

# I

## **Dalit, Dalit Women and Dalit Literature: An Introduction**

The word ‘Dalit’ has its origin in Sanskrit implying the state of being ground, suppressed, crushed or broken to pieces. It was first used by Jyotirao Phule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile “Untouchable” castes of twice-born Hindus. Since then, the term is generally used to represent the exploited lower castes in the hands of upper caste Hindus in a caste-based society stratified according to the design provided by *The Manusmriti*. The Hindu epic *The Manusmriti* described the origin of the various castes from the body of the creator Lord Brahma. It spells out the origin of four varnas as—*Brahmins* were born out of the mouth of Lord Brahma with Veda in hands to be the religious masters of the globe; *Kshatriyas* (warriors) came out the next from the arms of the Lord; the *Vaishyas* were third in the row that sprang out of the thighs of this supreme creator; and finally, *Shudras* appeared from the feet of Brahma to espouse the cause of servitude. The myth behind birth of castes out of mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the Lord aimed at impelling upon structural gradations of the society in ancient India. Untouchables stood at the bottom to comply with the commands of all the three castes ranked in order. For long, Indian society took such classification as a model for the vested interests whereas the low castes were condemned to serve degradations in public life. Utterly humiliated, they were identified with various titles like ‘Harijans’ as propagated by Mahatma Gandhi; ‘Depressed Classes’ by the British; ‘Chamar’ means ‘Cobbler’ in Oriya; ‘Chuhra’ or ‘Bhangi’ implying scavengers in northern states; and ‘Mahar’ in Maratha of Indian languages. Later the term ‘Dalit’ is redefined by Gangadhar Pantawane in a letter to Elenor Zelliot where he defines ‘Dalit’ as:

To me, dalit is not the caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, holy books teaching separatism fate and heaven because they have made him a slave. He does not believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. (Zelliot 268)

Similarly, Victor Premasagar defines the term ‘Dalit’ as the expression of their “weakness, poverty and humiliation at the hands of the upper caste in Indian society” (Premasagar, 108). The broader meaning of the term justifies its association with the portrayal of the wider experiences

of one's marginalisation. However, those who have the first-hand experience of Dalit exploitation are hard to convince on the broader meaning of Dalit. Therefore, the term 'Dalit' still refers exclusively to the victims of the caste-ridden society.

Caste discrimination is not confined to India but it is prevalent in the whole South Asia. Other countries in South Asia like Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka also face caste-discrimination and untouchability. In different countries 'untouchables' are given different names. For example in Nepal, they are commonly addressed with many derogatory terms in the typical Nepali language. A study titled "Caste-based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study on Nepal" reveals that in Nepal:

Dalits are called *paninachalne* (water polluting), *achchoot* (untouchables), *avarna*, *doom*, *pariganit*, *tallojat* etc. They are looked at through the language of development and termed as *uppechhit* (ignored), *utpidit* (oppressed), *pacchadiparcka* (lagging behind), *bipanna* or *garib* (poor), *nimukha* (helpless), *Simantakrit* (marginalised), *Subidhabatabanchit* (disadvantaged), *alpasankhyak* (minorities) or *banchitikaranmapareka* (excluded). (34)

Similarly, Bangladesh has an elaborate set of names for its *dalits*— both Hindus and Muslims. Hindu *dalits* are kept under the category of *harijan*, the Muslim dalits are classified as *arzals*. Some of the occupations in Bangladesh are associated with specific groups or communities and occupy 'low' position in the status hierarchy of occupation. These are sweepers, barber, washer, dyer, blacksmith, cobbler, oil-presser, boatmen, butcher etc. obviously, in Pakistan also, caste continues to be an important category of community classification and dalit question is a little more complicated. There, the categories with which dalits are identified are not completely alien to Indians. For example, *mochi*, *pather* (brick maker) and *bhangi* are mostly Muslims and considered 'lower' caste on the basis of their family occupation. There are other titles also like Musalman Sheikhs, *mussalis* (both used for Muslim dalits) and *masihi* (Christians) which refer to the specific group of people who are called untouchables. In Sri Lanka, the untouchable communities are known by their community names. The Indian influence on the local discourse on caste in Sri Lanka seems minimal. Neither *Harijan* nor *dalit* are used to describe the 'untouchable' castes.

There have been serious debates and deliberations to bring the term closer to the essence of 'subalternity' in larger context but the Dalit activists remain adamant to maintain their separate identity as according to them only a Dalit can understand as to what it is to be a 'Dalit'. Dr. Suryanarayan Ransubhe a well known critic in Hindi Literature who does not agree with the liberal definition of Dalit contends:

The Dalit Literature is the literature written by the Dalits but we believe that the literature in which the sensuousness of Dalit age is described and depicted most vividly is the Dalit literature irrespective of caste and base of the author, who has written it. (Chikhalikar 2)

In an attempt to 'writing back' against the mainstream literary discourse, Dalit Literature started getting shape and structure after Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's speech at Mahad Satyagraha (demanding equal access to water and abolition of caste discrimination) on 25 December 1927. It was a day that was concluded with the burning of the symbol of Brahminic slavery, *The Manusmriti*, a day still celebrated in many parts of India as *Manavmuktidin*. Dr. Ambedkar himself called the Mahad Satyagraha the beginning of the 'Untouchable Liberation Movement'. There arises a question that if Dalit Literature originated with Dr. Ambedkar then why the Dalit Literary Movement could flourish only after Dr. Ambedkar's death on December 6, 1956. Out of the reasons suggested by the scholars for this development is that earlier the untouchables led a life of poverty, ignorance and misery with hardly any conscious grudge against the discriminatory social construct. It was Dr. Ambedkar who awakened the man in Dalit enabling the common Dalit to join the movement with all his strength. The radical and progressive thoughts of Ambedkar instilled the fighting spirit among the people who had never known life as normal human beings, and who had no cultural or literary legacy, and had no literary consciousness. He was strongly opposed to the caste-based discrimination in different walks of life. He asserted that "... caste is therefore a harmful institution, in as much as; it involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules" (Ambedkar 264). His exhortation brought desired results when Dalits started realising that the selfish mechanism of the aesthetic concept of '*Satyam, Shivam, Sundram*' was to be reinterpreted in a democratic way and therefore they stressed upon the replacement of this concept with one which is material and social. It was under the influence of Ambedkar that Sharankumar Limbale redefined the literature as the medium to declare human freedom. He defined the concept of '*Satyam, Shivam,*

*Sundram*’ as— “Human being are first and foremost human—this is *Satyam*. The liberation of human beings is –*Shivam*. The humanity of human beings is *Sundaram*.” (Qtd. In Shankar)

Before Ambedkar, even expecting Dalit consciousness among them seemed unreasonable. Among Dalits, consciousness building can be divided into two phases. In the first phase Dalit thinkers tried to provide for the ideological background upon which an independent Dalit identity could be built. According to their interpretations of history, Dalits were the autonomous inhabitants of the country. Some thinkers claimed that Dalits were originally Buddhists i.e. followers of an egalitarian religion which was quashed by Brahmanism. In the second phase the efforts were extended from reinterpretation of history to other spheres as well and mainly to contemporary period. Dalit leaders began to assert *Dalitism* not only by its origins but also in terms of art and culture. They laid emphasis on the point that their culture has a lot of remarkable aspects which should be preserved. They tried to transform some of the practices which had been hitherto considered polluting into positive ones.

Yet another significant event in 1967 was the literary meet held in Bombay on behalf of the Maharashtra Buddha Sahitya Sabha. This meet brought together people from Solapur and Nashik who were involved in the literary movement. The first representative collection of poems by the Dalit ‘*Akar*’ was published in this conference. The period between 1972 and 1978 can be regarded as the second stage in the Dalit Literary Movement. It was the period when several collections of short stories by Dalit writers were published one after another. Between 1978 and 1986, a number of Dalit writers received state awards for their contribution in serving the cause of Dalit awakening. Dalit Literature came to be included in school as well as university level text books. It was being translated into various Indian and foreign languages.

To explore Dalit issues, it is pertinent to discuss what Dalit Literature is and who Dalit writers are. The history of Dalit literary movement started with the first vachana poet, Madara Chennaiah who was a cobbler. However, Dalit literature in Maharashtra flourished due to the efforts of Jyotiba Phule (1828-90), Prof. S.M. Mate (1886-1957) and Dr. Ambedkar (1891-1956). They highlighted the various issues concerning Dalits in a better way. Since its inception, there had been debates whether Dalit Literature is the literature of only those born in Dalit caste. Dalit Literature is generally perceived as one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India—its appalling nature and its exploitative system. In other words, the term

‘Dalit’ connotes not a caste but a realization and is related to the experience, joys and sorrows and struggles of those belonging to the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion, assertion and resistance, and therefore happens to be revolutionary. Sharatchandra Muktibodh highlights the importance of developing a Dalit point of view as the prerequisite for a Dalit writer. He remarks:

A Dalit writer is bound to have a Dalit point of view, but this is not enough for a literary artist. It is essential for him to experience a Dalit insight of his own.... It is an intellectual cartograph of an aspect of life, which it illuminates and elucidates. There is as much difference between a Dalit view and a Dalit vision as there is between having a look at the map of a city and actually living in that city. (Muktibodh 271)

Poems, short stories, novels and autobiographies written by Dalit writers provided useful insights on the question of Dalit identity. In his article “A Critical study of Dalit Literature in India”, Dr. Jugal Kishore Mishra discusses that now the subaltern communities have found a new name by coming together with the perspective ‘Dalit is Dignified’ thereby rejecting the subhuman status imposed on them by the Hindu social order. Dalit literature has questioned the mainstream literary theories and upper caste ideologies to explore the neglected aspects of life. He further argues that Dalit literature is experience based where ‘*anubhava*’ (experience) takes precedence over ‘*anumana*’ (speculation). Therefore, to Dalit writers, history is not illusionary or unreal as Hindu metaphysical theory may make one to believe. It is in this context that authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of Dalit literature today. It is through their *anubhava* that these writers have started using the language of the outcastes and under privileged in Indian society. Instead of relying upon the conventional notion of aestheticism where art is celebrated for its artistic beauty, Dalit writers explore the grace of their literature in the portrayal of shame, anger, sorrow and indomitable hope. Like other Dalit writers, Arun Kamble also agrees that the aim of the movement is humanism; liberty, equality and fraternity; and absence of exploitation. The age old oppression and denial of human rights have made them to be critical of everything conventional and mainstream. Today, the Dalit literature “has become a potent tool to threaten the Brahmanic hegemony in literature; inspiring Dalit masses for assertion, protest and mobilization; and stirring up thinking in Dalit intellectuals to produce organic Dalit intellectuals.” (Mishra)

Literacy rate being particularly low among Dalits, the emergence of Dalit literature where both the writers and readers are mostly Dalits, is itself an evidence of a profound change taking place in Indian society. In his essay “Thinking Dalit Critic Began to Theorize on Dalit Literature and its Role”, Dangle observes:

Dalit literature is not simply literature .... Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change .... At the very first glance, it will be strongly evident that there is no establishment critical theory or point of view behind them (i.e. Dalit writings); instead, there is new thinking and new point of view. (Qtd. In Limbale 2010, 2)

As the present research intends to explore the status of Dalit women as ‘doubly marginalised’ it is imperative to discuss the position of Dalit women in Indian context. They are thrice discriminated as besides being treated as untouchables or outcaste due to their caste, they face gender discrimination in her family as well as in various spheres of life –be it economic, social, cultural or legal. Woman is perpetually harassed for her economic impoverishment due to wage disparity, with low or underpaid labour. Four varnas of Hindu caste hierarchy exclude the untouchables or ‘*varna bahyas*’ (those outside the varna system). Among the untouchables, the status of women is further eroded and closely linked to the concept of purity. This is what the rigid, fundamentalist Hindu promotes through continuation of caste system and imposition of Brahminical values to maintain the rigid caste system. In terms of Dalit women, Hinduism makes them doubly marginalised—first for their being Dalit and secondly for their being women in a patriarchal social setup.

The creation of a number of Hindu religious books including the *Manusmriti*, *Atharva Veda*, *Vishnu Smriti* and many others like these and their strict compliance by the Brahmins, led to a society in which equality between men and women could never be realised. Dr. Ambedkar, an architect of the Indian constitution also makes it clear in his article titled “The Rise and Fall of Hindu Woman” that the most fundamental fact responsible for the sufferings of Dalit women in India was the orthodox philosophy propagated by the so called Hindu religious books. According to the *Manusmriti* women have no right to education, independence or wealth. It not only justifies the treatment of Dalit Woman as a sex object and promotes child marriage, but also justifies a

number of violent atrocities on woman as can be seen in the following verses from Laws of Manu:

Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age, a woman is not fit for independence.

(*Manusmriti* IX-3)

By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. (*Manusmriti* V-147)

A Brahman, Kshatriya or Vaishya man can sexually exploit any Shudra woman.

(*Manusmriti* IX-25)

*The Manusmriti* goes to the extent of considering the killing of an untouchable justified as a minor offence. If the religious texts of a religion propagate discrimination, then one can imagine the treatment Dalits might receive throughout their lives. The caste discrimination ultimately results into the perpetual oppression of Dalit women and violation of their economic, political, social and cultural rights. The history is the witness to the fact that the most deprived section of the society comprises of poor and illiterate Dalit women who are the easy target for sexual harassment and exploitation in many other forms. Dalit women face not just caste violence inflicted on them by the dominant castes, but are also subjected to exploitation due to the apathy of the set of institutional structures within the state.

The periodic report submitted by the Government of India for the 70th session of Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Geneva, Switzerland highlighted some of the most glaring facts about the condition of Dalit women who constitute 16.3% population of which 18% women live in rural areas. The report highlights that the woman performs hard domestic labour which is unpaid and as agricultural labourers or casual labourers they continue to toil under the burning sun, with no protection or benefits that labour laws should provide, since majority of these women are in the unorganised sector. They do not even get the minimum wages that the state has specified, since they are unable to organise and demand for decent wage. Therefore women are made to undertake manual low paying, tedious, time consuming work. After the day-long hard work at the field when they return back to their homes in the evening, they have to do all kind of household work like cooking, cleaning of utensils, washing clothes, cleaning of homes, milching cattle etc. In most of the cases, their husbands do not help them in their

household chores; instead often they take away their hard-earned wages for wasteful expenditures. Their young children remain unattended, half-fed and crying. Their husbands often show cruelty towards them and beat them mercilessly. Dalit woman cannot take rest even after doing work as it is desired of a woman to take care of her husband's carnal desires at the end of the day what if she is extremely exhausted after the day long ordeal. It seems that only hard labour and exploitation are in store for her as a fortune. (Unheard Voices: Dalit Women)

The women have to walk miles to fetch drinking water and often the water is not safe and potable. The discrimination against Dalit women can be better understood in terms of denial of equal access to water from the village wells. Water which is the elixir provided by the God has proved to be a potent tool of discrimination. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore nicely narrated the apathy of Dalit women who are not even supposed to offer water to high caste Brahmins in his one-act play *Chandalika*. The Dalit girl Prakriti is scolded by her mother for the sinful act of offering water to a saint. All efforts of Prakriti to realise her 'self' fail to deliver the desired results in a society guided by the rigid norms against the untouchables. It is generally observed that the Dalit hamlets are at the end of the main village or in the village outskirts. They live in small huts and even the few who may have slightly better housing are devoid of basic amenities such as sanitation, light and safe and clean drinking water.

Even today Dalit women are seen working on construction sites, carrying heavy loads of construction material. They also work in brick kilns for long hours, as casual labourers to lay roads with hot tar in the burning sun, without sandals and any other protective wear. The women have to walk miles not just for collecting water but also fuel and fodder for their domestic chores. Dalit women are victims of bonded labour, they are abused, sexually exploited by other caste, humiliated and are easy targets of insult. Due to the process of globalisation, Dalit men migrate from rural areas to the urban centres in search of employment leaving their Women behind to bear the responsibility of the family. The situation of Dalit women in India is just unexplainable. Rajendra Prasad Jaiswal states that the Dalit women are one among the worst sufferers of socio-cultural, political and economic exploitation, injustice, oppression and violence. Despite all the claims of India to grow in terms of infrastructure, transport, ICT, economic growth, literacy rate and other parameters of growth, the woes and miseries of Dalit women are boundless. They are the ones who form 'real' teeming millions in India, and are affected by all kinds of social and economic oppressions. Jaiswal remarks:



They are oppressed by the broader Hindu society, their own community's men and also their own husbands. Thus, they are triply disadvantageous. The issues of Dalit women are different from that of other Indian women. They have been deprived from all kinds of human rights, education, income, dignity, social status, religious rights, etc. They have to face outside world necessitated by economic deprivation, and an urgent need to earn for livelihood. (Jaiswal)

In Indian context, in spite of constitutional provisions ensuring equality—social, political and economic, Dalits seem to have been excluded from social, economic, cultural, civil, and political rights. The picture of a “democratic republic” which the Preamble reflects is essentially democratic from the political, cultural, economic and social point of view. In other words, it not only envisages a democratic form of government but also a democratic society which involves justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The Preamble of Indian Constitution reflects the objectives of the Constitution to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, and Republic and to secure to all its citizens—Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity, and to promote among them all; Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation. (Basu 21)

Certain rights are given to each individual of the country. This object is secured in the constitution, by making illegal all discrimination on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth under article 15. Under article 17, “untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “untouchability” shall be a punishable offence. Article 39, cls. (a) and (d), secures to men and women equal right to work and equal pay for equal work. Democracy in itself has no value without fraternity. It develops the spirit of brotherhood among all sections of the people. Part XVI is entirely related to the Scheduled Castes, Tribes and other backward classes. It provides reservation to all these communities. Under article 29, constitution gives the right to each community to preserve their culture by opening schools, colleges and other educational institutions to preserve and promote their culture. Also, there are ample provisions to safeguard the rights of religious and linguistic minorities. Similarly, Constitution of India ensures equality among all citizens irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, region or gender. Paradoxically, Dalit literature narrates an

entirely different story where discrimination replaces equality and hegemony prevails over democracy.

Today Dalit women numbering 80.517 million constitute approximately 48% of the total Dalit population, 16% of the total female population and 8% of the total Indian population (Mishra). Though they are substantially larger in Indian population, Dalit women are yet to realise their dream to enjoy essential human dignity which Indian Constitution guarantees to every citizen without exception. Dalits are among the most socially and economically vulnerable communities given their social exclusion, lack of access to landownership, lack of significant political participation, and lack of free employment. Over half the Dalit workforces are landless agricultural labourers dependent on the dominant castes in their localities for their livelihood. But within the Dalit community itself women are doubly marginalised. Their family as well as the community in general act together to impose a coercive control over their lives. This ensures that Dalit women continue to be disempowered, socially suppressed and physically, sexually, economically and politically exploited. Being a Dalit she is untouchable. She is restricted from entering the homes of other caste people, temple, at the local tea shop etc. In school and colleges also, she is made to feel inferior and unclean. Due to the caste hierarchy she is the victim of violence, atrocities, oppression and exploitation. In 2006 National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (2006) submitted a report titled *Dalit Women Speak Out* highlighting:

Violence against Dalit women presents clear evidence of widespread exploitation and discrimination against these women subordinated in terms of power relations to men in a patriarchal society, as also against their communities based on caste. She is doubly marginalised as she finds no support from politicians, bureaucracy, police, judiciary etc. (S.J. 2)

The Constitution of India provides women the right to vote on equal terms with men –a right that in many of the western countries women won after prolonged struggle. But in spite of all these efforts women representation in legislative bodies has remained poor. No doubt, the number of women (23) elected for the first Lok Sabha has risen to 59 in fifteenth Lok Sabha (Indian Parliament) but the inadequate representation of Dalit women in politics is still a matter of concern, though 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments have encouraged the participation of Dalit women in politics. The present political scenario at national level can be better understood when one takes

into account the portfolios given to the women ministers. They are still kept away strategically from the portfolios like home, external affairs, defence, industry or finance. However, it is a matter of celebration that the political class has come to realise that the Dalit women may be projected as the President, the Speaker of the lower house or the Chief Ministers of states. This development may perhaps be linked with the idea of *sanskritisation* implying “the process by which a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently ‘twice-born caste’” (Srinivas, 6). It is this social change which has made Dalits assert the identity of their own by making them conscious of their rightful place in the society. Their passionate demand for human rights finds reflection in the following lines of Sharan Kumar Limbale’s poem titled “White Papers”:

I do not ask  
For the sun and moon from your sky  
Your high houses or your mansions  
I do not ask for gods or rituals  
Castes or sects  
I ask for  
My rights as a man.  
I want my rights, give me my rights.  
Will you deny this incendiary state of things?  
My rights are rising like the sun.  
Will you deny this sunrise? (Limbale 2009, 74)

Hence women are marginalised in every sphere of life. In case of Dalit women, they are double marginalized. They are Dalits and women at the same time. As women, they are considered inferior to the male Dalits and, as such, seen to be unfit for focused attention even by the Dalit right activists. In the feminist discourse they are not given adequate space because they belong to Dalit community. However, Ambedkar’s commitment to the woman’s cause was clearly evident in his commitment to the Hindu Code Bill:

No law passed in the Indian legislature in the past or likely to be passed in the future can be compared to it (Hindu Code) in point of its significance. To leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex, which is the soul of Hindu society untouched and to go on passing legislation relating to economic problems is to make a face of our constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap. (Chatterjee 76)

Realising the importance of gender equality, UN Charter provided equal rights for women as a basic principle. UN declared 1975 as the International Women's Year. At least four international conferences were held between 1975 and 1995 focusing directly on the issues of women empowerment. Henceforth, all discussion on gender justice and equality always remain at the centre stage in the UN assembly. All this resulted in bringing the issue of women empowerment, equality and development on the national political agenda of most countries of the world. A world conference on Human Rights at Vienna was held in 1993 where Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was solemnly adopted. It emphasises:

The human rights of the women and of the girl child are inalienable, integral and indivisible part of the Universal Human Rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic and cultural life at the national, regional and cultural life at the national, regional and international level and eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are the priority objectives of the international community. (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action)

However, the condition of Dalit women as reported by the media and narrated by literature is still miserable. Despite constitutional laws of non-discrimination on the basis of caste and gender under article-15; the right to life and security of life under article-21; and the constitutional directive to protect Dalits from social injustice under article-46, the cases of caste-based discrimination are still recorded. However the existence of laws without proper implementation is of no use. Dalit women face violence at two levels. They are exploited by caste and gender and are vulnerable to sexual abuse. The United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women has also noted that Dalit women:

Face targeted violence, even rape and death from state actors and powerful members of dominant castes used to inflict political lessons and crush dissent

within the community or the women are used as pawns to capture their men folk. These women are gang raped, forced into prostitution stripped, paraded around naked, made to eat excrement or even-murdered for no crime of theirs.... (Irudayam, 8)

There are the instances that if a Dalit woman registers a complaint for her being abused no one hears her voice. Her voice is suppressed on the notion of family or community honour. Domestic violence is prevalent within the family. This violence often manifests itself in verbal abuse of the woman, accompanied by physical assault but also entails sexual abuse including marital rape.

Several cases of inter-caste marriage ending in domestic violence reveal caste and gender discrimination against the Dalit wife leading to violence. Women are tortured within the home for not bringing enough dowry, for not bearing male children, for being supposedly ugly or too beautiful or allegedly unfaithful or talking back to her husband etc. (Irudayam, 5)

Besides, her miserable condition gets projected through the Survey conducted by an expert group in 2006 revealing that the Dalit women are still denied access to basic public services. It highlighted as to how Dalit women are still unequal in terms of access to water; entry into village shops; access to restaurant or hotels; access to public transport; entry into Cinema halls; and many other civic amenities in the villages. Similarly, the survey presented a sorry state of affairs in terms of violence against Dalit women. It shows that out of the total number of women surveyed, 62.4% Dalit women still face verbal violence; 54.8% women face physical violence; 46.8% face sexual harassment/assault; 23.2% Dalit women are subjected to rape; and a substantial number of Dalit women suffer due to forced prostitution, kidnap/abduction, forced incarceration, medical negligence, domestic violence, child sex abuse and female foeticide/infanticide. (Shah)

Most of the Dalit women work outside the home than non-SC/ST women. They seem to be more vulnerable to these forms of violence in public spaces from members of the dominating community. One specific form of violence against Dalit women is the practice of *Devadasi* or *Jogini* system of ritualised, religiously sanctioned prostitution. A number of Dalit girls between the age of 6 and 13, particularly in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Orissa are dedicated to temple deities. Once these girls are dedicated to temple, they are unable to marry

and are instead forced to become prostitutes for the temple priests, dominant caste village elders or all men in the village.

Caste discrimination and untouchability is still prevalent in modern India. Even if a Dalit person acquires a high position, the label of untouchability does not leave them easily. Dalits have been denied entry to the Kali temple in Odisha for the past 80 years. When few Dalit school girls entered in the temple and offered a prayer, they were thrown out. On a complaint in this matter, P.L. Punia the Chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled caste himself went there but he was denied to enter in the temple because he himself was a Dalit. This is not the only temple where the entry of the Dalit people is prohibited. There are several other such controversies which prevailed in the past. But due to lack of political will, it still continues in spite of it being illegal and unconstitutional. (IBN Live)

Similarly, the doors of the Uthapuram temple which is situated in Madurai district in Tamil Nadu were opened for the first time quite recently for Dalits after independence. For generations, they were forbidden from entering the temple and a wall was built around the temple to keep the Dalits away. But now the wall is demolished and people from all communities are allowed to enter the temple and perform a prayer. (NDTV India)

Due to the spread of education, many Dalit people are now acquiring high position in society. There are various examples of Dalits who by their hard work and farsightedness have now acquired popularity, fame and celebrity status in the society. Let us take the example of Kalpana Saroj from Bangalore. She was once scorned by Brahmins, but has now built a business empire that employs thousands of upper-caste workers. She now wears gold bracelets, diamond earrings and a traditional *salwar kameez* which are denied to ordinary Dalit women. One admirer of hers calls her a “a real slum dog millionaire”.

The opening up of India's economy has helped in jobs and opportunities for India's poorest and has even created a new breed—the Dalit millionaire. Khade, a first generation businessman who drives a BMW, has suffered poverty, untouchability, humiliation and discrimination on the name of caste when he was a child in a village near Sangliin Maharashtra. Dalits have now formed a club named Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCII) to promote the cause and interest of Dalits, Miland Kamble is the chairman of this club. The top ten Dalits are either owning or managing prospective big corporate houses. (Raman)

There are various examples in which great people born in Dalit community, suffered untouchability and humiliation but due to exceptional courage, hard labour and will power, they earned a name in society. Two of India's prominent politicians Ms. Mayawati, ex-Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and Ms. Meira Kumar (presently Speaker of Lok Sabha) belong to low castes. Perhaps, the inspiration and exhortation of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, the architect of Indian Constitution, for Indian Dalit population has now started delivering results, though at microscopic scale.

Autobiographies are part of a literary genre that brings personal accounts of life in public domain. Various autobiographies serve different purposes in different times and it will be safe to affirm that the autobiographies of Dalit writers reflect pain and anguish of Dalits. Taking the trend of mini-narratives forward, several Dalit autobiographies reflecting the miserable conditions of Dalits have been written in various Indian languages. Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Mohandas Namisray's *Apne-Apne Pinjarey*, Tulsiram's *Murdaiya*, Sheoraj Singh Bechain's *Mera Bachpan mere Kandhon Par* and Surajpal Chouhan's *Tiriskrat* are important Dalit autobiographies written in Hindi. Sharan Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* and Daya Pawar's *Baluta* were written in Marathi but have been translated into almost all major Indian languages and English. *Untold Story of Bhangi Vice Chancellor* by Shyam Lal Jedia is another milestone achieved by the genre of Dalit autobiography. One of the most striking features of all such kind of autobiographies is the critique of Varna system which consider Dalits as the most inferior and filthiest creature of society. Vaibhav Singh highlights the special attributes of Dalit autobiography in the words:

In an autobiography, it is a normal trend to glorify the "self" and boast about the extraordinary quality of oneself. But that changes at the hands of a Dalit writers. When he/she writes, it is about denial of opportunities, even to live as an ordinary human being. The self becomes the representative of all other Dalits who were crushed down because of their Dalit identity. (Singh)

The protagonist of Dalit autobiographies is no doubt, the writer himself or herself. But his/her personal experiences encompass the condition of whole community. In *Joothan*, Omprakash Valmiki points out that upper caste people recognise them only by their caste and expect them to do the menial work which is specified for them. He writes:

One day Headmaster Kaliram called me into his room and asked in scolding voice: “What is your name?” “Om Prakesh.” I said in a fearful voice “Are you Chuhara?” The Headmaster asked another question in a frightening tone. “Yes” “ok then” go and climb on that tree, pluck the branches and make a broom out of them. The broom should be full of leaves and sweep the whole school” the Headmaster ordered. (Omprakash 4)

In *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)*, Limbale tells very heart-rending method of Dalit children’s fight against hunger. He narrates the harrowing experiences of Marathi Dalits in a caste-ridden society subjecting them to all sorts of inhuman and undignified life. It is a tale of untouchables, their wretchedness, depravity and helplessness. Hunger, poverty, starvation, humiliation and perpetual exploitation define the lives of untouchables in the autobiography. Limbale narrates:

Once somebody’s wheat flour felt on dusty road, He collected the upper portion of the flour and left. I reached there and collected the remaining flour, which was mixed in dust and when I gave it to my mother, she praised me a lot. (Limbale 2011, 11)

The Dalit movement was already strong in Maharashtra and its influence can be seen in the autobiographies of Marathi Dalit writers. The same is true for Tamil Literature in which Bama’s *Karukku* is considered a watershed. Various Dalit writings draw their strength from Dr. Ambedkar’s philosophy that the true picture of a Dalit’s sufferings can be portrayed by a Dalit only. Therefore, unlike other fictional writings, autobiographies have flourished most among the Dalits.

The present research explores certain dimensions of Dalit narratives (with special reference to Bama’s *Karukku* and Sharankumar Limbale’s *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* to underline the issue of the marginalisation of Dalit women in a country celebrating democracy as the guiding principle for political, economic, social, legal and cultural spheres of life. The phrase “Doubly Marginalised” used in the title of the research derives its essence from the term “Doubly Subaltern” used by the postcolonial theorists Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her popular essay “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*”. An attempt has been made to bring the two phrases closer in a way that they merge together to define the marginality of women (Dalit and Non-Dalit) as a commonly conceded fact, though the contexts may vary. The Dalit narratives under study present



a horrid picture of caste-based Indian society where discrimination against Dalits especially Dalit women prevail even today and they are marginalised by the society through the denial of equal access to civic amenities, education, economic self-reliance, democratic participation and essential human dignity. Though Bama's *Karukku* and Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste (Akkarmashi)* have different socio-cultural and geo-spatial contexts, both of the autobiographies are rooted in typical Dalit sensibility. If *The Outcaste* narrates the harrowing tales of discrimination against Dalits and untouchables in Maharashtra, *Karukku* portrays the agony of being Dalit (especially a Dalit woman) in southernmost part of the country—Tamil Nadu. The research discusses the two autobiographies by applying multidisciplinary understanding of marginalisation. It does not confine itself to the conventional notion of literary aesthetics; rather, it relies upon aesthetics of Dalit literature as is defined by prominent Dalit theorists.

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