ruling group, other ‘knowledges’ would appear to be illegitimate or not allowed to function within the official knowledge...they would appear to be ... as ‘insurrectionary’, ‘fragmentary’, ‘lacking autonomous life’”(Hartsock, Foucault on Power 167).

These women were not even allowed to have little pleasures in life. According to one incident women were not even allowed to go out and watch ‘Tamasha’ (a local folk drama programme performed by the local artists). Only men were allowed for these leisure times. Women started to have their own leisure time by making group and start dancing and enjoying then only a man went and disclosed this thing to the male community and “[h]e went back and called all the other men from the Tamasha show. The men were furious and they beat up the women” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 35). In this way Dalit feminist standpoint gets constructed by interlocking oppressions which is all about this complex mediation of caste, class, and gender oppression.

Urmila moves her narrative from her community to her personal sphere. She talks about her family and starts giving description of her mother. She describes the way her mother used to carry huge bundles which were too heavy even for a man to take towards the Ratnagiri. She used to do all the household chores, for instance, bringing water from the river, sweeping the house and polish it with cow dung, cleaning the panes, patting cow dung cakes, and ground grains all these works she used to do by herself. And in the season of farming she was all busy in farming activities for

instance, farming vegetables and cleaning paddy etcetera. Urmila mentions that she could observe all those speechless emotions in her mother's eyes. As she says that 'her eyes have reflected so many things-helplessness, vulnerability, defenselessness! (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 43) Hartsock attracts our attention towards the role of women which has been provided to them by society as well as by nature. The role of women is far deeper and understanding is far depthful than their male counterparts as she says, "as women's role in the sexual-division of labor places them in a mediating relationship with nature and sensuous activity (household labor, child-bearing, and child-rearing), their standpoint is "deeper-going" than the proletarian standpoint" (53).

Urmila mentions about her birth that she was not a desired child and her family was not willing to accept her, "when I was born, my cousin Govindada wanted to throw me away onto the dung heap. When I grew a little older, many would beat me" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 64). Birth of a son is always filled with greetings and celebration, while a daughter's birth is, at best, endured because of stigma of various fears. Such an unwelcome of daughters and the kind of unwantedness shown at their birth get conveyed in ways which are hardly tenuous. The facile ideology of Indian society frames its daughters in certain fixed roles. It has associated certain taboos with a woman's life, for instance, her lifelong dependence and responsibility for her honour blows it up with consternation discomposure. Consternation of adapting into an unknown family forms part of a girl's learning since her childhood.

She wants to explore the complexities which mark and divide Dalit women's experiences and knowledge since her child birth as these are some of the extremely unique experiences which weigh upon their head and heart and compel them to reflect upon their deteriorating situation. She describes how she got humiliated and insulted because of being low caste:

They made me stand at the threshold; I put the baskets down and they sprinkled water on them to wash away the pollution, and only then would they touch them. They would drop coins in my hands from above, avoiding contact, as if their hands would have burnt had they touched them (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 65).

In the above mentioned lines Urmila shares the range, complexity, and scope of Dalit women's experiences as these incidents are somewhere making them more aware and more conscious towards the society and its treatment towards them. Pawar shows the mundane, everyday acts and objects to remind the reader about the deep roots of caste discrimination and patriarchy and this is

what makes her narrative powerful and effective. After her father's death, her family lived on limited means, barely making ends meet. While studying with upper caste girls, she would be reminded of her origins through simple things, such as the sweetmeats they would bring in their tiffin boxes. Although these were small delicacies yet they could not afford them and that made an impact upon the tender heart of Urmila and made her realize the difference between us and them.

While discussing these social aspects Urmila also discusses some other cultural aspects of Dalit community, specially focusing upon the exploitation of Dalit women, and shares an extremely moving incident from her childhood. She tells how the priest of village used to exploit lower caste girls and they got to know it when they were waiting to get 'Prasad' outside the temple: "After a long time the door opened and a Komti girl called Ulgawwa came out, her face wet with tears, in a terrified state. Then the priest also came out but he left without giving us any Prasad" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 66). This particular incident seems to be indicating the sexual exploitation of Mahar girls because of their low social standing and poor economic background. They were easy bait for the sexual gratification of privileged and powerful section of the society. Describing the vulnerable condition of the Mahar women, Miller says that: "their women could be taken for consecration to the deities, to be used (in all senses) by the temple priests in the performance of system-sustaining actions" (640).

Urmila draws light towards the religious aspects and says that in their community people used to worship 'pigs' as deity and used to consider them as good omen for family.

Those who had the pig as their family deity were respected tremendously. The story went that lord Shankar had once taken the form of the pig to save somebody from our caste. So it was an unwritten rule that pigs could never be killed. Some people would not even utter the word (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 58).

Urmila discloses how the ignorance and illiteracy of these people was weighing hard on the lives of the upcoming generation when she discusses a ritual at the birth of some child. She says there was yet another strange ritual performed after the baby's bath with the express intention of averting the evil eye. After the bath was over, the woman bathing the baby would lift the baby up from her legs, and collect the water dripping in her palm and, after moving it around the baby's body, throw it away. Then she would take the dirt sticking to her left toe and press it hard on the baby's forehead. Sometimes, the dirty water or the mud would trickle down into the baby's eyes. It seems quite

ironical that how trying to avert the evil eye would itself hurt the baby's own eyes. When the baby's nose was blocked because of a cold, they poured coconut oil into its nostrils, thus openly inviting the prospect of pneumonia. The oil would enter the baby's lungs and prepare the ground for disease like bronchitis and asthma. In fact she says her own asthma, and the flowing nostrils of her brother's children are some obvious cases in point. There were many children suffering like this at both her mother's and my in-law's places. "Urmila shares how she was humiliated and treated badly in her class because of being a 'poor lower- caste' girl. She used to clean the whole class at the turn of her class for cleaning. "I alone was forced to clean the entire mess" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 67).

Here Urmila mentions and brings out an extremely motivating side of Dalit women, her mother that how she went to school and talked to her teacher in clear terms that she is determined to make her children study and attain something in their life. She says "Look I am a widow; my life is ruined. Yet I sit here, under this tree and work. Why? Because I want education for my children so that their future will be better" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 69). Urmila mentions how after her father's death, her mother sustained the whole family. She used to have pain in her stomach but then also she never used to complain rather kept on weaving baskets to earn some money for the family. "Pressing a rod or pestle into her stomach to lesson her pains, she would continue with her weaving. When the pain became unbearable, she threw herself down on the ground" (Pawar, *The Weave of My Life* 75).

Pawar describes about a ritual regarding Mahar people which is nonetheless a barbaric savage practice "An upper caste man would inflict a wound on a Mahar man's back and his wife had to cover the wound with some cloth and go on walking around, howling! Quite a ritual that one!" (*The Weave of My* 86). No one was there to stop such practices which were so inhuman. Neither police nor law had ever paid attention towards these incidents. As Teltumbde asserts:

The contemporary state-with its apparatuses of police, judiciary, and armed forces-is essentially a coercive machine that seeks to conserve the monopoly of the dominating class. In the Indian context the large majority of Dalit comprises the most exploited class and bears the brunt of the neo-liberal character of state (*The Persistence of Caste* 151).

The above mentioned quote supports the present status of Dalit people and the kind of negligence they receive from the government bodies which instead of helping them to come out of all these perverse social conditions, deteriorates their life by giving shelter to the wrong doers. It is a vortex

of power structure that cripples down the already backward Dalit. As in the words of Foucault “Power is employed and exercised through a net like organization” (*Power/Knowledge* 98). It is a system of oppression that leads to other oppressions. A Dalit needs to be aware of it as the knowledge of such oppression is extremely necessary to eradicate it from its roots. This is the foci of a standpoint which asks to contemplate upon a situation first, then observe it to understand its various dimensions.

Urmila mentions that the kind of consciousness that she has achieved is due to her positionality and her background. She mentions that she was born as a poor Dalit and society taught them to live according to those codes prescribed for a poor Dalit person. As she says: “I was born in a backward caste in a backward region, that too a girl!”(Pawar, *The Weave of My* 94).

Such distinction leads to various forms of oppression which further influence the material circumstances of a Dalit person. Besides impacting their living conditions, opportunities, it crushes their self-esteem as a person. Different people with different social locations have different social experiences. That is why those who belong to the upper castes can never be able to acknowledge the whole truth of the life of a Dalit. Dalit’s condition, their knowledge, location and position shape and limit the kind of experiences they gain. This distinctive knowledge is generated when a collective group shares similar circumstances and this helps them to construct a standpoint. These different experiences pave the way for different beliefs which a community shares. In this manner these people can be able to see the pattern of their experiences.

Urmila mentions the kind of poverty that they were living in and they were habitual of eating bhakri with rice and eating this dish again and again had killed their taste. At some days they used to eat bull fish, it was named bull because of having a horn on its head like a bull and it used to have foul smell so it was a Mahar’s food as they could not afford other luxurious, costly grains that could enrich their brains and build muscular strength. Their community people used to believe that it’s not enough being born a human until you belong to a particular high caste. Urmila remembers several incidents of her connected to her from a young girl to an adult. She discloses about her first menstruation, how her family used to keep her away thinking she is impure in those days. They used to keep her out of house in those day. It was painful for her as her class fellows already used to keep her at a distance because of her lower caste and now her own people were showing abhorrence towards her. As she says: “This made me cry harder. As it was, people in the class kept

me at a distance because of my caste. Now because of this even my own people in the house would keep me away” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 124). Menstruation is a topic on which some Indians still hesitate to talk as it is something not to discuss openly. According to these particular people, it makes a woman impure and dirty in those particular days. She is defined as unclean and unworthy to share a home; she can not enter into the kitchen or in a temple. In sum she can not do anything in those days except sitting in a corner for three-four days. It shows the utter ignorance and blind believes of these people in age old taboos. Urmila describes her temptation to wear to appear good and she mentions that: She did not wear chappals even till ninth class. “I had a keen desire for new clothes. But the only new cloths I would ever get were the school uniforms, which Aaye had to buy. I had never worn chappals till I was in ninth class” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 142). This was the extent of penury for these people where they were incapable to purchase a pair of *chappals* (informal footwear) even.

Urmila mentions that since her childhood she has witnessed some horrible scenes of domestic violence. She describes the scenes of terror and blood which she had witnessed in a very tender age in front of her eyes. She noticed the way a husband killed his wife and says: “I have killed a sheep in our field. Anybody interested in getting the blood” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 154). Such acts of violence maimed most of the women of her community. As Weiss asserts that: “To grasp the full reality of domestic abuse, it must be approached, like a piece of sculpture, from multiple vantagepoints” (5). The quote denotes that every problem has certain reasons, for instance- Dalit males outpour all their anger upon their females, they get humiliated outside their homes and then they thrash their wives to sense their superiority over them as it is quite impossible for them to challenge the outer powerful people. In this patriarchal hegemonic culture, these incidents were very common, as women were just like usable commodity for their male counterparts. If a woman’s husband suspects her and calls her with bad name then everyone gives her bad name and she becomes branded with stigma. Urmila used to speculate over these things and used to say that she has to have good relations with her husband after all he would be the one after her family. As she says, “If the husband calls you a whore, the whole world is ready to sleep with you. So I was absolutely sure that I wanted to have good relations with my husband. At any cost !”(Pawar, *The Weave of My* 195). Urmila mentions that she could get all these consciousness in a very young age due to the kind of circumstances she was living in and this was the reality of many other women of her community who were going through the same crisis in their lives. It can be observed that there

is a difference in the oppression of a Dalit female and Dalit men as a Dalit woman is the lowest among the lowest. She has to bear all the trouble despite giving all her services without any complaint. It requires a critical stance and penetrating vision to understand all the intersecting dimensions. The feminist standpoints intend to map the practices of power, the way the dominant institutions and their conceptual frameworks create and maintain oppressive social relations.

Urmila also reveals the process of religious conversion among the Mahars. She describes the conditions due to which they got shelter in Buddhist religion. But before that it is necessary to understand why there was a need to convert to Buddhism? These are the same Mahars described by Kamble also in her widely acclaimed narrative *The Prisons We Broke*. She deals with their horrific past in her narrative. There were two more untouchable caste groups namely: Mangs and Chamhars. Urmila also belongs to the same Mahar community. She reiterates that it was an untouchable community destined to live outside the village. The situation of the Mahars was like a servant to the whole village. They were responsible for the removal of dead cattle, furnishing of the firewood and cleaning of houses of others. *Patils* (village headman) of the village even used to sell them as servants during their personal land agreement to the *Patils* of the other villages. These people were recognized as contaminated since their birth as they used to skin dead animals, live in filthy life conditions etc. They were made aloof from the mainstream society as regarded as outsider. As Miller asserts that “[M]ahar, like all untouchables were utilized by Hinduism in the same way that they were utilized socio-politically” (640). It means that Brahmins were the sole controller of system and there was no way for the Mahars to get solace anywhere. The situation of these people even could not change in the reign of Peshwas in Maharashtra but the arrival of the British brought a change in their conditions as they started getting jobs in military, textile mills, and railways. Even Peshwa reign did not consider them worthy of getting any respectable job. It was the high time for a big change in the lives of these Mahars when Caste Disabilities Removal Act, 1850, came into prominence under the rule of East India Company, which declared that people can change their religion without getting harmed in the context of land rights and other benefits. These people converted to Buddhism under the influence of Baba Ambedkar. Ambedkar founded Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha in 1955 and it is also known as Buddhist Society of India. Around 1956 along with him, around five lakh other young men and women, who were mostly the Dalit Panthers (Group of Dalit young men and women who raised agendas and slogans to sensitize the government towards the issues of the Dalit’s) got converted into Buddhism, who wanted to get rid

of the ill aspects of the Hindu religion. He prescribed every convert to take twenty two oaths that will take their lives on a better path and make them better human beings. It included the teachings of Buddha who preached everyone to follow the path of love and compassion and equality. Urmila's family also changed its religion and now they were Buddhists. As the narrative mentions: "They had changed their religion and become Buddhist. "Now we are Buddhists! Now nobody looks at the 'kula' we have discarded our caste-specific surnames now and taken on new names. This is a caste-neutral name" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 175). They left their caste identity as according to Buddhism there is no such concept of upper and lower castes and this is what makes everyone equal participants at all levels of their lives.

In *The Weave of My Life* Urmila makes her readers aware of the ugly realities of the caste structure when she shifted to Mumbai from Konkan region in 1976 with her husband. Urmila tells how they suffered for getting a room at rent, when after her marriage she shifted to Mumbai with her husband. She described the reaction of upper caste people to whom they approached for getting a room on rent: "[t]hey began to abuse us! 'These are low caste people! So what else can you expect from them? Look at their things! A tin cot and cheap pots and pans! The moment we saw their things, we knew what they were! Dirty, mean, uncivilized...!'"(Pawar, *The Weave of My* 224). It is really pathetic to imagine how one could feel after facing such humiliation. These are the lived experiences of a Dalit, who is always considered a Dalit because of his/her appearance, clothing and culture. These experiences denote the marginal aspects of their lives, where they feel caught up in the vortex of the whole situation; they feel in the middle where they can observe everything, from the gaze of a person to the taunts of upper castes. These middle spaces make them aware of that large gap that exists in the minds of the privileged castes which lead to what Gokhale calls as their "ideological condemnation and material servitude" (270). In this context what Bhabha says seems appropriate to mention : "These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself"(qtd. in Botha 54). Means these gaps provide an opportunity for these people to understand the reality in a better manner and use this site of marginality as a space of opportunity for the construction of a new identity. All these incidents seem to be boiling inside Urmila when she says "My own experiences, those of my friends and other women, which of living in village, casteism, being a woman, built up a pressure inside me!"(Pawar, *The Weave of My* 226). It shows the oppositional consciousness of a

deprived person, a person who thinks from the margins and observes both the outer as well as inner phenomenon of certain condition. Their marginal site is the place from where they can make significant interventions in the world. As Nilsen and Roy observe:

Socio-economic marginalization...intersects with structures of power based on caste, gender and sexuality to create patterns of exclusion, vulnerability, stigma and disenfranchisement that define subalternity in contemporary India...however, subalternity and the relations of power through which it is produced are also vigorously contested from below (2).

Urmila shares that how she could not even save herself at her work place because of being a female of the lower caste. She says that her position could not change even after getting promotion and doing her work diligently. The reasons for such discrimination were quite palpable which prominently highlights the shallow mentality of the society. As she says: “The moment a man promoted, he immediately became a ‘Bhanusaheb’ or ‘Raosaheb’. But women remained simply, ‘Bai’, without the ‘Saheb’ even after their promotions! Besides I was a Dalit!’ Why should she expect to be addressed as Bai saheb?’ ‘Why should we ask for her permission?’” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 235). Urmila here unravels the hidden mentality of the patriarchal structure, as she says that a woman can be however efficient and laborious but the biased norms and culture of the society would not make it seem something significant yet on the contrary things are always celebratory for men even for their small contributions. As Narayan says: “All such incidents and happenings are replete with unreflective and self-congratulatory views of their “culture” and “values” that disempower and marginalize the interests and concerns of many members of the national community, including women” (*Dislocating Cultures* 23). Things become much harder when a Dalit woman does something remarkable as it can pose fear to those in the privileged position.

Urmila has shown the two phases of patriarchy; one is by the privileged upper caste and the other by the men of her own caste. Urmila here mentions about her own domestic life also as she shares how she used to manage job and family both but it was not convenient for her husband. Urmila’s husband makes her understand the duties of a woman after marriage through his patriarchal lenses. Somewhere he used to feel insecure by the rising education level of his wife and by observing her social participation. As he says:

Look, you can do what you like only after finishing your daily chores in the house. Cooking, looking after children, and all that stuff. If you think you can do this and get more education, fine!’ This was actually his way of saying ‘No’, but I took it up as a challenge (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 237).

Such kind of incidents were heartbreaking for Urmila as she had faced the cruelty of society being a lower caste member and now these kinds of humiliations were not alien to her even at her home, in her personal space. Urmila’s husband was not very happy with her decision to study further. As he says bluntly when she shares her wish to do Master’s degree: Now pay more attention to the Children and the house” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 240). Urmila says in the very beginning that marriage was something about which she was really concerned as, it is a serious institution to get into and to fulfil it with dedication need efforts on one’s part. But as a woman she has always remained responsible and patient but she always wanted to make an identity of her own and never wanted herself to remain limited to few roles which are specially prescribed by the society to an Indian women. As Garg comments here:

The strength of the Indian woman lies in her belief in her Annapurna image, i.e in being the provider of food and economic well-being or in being the householder, mother and shakti (power) combined in one. Her weakness also lies in her considering herself the Annapurna when the power or shakti aspect is replaced by the self-sacrificing, all forgiving –martyr image ...for if they lose that, they lose their cultural and individual identity” (99).

Garg’s comment is extremely stimulating in the context of the condition of those Indian women, who are married as well as working in the outer arenas. As the Indian culture has prescribed certain roles for these woman after marriage, for instance, she should be *pativarta* (devotee of her husband), *annapurna* (one who gives the food) and filled with the sense of *mataRatv* (motherly feelings) all these aspirations are based on the social notion of woman as gender which bind a woman in the cultural norms and if sometimes she fails to accomplice these social aspirations, society brands her as imprudent, delinquent, and careless towards her family. Still some women sacrifice their aspirations as an individual, they kick aside the opportunities that life brings to them and ultimately these females remain incomplete as they remain unavailable to make use of their potential just to protect their married lives and the wishes of their respective husbands. Urmila says in this context that: “[I]was simply aghast how we women nurture and protect patriarchy, like a baby in cradle!

(*The Weave of My* 240). According to Urmila these are the women who are themselves ready to be martyrs for the wishes of their husbands and ultimately it leads to their own fragmentation and help sustain the seeds of patriarchy deeply into the social structure. All these incidents used to inflate Urmila with anger and led to a fragmented and disturbed married life. But for the sake of her children and home she tried to compromise. As she says, “I knew I was a woman and looked at myself with patriarchal eyes” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 246). She describes how instead of having been exhausted due to whole day’s work, she had to perform all her wifely duties at night. She says, “Yet at night, though my body was a mass of aches and pains, pressured my husband’s feet” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 246). Urmila shares that she was ready to make her husband happy every time but he accused her “[l]eave alone being an ideal wife, you are not even a good one!” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 246). Wilkinson’s statement holds true in the context:

[A]t the core of suffering is the sense that something is irreparably wrong with our lives, and wrong is the negation of what could not have been right. Suffering resists definition because it is reality of what is not. Anyone who suffers knows the reality of suffering, but this reality is what you cannot ‘come to grips with (355).

The particular quote makes it clear that suffering does not come from a vacuum rather it signifies that something is going out of the structure and it is creating a certain kind of disorder. When disorder is created, it also gives rise to inequality, subordination, and disfigurement to an ideal figure of nation. A nation, which is simply a map drawn on a paper or on a wall without its citizens. It is the people of a nation who give it a shape, but when certain people themselves create chaos and disorder in that particular nation, it brings suffering to others. These people who go through suffering go through various pains among which caste discrimination, gender bias and class inequality are the prominent ones. When all three forms of oppression create an intersection in the lives of certain group called- Dalit women, it brings wreckage in their lives and creates a depredation in their lives. These Dalit women are surrounded by various power structures which help to amplify their subordination and their whole life gets strangled with the consequences of this subordination. These powerful social structures appear in the form of upper castes, patriarchy, and rich people. As Michel Foucault says, “Domination is in fact a general structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found descending to the most recalcitrant fibers of society”(The Subject and Power 790).

These are the competing strains of equality and difference between the inner worlds of Dalit woman and that is why these narratives by Dalit women are poignant due to their radical connotation as well as potentially widening appeal. Through these life narratives Dalit female writers uncover the marginal world of a Dalit female. They try to connect to others with their unique world. It also allows them to believe that Dalit women's different experiences can transform their lives if they critically contemplate over them. Urmila shares how she has faced various mishaps in her personal life but did not lose resilience and perseverance. Her husband's attitude towards her was full of strange behavior as the narrative mentions:-

His attitude towards me was full of contradictions. On the one hand, he was proud of my writing; he admitted as much to his friends and relatives. But on the other, he immensely resented my being recognized as a writer, my speaking in public programs and my emerging as a figure in the public domain. Our arguments would invariably end in bitter quarrels. I would say, 'please, have a heart! I am a human being too. I too work like you. I too get tired. My work also has the same value as yours'. But neither my words nor my work had any meaning for him! On the contrary, he would tell me, 'look at the village woman. The husband's wish is law for her. She does not dare to sit down or get up without his permission. Tell me, in that case, how is she able to run her home well?' was not the answer implicit in the question itself? (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 246).

Hartsock argues for the epistemic privilege of the feminine cognitive style over the masculine one, because it overcomes the dichotomous way of reasoning and because the ethics of care is superior to ethics of domination. Way of knowing that emerges from caring for everyone's needs will produce representations of the world in relation to universal human interest, not in the interests of the dominant (male) class.:

[t]he female experience not only inverts that of the male, but forms a basis on which to expose abstract masculinity as both partial and fundamentally perverse, as not only occupying only one side of the dualities it has constructed but reversing the proper valuation of human activity (171).

But even after her husband's changing behavior and receding support Urmila was not ready to give up: "I had seen the outside world and that he did not have the power to keep me confined to the narrow space of home anymore"(Pawar, *The Weave of My* 248). It shows the real awakened

consciousness of a Dalit woman and power to recognize her caliber and this is what in real terms would inspire the other Dalit community women that the boon of education is the only power by which they can get out of any troublesome situation and make a vision of their own. "Finding one voice...a metaphor for self-transformation" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 12). According to hooks, to transform the society and situations, it is extremely necessary to have firm belief and trust upon oneself. It is necessary to have voice that can be individual but represents the cause of collective. As we can observe that the pain of Urmila denotes the pain of Dalit community females but she could get the boon of education and raise her voice for her whole community so it is the ray of change which starts by affirming and by observing one's position in society that helps in bringing some change through one's standpoint. As Urmila says:

I had realized that I now had a new vision, a new perspective of looking at women. I had lost my fear. The women's movement had given me great strength to perceive every man and woman as an equal individual. It had taught me to relate to them freely, without any prejudice whatsoever (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 248).

Urmila says that her narrative signifies not only her growth but the growth of her awareness and her knowledge regarding the prevalent norms in the society. Observation and critical analysis of certain situations help in the construction of one's knowledge. Such observation can be valid when they are performed by a collective group. It helps in comprehending the full picture of some condition. Urmila observes her own condition as well as the condition of millions of women like her as she could understand that to reform the condition of a person it is extremely necessary for him/her to resist the dominating structures that are capable of buffeting one's identity by implementing forces and compulsions. That is why it is extremely necessary to acknowledge these conditions if one wants to create hurdles in the path of dominating power. It has been said that "[t]o say no is the minimum form of resistance ... [t]hat is at times very important" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 386). Resistance is necessary at every step, it should be so firmly stabilized in the minds of these subjugated individuals that their resistance should equate the power which operates over them and in any condition their resistive force should not lose its resilience. The observations and knowledges of these marginal groups were always considered inferior by the dominating body. The privileged dominating culture always tried to exclude their experiences from their discourse and even their thinkings and observations were under the subjection of powerful people. Their

thoughts were also dominated by the privileged groups by compelling them to take their situation as given by fate. Foucault says “Subjugated knowledges...something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (Two Lectures 203). This kind of reality presented of these marginal people always seems to be one-sided because of the exclusion of deeply embedded experiences of their lives. That is why production of truth is extremely necessary as these marginal knowledges were discarded as invalid and insignificant to a great extent because they themselves accepted their subjection. Their experiences were always defined and described by those in power and at a different end of society but now when these marginal beings themselves witnessed their subordination they appeared to acknowledge their issues. As Urmila says: “Here I was, I felt, a Dalit woman, on the lowest rung of social ladder, just trying to climb one step above with the help of my education and my writing. And these women are trying to push me down again, by using the single pronoun!”(Pawar, *The Weave of My* 251).

The struggle of these Dalit women has always remained in the form of their inner turmoil and ferment but it was always necessary to bring it in the outer terrain to let the society know about it. It was extremely necessary to change their own situations before those changes occurred in the outer world as nothing can take place actually in the outer world unless and until its images create in our own minds. Urmila shares the journey of their movement to oppose this intersectionality of caste, class, and gender. She says that she had come to know that the issues of an upper caste woman and issues of the lower caste women were quite different as these upper caste women might be having problems due to their gender but their problems were not as severe as Dalit woman’s problem. A Dalit woman’s life is trapped and subjugated under various social obstructions and out of which caste is the uppermost, which she has got by her birth and by her destiny. None of the movements in India was focused directly at their problems as Urmila observes: “One thing was, however, very clear to me. Women’s issues did not have any place on the agenda of the Dalit movement and the women’s movement was indifferent to the issues in the Dalit movement. Even today things have not changed” (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 260). A Dalit woman suffers at every level it can be social, political or economic but her economic poverty is also responsible for her deteriorating situation:

As a woman of caste becomes lower, those rules diminish and become less rigorous. However lower caste women traditionally would suffer greater economic plight, and along with that, a lack of economic freedom. This lack of economic power endangers their education, social inequality, and quality of life (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 34).

Lives of Indian women run on several parameters. These parameters can be seen in various contexts, for instance social, economic, political, and many more. Society has defined roles for them. Society is there to decide everything for them for instance- whether she can go out in public arena or not? Whether she can earn or not? Whether she can speak out her opinion or not? For all these issues and concerns society is there to give its verdict but woman has to accept it anyway with a wish or without a wish. It is a common experience of growing up as a woman in India. But things become exigent if that woman belongs to a lower caste group, Dalit.

Dominant group is insulated from suffering of the oppressed, which leads them to be convinced by their own ideology. They experience the current organization of society as basically satisfactory and so they accept the interpretation of reality that justifies that system of organization. The pervasiveness and relentlessness of the suffering of these people pushes to find out what is wrong with the prevailing social order and develop new and less distorted ways of seeing the world. The standpoint of the oppressed is different from that of the ruling class. It is also epistemologically advantageous. It is more impartial because it comes closer to representing the interests of the society as a whole. The oppressed are able to see relations of power between rulers and ruled; they are capable of explaining the standpoint of the ruling class. But they can only achieve it through collective struggle and by reflecting upon it to generate Dalit feminist knowledge.

Urmila and some of her female friends decided to give words and voice to the concerns of Dalit women. They made a group named '*Dalit Mahila Sahitya Sanghatna*' and decided to write for the sake of Dalit women. These women were very much influenced by the thoughts and ideology of Jyotiba Phule and Baba Ambedkar, who were of the opinion that for the emancipation of Dalit community, it is extremely requisite to change the condition of it its women. Their aim was to educate these women and awake their consciousness towards their rights and well-being. So the thoughts of these women were very much replete with the ideology of these great thinkers and social reformers. As Pawar asserts:

We women only present our writing. Why shouldn't we have our own independent platform for literature? ...We decided to float a Dalit Mahila Sahitya Sanghatna (Dalit Women's Literary Organization).Of course; we could not have done it on our own! But we had the strength of the Phule-Ambedkar philosophy as a support and the famous pair from history-Tilak and Agarkar-as a model (*The Weave of My* 266).

There is an isomorphism between the individuals and their social location which they need to understand to be able to know how their identities and culture have been stabilized in a particular manner? Their consciousness and identity would emerge only from praxis or practical action. According to Smith these Dalit women need "to understand the conceptual practices of power...through which their oppression was designed, maintained, made to seem natural and desirable to everyone" (qtd. in Harding, Introduction 6). These "Oppressed groups can learn to identify their distinctive opportunities to turn an oppressive feature of a group's conditions into a source of critical insight about how the dominant society thinks and is structured" (Harding 7). Achieving a standpoint is not simple as it is not just a perspective rather it requires participation in the entire situation that can lead to empowerment. Till now these "women are outside and subservient to this structure" (Smith 26). But now they are ready to change different aspects of their lives from their women's place as the pervasiveness and relentlessness of the suffering of these Dalit people pushes them as an oppressed group to find out the wrongs with the prevailing social order and develop new and less distorted ways of seeing the world. The standpoint of the oppressed is not just different from that of the ruling class but it is also epistemologically advantageous. It is more impartial because it comes closer to representing the interests of society as a whole and through this the oppressed are able to see relations of power between rulers and ruled. Standpoint of the oppressed includes and is able to explain the standpoint of the ruling class. This standpoint of the oppressed section is discovered through a collective process of political and scientific struggle. It is prior for them to start off thought from a contradictory social position that can generate the Dalit feminist knowledge.

These women were on the path of becoming the harbingers of freedom for the Dalit women. They have become Dalit feminist, a unique category to raise the concern for the unique problems Dalit confront everywhere ; the joint tasks of selectively appropriating and selectively rejecting various facets of their complex national, cultural, and political legacies, a critical engagement that can alone

transform one's inheritance into a "culture" of one's own"(qtd. in Narayan 232). "There are so many issues concerning the women in our community, such as ignorance, superstitions, casteism, employment and others. That is why it is necessary for all of us to come forward and unite" (Pawar, *The Weave of My* 268). At every step Urmila talks about the lived experiences of Dalit women and these experiences only create an oppositional consciousness in them which compel them to contemplate over their situation and gather that courage by which they can bounce back at these situations. And it would enable them to create an identity of their own which will lead to their self-actualization. As Paulo Freire comments:

[t]he more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of those oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself within history to fight at other side"(345).

Through her journey Urmila Pawar shows us her individual life but she also brings some hidden aspects of Dalit people in general with specially focusing upon the Dalit women. Her individual life is a symbol of the pain Dalit community women have gone through. That's why some of them discarded Hindu religion and turned into Buddhists. Now these people have a particular way of seeing reality and they want others to look at them as human beings. Now Dalit does not mean only socially suppressed or oppressed people but it also signals rational, secular people who have discarded the oppressive system and concepts like God, fate and the caste system. Now 'Dalit' is being replaced by 'Phule-Ambedkarite' or simply 'Ambedkarite'. These changes were influenced by these two great thinkers. Here Hartsock has given an extremely appropriate line "We need to dissolve the false 'we' into its real multiplicity and variety and out of this concrete multiplicity build an account of the world seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margins as well as the center" (50).

Urmila describes the life struggle of many women who got inspired by her and worked for Ambedkar movement despite strong opposition from their families. Laxmibai Kakde from Pune went through sterilization as she was unable to have a baby and participate in the activities of Dalit women's movement. Some of these women had sacrificed their family for the sake of the

emancipation of their Dalit community. And many other Dalit women turned into Buddhist Bhikshunis. These were the women who were better equipped to understand the world because of their real social experiences which were constructing their knowledge. These women are positively utilizing their personal negative experiences. Their voices reveal the differing family and educational experiences that these women are having and which has been overlooked by the upper caste women movement. Their experiences reflect solely structured factors such as the cultural, national, economic and political contests that shape women's lives. Their Individual subjectivity is replete within a collective subjectivity called Dalit women's community. Dalit women are active agents, not passive victims in defining their social world. These women's voices are celebrated and reified as the authentic voice of Dalit womanhood. They are developing and promoting a collective identity and a collective position from which to challenge dominant standpoints. They are united in their desire to center stage Dalit women's voices. Experience is viewed as central to any analysis or understanding of Dalit women's lives. Their discourse, in contrast to academic debate, is not about oppression and suffering, nor do they conceptualize experience in an abstract form instead these Dalit women have a much more pragmatic and contextual understanding of experience. This does not mean that their conceptualization of experience is any less valid. The importance of Dalit women in developing knowledge and understanding of Dalit women's experiences is encapsulated within Dalit feminist standpoint. Dalit female standpoint is rooted in this legacy of oppression and particular notions of experience based on Dalit women's victimhood status. Analysis of Dalit women's lives and an understanding of Dalit women and their everyday experiences are central to knowledge production. In Dalit feminist standpoint the privileging of experience and the central role it assumes in knowledge production promotes images of authentic and essentialized Dalit women. That is rooted in the particular idea that one's experience is more valuable than others. The authenticized and valorized Dalit women's experience is based on notions of suffering, dysfunction and marginalization. Dalit women are constructed as fixed into particular positions of oppression from where they are giving voice to their vision.

Sometimes life has brought extremely hard times for Urmila as she found herself in dilemma of looking after the family first or participating in the activities of group. As her mother says to her 'to be a mother is to commit sati, to immolate oneself; nothing less!' (298). Pawar says that while those members of the Dalit community who have adopted Ambedkar's way of life tend to be more progressive but there was no significant change in the condition of women. But Urmila's conversion

to Buddhism led to her own self-development and this only inspired her to turn to feminism after moving to Mumbai. It was perhaps the second-most important event that shaped her life. That's why she calls 1975, as International Women's Year, a landmark in both her own life as well as the country's approach to women's rights. Her achievements and her awakened consciousness itself represent the awakened consciousness of Dalit community women as a whole and this consciousness comes from a constant speculation and reflection upon one's condition and helps to construct knowledge. As Hartsock comments:

[T]hese knowledges represent a series of achievements: they result from and express a series of ongoing efforts to keep from being made invisible, to keep from being destroyed by the dominant culture. The struggles have a very high stakes-survival itself" (50-51).

Their consciousness describes multiple voices of those Dalit women who could never have the privilege of getting education and that is why they could never realize their real identity and strength. They were just grappling with the complex subjectivity of Dalit women. And this complex subjectivity and collective identities only offer a formulation which connects complex subjectivity with the empowering potential of collective identities. "They represent the transcendental voice of enlightenment attempting to come to grips with the social and historical changes" (Foucault on Power 163-164).

While the narrative in the book meanders from Pawar's personal story to the lives of those around it is throwing light on Pawar's life in the big city, where her journey as a literary figure wasn't free of resistance from her own household. Her husband who supported her initially later expected her to fulfill the typical roles as per Indian society. She has to be perfect as a housewife, in catering of the kitchen and household chores. She lost her one son and left with two daughters. But she represents a solid, firm Dalit woman who is ready to welcome any kind of storm in her life as she has dedicated her life for a cause –to emancipate her community women. She condemned the relativism of upper caste as the problems of these Dalit women are far serious and different from them. As Haraway says "[t]he standpoint of the subjugated ...are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts... 'Subjugated' standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world" (584). Urmila says:

I was a rebellious child and had numerous fights with my mother while growing up. But by the time I wrote this book, I felt I had taken her place. Like her, I was attempting to make the most of my life in a patriarchal society, I had lost my husband and my son and my two girls misunderstood me because they could not understand my need to have a life beyond home. It's as if our lives had been juxtaposed. (*The Weave of My* 218)

Foucault's argument seems valid to mention that "in the end we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power" (Two Lectures 94).

Women have more pragmatic and contextual understanding of experience. With Dalit feminist standpoint, these women's sense of self and their individual subjectivity also continue to be constructed through their relationship to community. Notion of individuality and collectivity become inextricably linked and interconnected and individual subjectivities rest upon the juncture of self, community and identity. Dalit women's desire to voice their experiences and collectively organize themselves is articulated through the key sites of motherhood and family, education, employment and community activism. These sites allow Dalit women to define their own experiences using their own voices but it also enables them to challenge the dominant discourse of upper caste womanhood that either marginalizes or pathologizes their experiences.

The use of bamboo is integral to the narrative. The title of the memoir refers to the cane baskets woven by women from several Dalit communities. Pawar, who grew up watching her widowed mother weave aaydans as she strove to make ends meet, equates the act with her writing as she weaves the stories from her life. These are the situated knowledges of these women, as Harstock called it and these are valuable because they provide a "more adequate account of reality" (30). They have led their lives while facing these power relations but this engaged and accountable positioning of these women has made a way for their self-identification where they instead of being nowhere claim to be everywhere. These are the Dalit women and the very layer of their experiences is complex and unique in comparison with others. They challenge and discard the hegemony of one and all who refused to recognize their humanity leading to reification of their Dalit identity. All their identities have a role in the way they perceive themselves and the world they inhabit. And this realization only causes a new kind of social churning. They are developing a standpoint of their own to critique the dominant viewpoint. It is the self-expression of those women whose voices have

been suppressed and denied space for articulation for several centuries. Now these muted women are turning vocal and articulate to transform their condition. As Narayan says, “we need to move away from such narrow mind-set and “cultural contexts as sealed rooms, impervious to change, with a homogenous space “inside” them, inhabited by “authentic insiders” who all share a uniform and consistent account of their institutions and values” (219). These kinds of Political perspectives of these educated Dalit women are necessary because it constitutes new ways of seeing fresh modes of reflection and assessment as people humiliate them and their gender is one more dimension of their social differentiation.

In this manner, these women are delineating the historical contexts and working through the everyday rhythms of life and employing what appears to be trivial to illuminate the reproduction of hegemonic caste structures as well the production of spaces that offered possibilities for dissent. They are creating a history of pride by their writings. They are also representing resistance and dissent but differ from the male Dalit writers as they do not continue to relegate Dalit women merely to the study of the history of castes but they bring upon some serious issues regarding Dalit women. They are of the opinion that they need to work to fully integrate them into the history of India and in the history of women’s movement more broadly. By focusing on the Dalit women they are also examining the practices of distinctiveness and hierarchy within the larger Hindu community but at the same time they are unveiling the hidden archives of Dalit resistance.

Their concrete embodiments as members of a specific class and gender as well as their concrete historical situations necessarily play significant role in their perspective on the world. These are the socially constituted members of a group that emerge and change through history. Baba Ambedkar is an inspiring image for the emancipation of these Dalit people as Urmila Pawar has immensely praised his ideology towards his people and his arduous efforts for their welfare. Dalit women are increasingly writing about the complexities, incongruities and inequalities of the socio-economic and political system. They are writing about the complex fabric of personal relationships, family life, or sexual exploitation. Even their sexual exploitation is quite often a function of this larger exploitation. This wider canvas of their lives and struggle is quite often glossed over with the deep pain of casteism. As the upper-caste is not a participant in their lives so there is always a difference in their viewpoint and the view point of the Dalit community people. These narratives amazingly capture the texture of the life and the psyche of the deprived world within India. As Tiwari says:

“Indian is a world within itself” (10). That is why it is necessary to give voice to every single section of this Indian world so that each section can express itself boldly and without any fear. So the women who belong to the Dalit world in India, they are expressing themselves through their writings. It is this body of writing which reveals the role of Dalit women in development and literature is seen to fuse together. If we closely understand the writings of these women, we can observe that these Dalit women have important issues to reveal. These issues must be heard if we want to rise above our preoccupation with stereotypes.

Conclusion

The present thesis has made a candid attempt to critically analyze and understand the Dalit female epistemology which gets constructed by their particular location. It has specially focused upon the narratives written by three Dalit female writers namely: Bama's *Krukku* and *Sangati*, Baby Kamble's *The Prison's we broke*, And Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*.

The discourse and the discussion accomplished in the introduction of the thesis have underlined the kind of differences that are inherent within the Indian society and the depth of these differences is unfathomable as they challenge one's identity and basic rights to live within a society. The name given to this factor, which creates differences, is caste. Caste is a deeply embedded factor of Indian society but the same factor has become responsible for the segregation of Indian citizens and divided them into upper and lower caste groups. All these conditions have led to the subalternization of one section of India society which is named as Dalit. The Introduction has dealt with the meaning of Dalit and what does this identity actually provide to the one, who is recognized as Dalit. Once a person is born as a Dalit, the social locations determine her/his fate as subaltern. They are under the domination of powerful hegemony of upper caste holders. They are subjectivized under various ideologies which have subjugated them in the past and still it is producing a danger to their self-esteem. The subjection is abstract; it is subjugation through beliefs and ideas which brand a Dalit as a worthless, incapable and degraded. It has crippled down their sense of pragmatism and prudence. In Dalit section, there is one more section which faces not just caste oppression but, gender bias and class discrimination, this section contains- Dalit women. The thesis in context has elaborately dealt with the core issues that seem threatening for the worth of Dalit females. These females were always considered backward and their issues were not taken thoughtfully either by the Indian Caste Movement or by the Indian Feminist Movement. They were always considered dirty, treacherous, deceitful yet a servant to all. The lives of these women have always remained vulnerable and strangled within the intentionality of various oppressions. But in the modern time these women are getting educated and raising a voice for themselves, their community with a special focus upon the Dalit women.

The Introduction elaborately deals with the contemporary situation of these people which definitely needs an intervention. It provides various dimensions of appraising discrimination against these people, the attitude of the government, police and the judiciary poses a formidable challenge. Still,

caste tensions lie just beneath the surface. They have to scale the walls of discrimination and prejudice prevalent against them. Society is not ready to accept them at benevolent terms. Social acceptance has proved harder to attain for them as it can be observed through the plethora of articles available in hugely popular dailies about the violence against these men. But the condition of Dalit women is far worse than their men as they are victims of every kind of inhuman torture, rapes and killings because of their low social standing and extremely poor background. For generations in India, Dalit women have been actively stopped from speaking. Their condition is very far from *Acche din* (good days). Their different experiences were never acknowledged by the society. It is a message that the rest of India has not only refused to listen, but also actively silenced upon it. Whenever they tried to speak they were forced to hold their tongues. They are just the silent members who can be oppressed, ignored or used for the general causes of the whole society. But now their pain has also got tongue for creating its own voice as they are getting educated. The upper caste people can not stand the one who can speak, who can question about the prevalent biased norms. These Dalit women have got education by their available means, they are also the legitimate speaker for their community because the kind of Dalit recognition they carry with themselves is not just about an identity but it is also the pain they, their ancestors and their community have gone through. These women are in dialogue with the whole world and they seem to be addressing disparate audiences that their fragmented self is in the process to become a harbinger of change. They are speaking from their margins, which earlier used to seem a vacuum but now it is an edge of possibility and action. It is the standpoint from where they can observe the outer world. They are now rational enough to have a critical stance through which they can analyze the real scenario and ready to expose the fickleness of the outer privileged section of the society. These Dalit women are using an embodied way of knowing, through their location within the society and through their outsider-insider phenomenon. There are using their own lived experiences as well as the collective experiences of them as a community to construct a standpoint of their own. These are their subaltern ways of understanding the dominating structure. They have awakened their consciousness and become more aware to recognize the way the pattern of injustice works within the social system. Their collective vision has the possibility of reconfiguring the existing reality. They are doing it by acknowledging their past, engaging their community with it, making their community also to learn from its past. They seem to be proceeding ahead with commitment, courage, determination and resistance. They want to make their presence felt by the society and want to affirm that they can

observe everything instead of being nowhere. They feel that the truths acknowledged about them are partial and they comprehensively discredit the claim that India's caste problem has disappeared even the widening class inequalities only compound the fissures of an already hierarchical society. The Introduction has widely mentioned Dalit thinkers and theorists to support its arguments namely Sharmila Rege, Gopal Guru, Anupama Rao, Gail Omvedt, Ranjit Guha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, etc. It elaborately discusses about the female standpoint by relying upon the theories of Dorothy Smith, Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock, Patricia Hill Collins etc. and for Dalit Female Standpoint. Besides it has prominently relied upon the Indian thinkers- Sharmila Rege, Uma Chakravarti, Uma Narayan etc.

Chapter two of the thesis has illustrated the prevalent bias in Indian Christianity from the standpoint of a Dalit Christian woman, Bama. Her vision as an educated Dalit woman has given her the privilege of self-reflection constructed by power structure to exercise different apparatuses of power machinery which control the consciousness, ideology and identity of subalterns. These subalterns are Dalit Christians. The chapter has dealt with the condition of the Tamil Dalit Christians. The chapter unravels the repressive condition of the Dalit Christian women located in vulnerable conditions. The chapter aptly discusses the prevalent corruption prevalent in churches and inhumanity of the church authorities. Further, it has elaborated upon the condition in which these people got converted into Christianity from Hinduism. They get victimized by the upper castes. Reddiyars and Naidus are the privileged and powerful castes and rule over the lower castes. These Dalits might have turned Christians but they have not got solace there. Village structure denotes the spatial differences as these people have separate residential areas. Church festivals are important mode of domination. They need to have their own church as they will not get welcome in the church built by privileged Christians. Bama recollects all such memories from her past and observes these harsh realities from her vision. She knows that she alone cannot eradicate these problems but she can inspire others in her community to get educate as through knowledge only they can get the observation power to access the real condition and they can map their condition in society. It is a differential force that allows them to chase their positions available and the directions to move in society at large. It requires one's consciousness that perceives itself at the center of myriad possibilities all across workings situational representation. In sum, by mapping the subaltern is he/she can observe the totality of the ensemble. These women are mapping their own standpoints

or their own position as it gives them a heightened sense of their place in social system. They make this point of view through their mind.

Chapter third has examined, discussed and debated the second novel written by Bama. It is a collection of anecdotes which discuss the various facets of the lives of Dalit Christian women and divulges artefact of power structure. It is a kind of conversation among different generations of Dalit women. It elaborately discusses the issues of patriarchy, poverty, and caste politics in Dalit Christian communities. It has made a special focus upon the women as conditioned, isolated and subjectivised through various power structures. The location of these women is concomitantly associated with their conditions as it brings up their lived experiences as a Dalit. Bama seems boosting the courage of her community women, and motivating them to take a stand for themselves for their betterment. Both the narratives *Karukku* and *Sangati* by Bama are the symbol of the awakened consciousness of the Dalit women community. Narratives do not claim to change the situation of Dalit within a day but look like a welcome attempt to attract the attention of the outer world and make them to think harder towards their situation.

Chapter four deals with the history of the Mahar community in Maharashtra and their conversion into Buddhism through the novel *The Prisons We Broke*. Mahar, an untouchable community in Maharashtra had a horrible past. The chapter discusses at length the filthy life conditions of these people and specifically focuses upon the condition of its women. It discusses the different standpoints of Dalit women, as a Dalit, as a Mother, as a labour etc. It widely studies Dalit female condition and the way they are situated in the society. Their material embodiment as part of a specific subaltern group plays a significant role in the making of their perspectives. These are the people who have collectively gone through a different past and differently located that makes tremendous impact upon them socially, psychologically and economically. Men and women feel every emotion in different way that is why these women have a very different understanding towards the kind of domination they go through in their lives. As women refuse to buckle under the chicanery methods of the privileged people who want to subdue the willingness of these women to live and through their vision they starkly challenge the differential and separatist tendencies of the society which try to take their advantage in disguise of its humbug.

The writings of these women may not bring expeditious comfort and alleviation to the condition of Dalit women, Dalits in general or any marginal section of the society but these narratives or these

social documents need to be read that will help the mainstream world to think judiciously and with more prudence. They seem to be making a furtive effort to connect with the society and to belong to it which believes in denying, accepting and justifying their worsening conditions. For these subalterns it is much harder and more necessary to figure out a vision that sees our diversities as our advantage not a threat

Chapter fifth makes an elaborate analysis of the oppressive intersection in the life of Dalit women through the novel, *The Weave of My Life*. It is written in the genre of an autobiography of Urmila Pawar's own life as a Dalit and her growth from a Dalit woman to an awakened social activist for the cause of Dalit women. She strongly condemns the exclusion and misrepresentation of Dalit women's experiences. The chapter has elaborately discussed that all female experiences are not homogenous and cohesive rather Dalit women carry some real noteworthy differences that make their lives challenging. These women wish to know the nature of their problems as their problems are specifically their own and the outer world which produces and permits these problems creates a feeling of alienation, perversion and fear in them. That is why they have grown an oppositional consciousness in themselves which demands for equality and reformation. Whenever these women want to express their dissent, their throats always get occluded by the mighty social beings who want to exert all their power to eliminate and discredit these individuals whom they deem as degenerated and feckless. Constitution has abolished untouchability but it has not implied adequate measures to abolish those factors which give rise to the notion of untouchability in society. As it is perceptible through the newspapers and other sources that violence against these Dalit females is on the rise and there are various reasons which trigger the phenomena of atrocities and grudges against these impuissant and vulnerable Dalits. Local government authorities also sometime give protection to these perpetrators who cause harm to these individuals. These individuals seem to be implementing their discernment and perspicacity on individual as well as on their community level rather than on any high political level but still they are able to notice the pitfalls of the system which need an urgent attention towards the follies of the system. All these factors seem to be working in collateral way as these three are deeply ingrained in social fabric where caste is a concrete reality, gender a social construction and class is conceptual category. Class analysis cannot be done without taking into cognizance the harsh reality of castes and both these overriding issues give birth to the gender based discrimination. These thrice harrowing factors tyrannize the lives of these female Dalits. They want to reinvigorate and refocus those differences which are developed through social

conditioning so that they can provide the social order a higher ethical and moral vision. It seems a way to identify a similar pattern in the collective life. These subalterns can clearly articulate their position as society is ignorant of what they naturally know. They seem to be absorbed in the cause of collective welfare as they have become adept to recognize the pattern of prejudice which their community goes through at every step of its life. They want to make their inconceivable presence felt by the society as they want to turn the social attention towards their diverse subjectivities. These women discuss the core concerns of the Dalit women. They look into their lived experiences transcend one's capacity of the individual to locate itself, to arrange its immediate surroundings perceptually and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. In totality it can be said that these peculiar Dalit standpoints get constructed from the bricolage of diverse experiences and denote a relation between their individual position and the society in which they find themselves.

The aforementioned extensive rumination encapsulates the whole discourse and discussion on the location and position of Dalit subalterns with a special focus on the women of this community. It traces the life odyssey of Dalit women through the writers' own life conditions. It elaborately studies the repression and resistance outgrown into the Dalit female psyche through their lived experiences. Their position enables and offers the kind of knowledge which is beneficial to map a subaltern's standpoint. It is largely the result of their individual consciousness and awareness towards their history which has been studied in each novel at length. The locations of these Dalit females who work as social agents is requisite to be taken into consideration as they live according to a whole series of social pressures, cultural coded norms, and by the given conditions of history. They discard the belief justifications of the society by their situational justifications. There are various things that they have been justified in believing through the hegemony of the dominant oppressors. But now they have realized the privilege of their reflexivity through which they can uncover the truth which were presented earlier in delphic way. These subalterns are mapping their position in the social space. It can be Bama, Baby Kamble, or Urmila Pawar, all of these women are observing their standpoint from their different regions but their consciousness as a Dalit is alike. Their narratives prove to be panoply through which Dalit female's standpoint can become more explicit and perspicuous. These standpoints result from certain locations that symbolize their social, psychic, economic position also. These positions prove to be those archimedean points from which they count the possibility of action. These points are necessary for them to comprehend their

position in the social order from where they can speak for themselves as well as for their community.

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