VOICE OF THE VOICELESS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE SELECTED AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF BLACK AND DALIT WRITERS

Thesis submitted to the
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by

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, **Voice of the Voiceless: A Comparative Study on the Selected Autobiographies of Black and Dalit Writers**, submitted by **Ms. Sageera M P**, to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations and bona fide research, carried out by her, under my supervision, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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DECLARATION

I, **Sageera M P**, hereby declare that the thesis entitled, **Voice of the Voiceless: A Comparative Study on the Selected Autobiographies of Black and Dalit Writers**, submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations, and bona fide research carried out by me, under the guidance of **Dr. Sajitha M.A.**, Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, Farook College (Autonomous), Calicut and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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CONTENT

LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

A Song Flung Up to Heaven	SH
Gather Together in My Name	GT
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings	CB
I wonder as I wander	IWIW
Singin’ and Swingin’ and Getting’ Merry Like Christmas	SS
The Big Sea	BS
The Heart of a Woman	HW

Chapter 1

Introduction

Autobiography, as a unique literary genre, ignites many spheres and enlightens society. The emergence of specific spheres within literature and separation into categories and sub-disciplines reflects various forms of social inquiry. Autobiographies present social imaginations and experiences different from the existing canonical narratives. A writer's journey from other literary forms to an autobiography happens through the evolution of historical and social relations. Changes in narrative conventions need to be analysed depending on the function it has within the social structure.

In 18th and 19th centuries, writing and reading were centred on the privileged classes. Acquisition of reading and writing in context where it has become a resource value within society leads to hierarchies. A closer examination of the autobiographies up to nineteenth century reveals hierarchisation based on caste, race, and gender. It connotes that the absence of specific voices in the available conventional media, especially narratives, is apparent. The thesis, which focuses on a comparative analysis of Black and Dalit writers attempts to analyse the presence of voicelessness.

In the thesis titled "Voice of the Voiceless: A Comparative Study on the Selected Autobiographies of Black and Dalit Writers", the expression 'voice of the voiceless' is used to denote the 'voice' of socially excluded classes. The word 'voiceless' does not mean those who do not have 'voice.' Instead, it connotes the

absence of resources and power, which are significant in the identity formation of an individual in the mainstream society. Precisely, ‘voicelessness’ signifies exclusion of many social classes. It may mean that the absence of elements counted as capital and resource in the mainstream society, on many levels, is transformed into voiceless. It is not the absence of socio-political and cultural capital that makes particular sections of a community voiceless. Still, the fact is, in society where caste, race, and gender hegemony exists, it does not take into account the political and cultural capital of the lower classes and gender groups. In essence, some power politics works behind every exclusion.

Only by analysing the subtle nature of exclusion can one explain the historically stratified social systems. ‘Black’ and ‘Dalit’ are two terms that need to be discussed only by considering the empirical realms of various forms of exclusion. Specifically, at first, one should understand the workings of different hierarchies; gender, classes, regions, occupations, and so on inside the caste system. Similarly, within race, different hierarchies of gender, class, occupation, religion and so on operate. In this thesis, caste and race are used as modest category to understand and explain exclusion. Frantz Fanon refers to the nature of existing discrimination in America as:

> Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!’’’ Frightened! Frightened!
>
> Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.

> I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*, which I had learned about from Jaspers. (112)

The above text is helpful to understand the nature of racism, particularly, the ideologies behind race. Frantz Fanon, here comments about the politicisation of a society. It indicates the divisive logic of the two colours; Black and White. The mechanism of social inclusion and exclusion envisioned in societal consciousness is projected through these lines.

The thesis emphasises the absent voices and the politics of exclusion of Black and Dalit societies by those societies in America and India that designate themselves as mainstreams at the level of race, caste, and gender. Besides, being a literary genre autobiographies combine themselves with many other disciplines to understand the nature of socio-cultural relations. The autobiographical narratives can shed light on different aspects of sociology, history, gender, and identity. The focus of this research is the inter-textuality of autobiographies.

The present study postulates that Blacks in America and Dalits in India experience severe exclusion in their respective racist and casteist society. The thesis aims to critically analyse and identify factors behind the voicelessness and exclusion of Dalit men, Black men, Dalit women and Black women. Furthermore, gendered othering of Black and Dalit women within the specific society also comes under the scope of this study. The differences and similarities in the complex subaltern experience of Black and Dalit are also a relevant topic to discuss.

Mainly, in this thesis, explorative, interpretative and evaluative research methodology is used. The thesis relies on and uses theoretical approaches of subaltern studies and cultural studies to understand and explain the concepts of race, caste, Black, Dalit and gender. While using the critical studies of caste, race and gender as theories in the field of social exclusion, a comparative analysis of Black and Dalit autobiographies is attempted. The analytical limit of the historical ideologies of this thesis is a retrospective of how race and caste have been exercised in modern times. The thesis begins the analysis from the questions raised against the caste system through *Gulamgiri* (slavery) of Jyotibhai Phule (1813) to the major arguments and approaches of the contemporary studies in 21st century. The study also problematises traditional approaches that perceive race and caste as essential. There is no such thing as identity, but a process called identification has theoretical relevance (Ahamad 17) here. Apart from the practical adjustments, the aim here is to find the historical way to consider and understand the society in a decentralised manner.

The thesis opens up the argument that dominant ideologies of caste, race, class, and gender obscure the authenticity of Black and Dalit experiences. Factors such as labour, space, body, resources and so on function as reasons behind the voicelessness and social exclusion. Furthermore, the thesis finds that gender works exactly with all its patriarchal contents and ideologies within Black and Dalit communities.

Though caste and race differ in content, they share political similarities at the level of marginalisation.Though caste has some similarities with race in its

manifestations, both do not share the same ideologies in everyday life.While gender relations within caste are in too complex hierarchies, gender relations within race are sometimes not confined to internally demarcated and self-contained confinement.

Caste is also a name for mutual exclusion and never-ending expulsion. The historian, P. K. Balakrishnan, who has problematised caste in Kerala, states:

> It's not because a better social status or welfare is offered that one caste poses itself as superior to another, or within the caste system a sub-caste poses superiority to another, but because it sets as a normal emotional temperament a stronger and heartfelt contempt, sneer, and hate towards each other… It is to sincerely feel contempt and hate and to express it instinctively which has become the first mark of caste superiority. (362-363)

Balakrishnan's observation points to, what the attitude towards caste should be. Additionally, the comment helps to understand the complexities behind the ideologies and practices of caste when compared to race. When writing about the caste construction, B.R Ambedkar, in *Writings and Speeches*, states, "Classes have become castes through imitation and ex-communication" (22). Although race and caste are an essential focus of this thesis, the autobiographies of Black and Dalit women are also analysed to understand the magnitude and extent of the social representation of women in the specific social conditions.

The conceptual history of Black and Dalit social groups is critical. To understand caste and race, fundamentally, one must search the differences created between colour life and caste life from other mainstream lives. Gyanendra Pandey, an Indian historian and theorist in subaltern studies, states:

> Difference becomes a mark of the subordinated or subalternized, measured as it is against the purported mainstream, the "standard" or the "normal". What we are presented with are two terms in binary opposition, "hierarchically structured so that the dominant term is accorded both temporal and logical priority". It is in the attribution of difference, then, that the logic of dominance and subordination has commonly found expression. The proclamation of difference becomes a way of legitimating and reinforcing existing relations of power. (3)

Pandey here unleashes the politics of exclusion among Black and Dalit social groups. By comparing Black and Dalit social conditions, he exposes the ideological construct of race and caste. There may not be any monolithic approach or methodology for social learners to understand and explain the plurality of the existing social hierarchies. The centralised ideologies do not open up any great possibilities in analysing identities. Rather than similarities between caste and race, they are more likely to be diverse. Historical evidence suggests that race does not have a long history of caste. John Storey, a theoretician in cultural studies, writes:

> There are three key moments in the history of 'race' and racism in the West. These occur around slavery and the slave trade, colonialism and imperialism, and 1950s immigration following decolonization…It is important to understand that 'race' and 'racism' are not natural or inevitable phenomena; they have a history and are the result of human actions and interactions. (168)

The extensive roots of the institutional history of the caste system do not complicate the history of race history so profoundly. It suggests that the marginalisation concerning colour did not have a rooted history than caste. According to Storey, “Racism first emerges as a defensive ideology, promulgated in order to defend the economic profits of slavery and the slave trade” (169), is the context in which the ideologies, beliefs, and myths around race are created.

The colonial invasion has created a divisive world view in the colonised minds regarding the Black and White. Fanon here points out that behind the formation of race, the world’s new power relations from within operate. He states:

> All colonized people-in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave-position themselves in relation to the civilizing language; i.e., the metropolitan culture. The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become. (3).

If the claim that the ideologies and practices about race as institutionalised through the colonial discourse is admitted, then race can be understood as social discrimination that has only recently been emerged in comparison to the historical formation of the caste system in India. Storey notes:

> A key figure in the development of the ideology of racism is the planter and Judge Edward Long. In his book *History of Jamaica* (1774) he popularized the idea that black people are inferior to white people, thus suggesting that

> slavery and the slave trade were perfectly acceptable institutions. His starting position is the assertion that there is an absolute racial division between black and white people. (169)

To justify various forms of jurisdiction exercised by the invaders during the historical period of colonialism, they marginalised the people in the colonies, their bodies, customs, beliefs, and other elements. ‘Blacks’ transformed into ‘race’, and the concept itself is generated in an ideological premise that has prioritised to legitimise colonisation.

The political thinker and theorist, Achille Mbembe’s description of prejudices about African people help to understand the historical impressions of race. He elaborates:

> First the African American experience constantly appears in the discourse of our times as an experience that can only be understood through a *negative interpretation*. Africa is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of “human nature”. Or, when it is, its things and attributes are generally of lesser value, little importance, and poor quality. It is this elementariness and primitiveness that makes African the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated and unfinished, its history reduced to a series of setbacks of nature in its quest for human kind. (1)

Achille Mbembe, here, repudiates the prevailing outlooks on Africans. He tries to weave new chapters from the long history of thoughts, actions and exertion of the African society.

History of the African-American autobiography is a portrayal of the historical experiences of the African society. The two terms 'Black' and 'Dalit' are used in this thesis not to mean any essence. Instead, it means something changeable, replaceable and historically conceived.The concept of arbitrariness (3), which Achille Mbembe exemplifies as the hallmark of the African thought and ideology, is the essence of the world experiences of the African people. He explains:

> By *arbitrariness* is meant that, in contrast to reason in the West, myth and fable are seen as what, in such societies, denote order and time. Since myth and fable are seen as expressing the very power of the *originaire*, nothing in these societies requires, as noted above, justification, and there is little place for open argument; it is enough to invoke that time origins. Caught in a relation of pure immediacy to the world and to themselves, such societies are incapable of uttering the universal. (4)

Mbembe here criticises the non-European approaches of Eurocentrism towards the African society and its culture. Along with this, he problematises the Epistemological Essentialism and the Centralist approaches. Mbembe questions the centralised and non-dynamic notions about identity. This observation also exposes the hollowness of Universalism and its parameters about culture, aptitudes and so on. While analysing Black and Dalit identity, especially in comparative terms, the certainty in characterising these concepts must not be considered qualitative. That is why people like John Storey try to stay away from Essentialism while striving to define racism. Storey writes:

> Human biology does not divide people into different 'races'; it is racism (and sometimes its counter arguments) that insists on the divisions. In other words, 'race' is a cultural and historical category, a way of making *difference* signify between people of a variety of skin tones. What is important is not difference as such, but how it is made to signify; how it is made meaningful in terms of a social and political hierarchy. (167)

In this sense, caste is also a complex historical concept of the hierarchical power structure.

The caste and colour imprints endorsed by the mainstream societies are scrutinised and altered through Black and Dalit writings. Blacks and Dalits are lifted into a 'subject' status from an 'object' status through the autobiographical narratives. So far, they have been a mere 'subject' in the writings and discussions of the mainstream. It is the effort and destiny to portray the world and social relations through the marginalised eyes that distinguish the autobiographies of Black and Dalit communities from the nature and content of the mainstream autobiographies. It is exceptionally imperative who writes it, and who sees it. That is the politics behind the transformation of the 'object' into the 'subject' status.

Blacks and Dalits become 'subjects', whereas, it is a significant change that Whites and upper-caste turn to 'objects' in society. In the autobiographies and other subaltern narratives, it is not their identity, but others' identities that have been scrutinised intensely. There was a great upheaval in the social order and hierarchy when those who had been only a 'subject' became an 'object'.The main emphasis of such autobiographies is that the newly shaped social subjectivity originates by

narrating their marginalised experiences. Julia Swindells, a pioneering theorist of life writing, states:

> Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness-women, black people, working class people-have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a 'personal' voice, which speaks beyond itself. (7)

Subaltern autobiographies focus on the political contexts in which their subalternity, gender, caste and racial conditions are determined. It reflects the underlying forces of the subaltern identity formation. All the elements and concepts that envision social status are seriously analysed in their autobiographies. Black feminist critic Bell Hooks in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* presents the unique standpoint of Blacks in America.She states:

> Theorizing black experience in the United States is a difficult task. Socialized within white supremacist educational systems and by a racist mass media, many black people are convinced that our lives are not complex, and are therefore unworthy of sophisticated critical analysis and reflection. Even those of us righteously committed to black liberation struggle, who feel we have decolonized our minds, often find it hard to "speak" our experience. The more painful the issues we confront the greater our inarticulateness (16)

Here, one must understand that the positional evolution of the subaltern

happens while they start marking their world of experiences. Such consciousness arises as they enter into the media-centric discourses. Hooks states:

> Without a way to name our pain, we are also without the words to articulate our pleasure. Indeed, a fundamental task of black critical thinkers has been the struggle to break with the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe, and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory. Without this, how can we challenge and invite non-black allies and friends to dare to look at us differently, to dare to break their colonizing gaze? (16)

Through autobiographical narratives, the marginalised Black and Dalit communities reach the centre of the pragmatic world, which includes language, vocabulary, preferences and social references. Patricia Hill Collins puts forward some theoretical understandings by taking into account Simmel's relevant observations on the nature of the social relations in sociology. Collins looks at how the proximity and distance to the centre of gravity of socialness are formed between certain social groups. She states:

> Simmel's (1921) essay on the sociological significance of what he called the "stranger" offers a helpful starting point for understanding the largely unexplored area of Black female outsider within status and the usefulness of the standpoint it might produce. Some of the potential benefits of outsider within the status include; (1) Simmel's definition of "objectivity" as "a peculiar composition of nearness and remoteness, concern and indifference"; (2) the tendency for people to confide in a "stranger" in ways they never

> would with each other; and (3) the ability for the "stranger" to see patterns that may be more difficult for those immersed in the situation to see. (104)

Collins here points to the political context of exclusion of race,caste and other marginalised communities. To situate in the proximity and distance means to push the marginalised into side-lines. About the social realities, the question, 'what is objectivity?' is relevant. The question 'what an autobiography writes?' should be considered as an answer to the question of 'who writes it?' Tangible realities about self and society are the characteristics of autobiographies.They may not often be present, but remain absent. This idea is also relevant to objectivity. That is why the critic Robert Elbaz writes, "Autobiography oscillates between its presence and absence" (11). It is a statement that can be taken as a caption about objectivity and reality. It is also a statement that opens up the possibility of a deeper understanding of the subject regarding the self. To ascertain the autobiography as a literary genre, Stephen Butterfield, an autobiographical critic, states, "The genre of autobiography lives in the two worlds of history and literature, objective fact and subjective awareness. It is a dialectic between what you wish to become and what society has determined you are" (5).

Race and caste share worlds of awfully complicated experiences of exclusion. The cultural status of being voiceless is merely a symbol used to describe the social and cultural exclusion of Black and Dalit people. Ideologically, there are many layers behind it.

The autobiographies from Black and Dalit writers are considered to be their representations in the mainstream narrative field. Significantly, they are a public

response and question voiced against the age-old race-based, and caste-based social exclusion and discriminatory practices of the mainstream.The thesis focuses on two Black writers; one from a Black man and another from a Black woman. Similarly, among the two Dalit autobiographies selected for the study, one autobiography is from a Dalit man and the other is from a Dalit woman. These autobiographies share a unique similarity in handling social exclusion and voicelessness of Black and Dalit communities. Autobiographies, such as, *Joothan* (1997) by Omprakash Valmiki, *The Big Sea* (1940) of Langston Hughes, *Karukku* (1992) of Bama and *The Heart of a Woman* (1981) of Maya Angelou have taken for specific analysis in this thesis. The thesis also examines Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), *Singin' and Swingin' and Getting' Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (1986), *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002*), Mom & Me &Mom* (2013) and Langston Hughes' *I wonder as I wander* (1956). These autobiographies critically inspect the forces of social formations and exclusion of specific communities that have historically been taken place in two regions of the world.

The Black and Dalit autobiographies selected for the proposed research study have accomplished almost canonical status in the mainstream literary sphere. The works have potentially questioned the values and ethics of the institutional narratives promoted by the existing conventional canonical mainstream literature. The authors of these autobiographies also have experienced social exclusion in severest structures in the socio-cultural context of their specific societies.

Langston Hughes, one of the pioneers of the Harlem Renaissance, is a

celebrated Black poet, dramatist, fiction writer and journalist of 20th century United States of America. Being a Black man of African descent in a White society, Hughes had to confront severe forms of racial oppression upon his racialised body. Hughes feels alienated from both the worlds; from his people, and from the White Americans. Hughes, who fits into the second phase of the African-American writings, stressed the theme of 'Black is Beautiful', which expresses his racial pride. In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain", Hughes states:

> The younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful and ugly too the tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain free within ourselves. (57)

Hughes' writings and autobiographical narratives shed light on his newly acquired racial pride, with which he illuminated the society with a Black consciousness. He says, "My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind" (Rampersad 418).

From the status of a confused Black girl raised in Sothern town of Stamps in the United States, Maya Angelou rose into the position of the first Black woman to write and recite the poem, "On the Pulse of Morning", on the occasion of President Bill Clinton's inaugural ceremony in 1993. Angelou, a phenomenal woman of African-America, sings and speaks for the voiceless Black women who had to

contest severe racial discrimination in an apartheid social environment. As an acclaimed American poet, autobiographer and activist, Angelou represents the Black beauty, the strength and human spirit of Black women. She asserts a Black pride, especially a Black feminist pride, throughout her autobiographies, volumes of poetry, and collections of essays.

Bama's criticism of the caste system and Dalit patriarchy in the Tamil socio-political and cultural contexts brings forth a sustained critique on the violent exploitation of Dalit women's bodies. Through her literary narratives, *Sangati Vanmam, Kisumbukkaran, Oru Thathavum Erumayum, Kondatta and Manushi* Bama positions the experiences of Dalit women from the edges to the centre. Her works not only rejoiced the wit and resilience of Dalit women, but their creativity, too.

Omprakash Valmiki's Dalit voice signifies the heart of India that has been unrepresented and remained voiceless for centuries. His *Salaam, Ghuspethiye, Dalit Sahitya Ka Saundaryashastra, Sadiyon Ka Santaap, Bas!Bahut Ho Chuka, Ab Aur Nahin* and *Do Chera* are the detailed accounts of lower-caste Dalit lives in the oppressed casteist India. His writings proclaim the historical transformation of a Dalit object into a speaking subject. His autobiographical narrative, *Joothan: A Dalit's Life,* asserts that Dalits, too, can speak. He states:

> Caste is a very important element of Indian society. As soon as a person is born, 'caste' determines his or her destiny. Being born is not in the control of a person. If it were in one's control, then why would I have been born in a Bhangi household? Those who call themselves the standard –bearers of this

> country's great culture heritage, did they decide which homes they would be born into? Albeit, they turn to scriptures to justify their position, the scriptures that establish feudal values instead of promoting equality and freedom. (133-34)

In India, the caste system and gender within the caste system operate on different social hierarchies. As caste and gender fuse, the impact of stratification intensifies and marginalisation happens more. The exclusion of Black women and Dalit women are more potent than Black men and Dalit men. Unlike Black/Dalit men, the predicament of Black/Dalit women is not merely race, caste and class, but their gender status, too. In nutshell, caste and gender determine one's position in cultural streams, resource relations, private and public lives and so on. Instead of being linear, the caste functions in many layers and regional differences. Historically, enquiries have to be made to determine whether the hierarchies of the caste system or the hierarchies of gender are intense and antiquated. The factors such as occupation, education, and availability of resources are crucial to the caste system. Such factors operate differently within the caste system and the gendered system. Women are driven to the margins based on race, caste, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion.

In an article titled "Rashtreeyathayude Punaravishkaranam", Prof. Nizar Ahmed points out that it is not identity that exists, but, rather an identification (17). In this sense, the autobiographies, especially, Black and Dalit autobiographies, pave way for identifications. Social factors, such as race, occupation, gender, region, religion, and language lead to multiple levels of identification. An examination of

the historical background of the transformation of Black autobiographies as slave narratives reveals the nature of expansion of the identification process. As Nafeesa Fathima Moinuddin comments:

> Slave narratives were also written to appeal to the mercy of their White readers. The slave narrative reached the height of its influence and formal development during antebellum period from 1836-1861. Two of the most popular autobiographies were Frederick Douglass' *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave. Written by Himself* (1845) and Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl* (1861). (119)

Moinuddin, here, refers to the emergence of the autobiographies of African-American Women. The social exclusion of men and women within the concept of Dalit and Black stratification have generalised operation. Sometimes, gender status within specific society is either neglected or addressed distinctly. An analysis of autobiographies will help to understand how Black, Dalit and gender groups are subject to identifications.

Autobiographies of the African-Americans and their identity formation can be traced back to 16th century in the United States (Karunakar 9). Early themes of the African-American autobiographies were mainly resistance against the White American slavery. It points to the significant gaps in the American social history. The history of migration from other European nations and the history of American natives who existed before the arrival of the migrants stimulated the most significant controversies in the United States. The social life of Blacks in America provides

remarkable hints at the formation, exchange and glorification of their socio-cultural capital.

Autobiographies, especially from Black men, Dalit men, Black women, and Dalit women are a decentralised defense against the grand-narratives and their contents that existed until then. Black and Dalit autobiographies are among the most effective piques against the cultural reception of Eurocentric patriarchy worldwide. Black and Dalit autobiographies place the social identity as the collective form of experiences by weaving a series of memoirs against the persistence of all written texts which marginalise and reject Dalit and Black lives. An Indian critic and social scientist Prof. P. Sanal Mohan's observation regarding the nature of the memories of the marginalised is noteworthy:

> The importance of social recollection has to be mentioned in contemporary social theories and historiography. This is greatly relevant in the studies about subaltern sections. Retrieving the reminiscence of the torturous past experience (be it of racial extermination or social persecutions and sufferings) is methodologically crucial. Though thus, memories play a key role in constructing history, it's not just history. Memories can generate great meanings and can provide meanings and references beyond history. No other substitute can replace memories. (325)

As nothing else can replace the authenticity of memories, incidents, and linguistic representations in the autobiographies reflect the subjective autonomy within the social structure, where memories are captured. It means that the selection

and emphases of events and language in the memories are all determined in the autonomy of different spheres of experiences.

A review of literature helps to ascertain the academic explorations made in the specific field of study. It further encourages future research in the context of already existing literature. Therefore, those studies pose as an intellectual tradition in the arena of critical interpretations. Here, a genuine survey of literature is undertaken to develop a mature insight into the autobiographical writings of Omprakash Valmiki, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou and Bama. Based on the significance of the materials surveyed, it has been found that only a few substantial studies were made on the autobiographies of Black and Dalit writers selected for the present study. Such analysis has different thematic concerns, yet they are included in the literature review to state that no significant research has formulated the arguments put forward through the present thesis. Moreover, the previous studies on Black and Dalit autobiographies stimulate more insightful thematic and critical expressions. Subsequently, this thesis explores the social exclusion and voicelessness of Blacks and Dalits in America and India.

Dolly Aimee Mcpherson's *Order out of Chaos: The Autobiographical Works of Maya Angelou* (1991) is an essential work on Angelou's Autobiographies. It provides an excellent analysis of Angelou's five autobiographies. Moreover, it surveys the autobiographical tradition in America and Angelou's unique place within it. Mary Jane Lupton's *Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion* (1998) provides an expansive exploration of her life and works. A chapter is devoted to a detailed analysis of each of the five volumes of Angelou's autobiographies. The

book details thematic issues, plot, narrative techniques, character, development, style, setting, and so on. Harold Blooms', *Blooms' Modern Critical Views: Maya Angelou* (2009) contains eleven scholarly articles on various critical perspectives based on Angelou's work. The essays critically analyse racism, identity, sexuality, trauma narrative, motherhood, marriage, poetry and so on.

Many studies on Langston Hughes' life, literary contributions, racial discrimination, freedom, justice, religious aspects, racial pride and musical elements are seen. The literary works which discuss different thematic elements of Langston Hughes have helped for keen observation of his autobiographies. Arnold Rampersad's *The Life of Langston Hughes*, Steven Carl Tracy's *A Historical Guide to Langston Hughes* (2003), *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume 5,* edited by Sacvan Bercovitch (2003), Harold Bloom's *Modern Critical Views on Langston Hughes* (2001), Edward J. Mullen's (1986) *Critical Essays on Langston Hughes,* James Trotman's *Langston Hughes: The Man, His Art, and His Continuing Influence (*2012) are works that deliberate on Hughes' engagement with socio-political movements, contributions to literary field, tussles with White society, influences of folk tradition, relationship with the Harlem Renaissance, creativity, experiences of discrimination and African-American double consciousness and so on. These works help to get a biographical survey of Langston Hughes, the Black man, the activist and the writer.

The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays (1981) by Albert .E. Stone, Robert .B. Stepto's *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro American Narrative* (1979), Valerie Smith's *Self Discovery and Authority in African*

American Narrative (1987), William .L.Andrews' *African American Autobiography* (1993) are critical texts which deal with the African-American autobiography.

Dr. R.P Singh's *The Subaltern Speaks and Asserts: The Autobiographies of Narendra Jadhav, Omprakash Valmiki and Sharankumar Limbale*, Raj Kumar's *Dalit Literature and Criticism, Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* by Vinayak Chaturvedi and *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration* by Amar Nath Prasad and M. B. Gaijan are some of the books which gave insight into Dalit writings.

From the literature reviews , it is found that a few studies comparing the autobiographies of Black and Dalit writers have been done so far. Mainly the published ones are some research studies. Some of the M.Phil and Ph.D. theses that have published on varied aspects of Black and Dalit autobiographies are *Dissonant Voices in Subaltern Autobiographies: Post-colonial Study* by Rajpankhe M.S, Milind Pandit's *Dalit Autobiography on Post Modern Writing*, Ashwin .S. Meshram's *Revolt Motif in African American and Dalit Literature with Special Reference to Native Son, Invisible Man, Upara, Celebration of Self in Black and Dalit Autobiographies: A Comparative Study of Maya Angelou and Bama (2004)* by Agnes Fernando. Shivaji .D. Sargar's research article *African American and Dalit Autobiography* (2012) describes autobiographies in general. Jaya Parveen Rajesh's research article *Voice of the Voiceless (2012)*, Mantra Roy's *"Speaking" Subalterns: A Comparative Study of African American and Dalit/ Indian Literatures* (2010) are a comparative analysis of the Black and Dalit autobiographies.

The present study attempts to study the voicelessness of Blacks in America

and Dalits in India throughō selected autobiographies of Black and Dalit writers. It critically compares the social exclusion of Blacks and Dalits, and examines how they bring forth an alternative voice in the hegemonic mainstream canonical literature. Additōionally, the thesis compares the gendered experiences of the marginalised Black and Dalit women. The thesis being a literary study in nature, is divided into five chapters.

The introductory chapter showcases the hypothesis, objectives and thesis argument. It exposes the significance of autobiographical narratives for learning the social exclusion of Blacks and Dalits in American and Indian socio-cultural and literary landscape. It explores how Black and Dalit autobiographies function as an intimidating literary alternative to position the Black and Dalit voices in the mainstream cultural context. It outlines the thesis and provides a brief introduction to Black and Dalit autobiographers selected for the study. A concise survey of literature is also enlisted in this chapter to acknowledge the research journey already formulated in the specific field of study. The methodology adopted for the thesis is also encompassed in the introductory chapter.

In the second chapter, titled “The Context and Construction of the Voiceless”, concepts are formulated by explaining the nature of social and cultural exclusion of the Black community in America and Dalit community in India, along with various levels of political situations of voicelessness. This chapter puts forward the theoretical concepts of caste, colour and gender. It explores exclusion of marginalised Blacks and Dalits concerning their labour, social resources, spaces, body and cultural hierarchies. The chapter focused on how Dalit men, Dalit women, Black men and Black women are historically signified in narratives like

autobiographies in different contexts in India and America. Within a theoretical framework, the chapter attempts to explain the hierarchisation of gender within the Black and Dalit social spheres in America and India.

The thesis analyses *Joothan* of Omprakash Valmiki, *The Big Sea* of Langston Hughes, *Karukku* by Bama, and *The Heart of a Woman* by Maya Angelou. These are autobiographies from a Dalit man, a Black man, a Dalit woman and a Black woman. The thesis aims to compare the marginalisation of Blacks and Dalits in different socio, political, and cultural environments and problematise exclusion factors.

The third chapter, titled "The Othered Souls: Langston Hughes and Omprakash Valmiki", analyses autobiographies of Langston Hughes and Omprakash Valmiki. It examines how the race system and caste system are subject to exclusion in America and India. Out of the two autobiographies of Langston Hughes, the study focuses on *The Big Sea* and *Joothan* of Omprakash Valmiki. The factors behind Black and Dalit voicelessness are analysed in the context of the selected male autobiographies. The experience of male 'othering' and the formation of identity and subjecthood are also elaborated in this analytical chapter. Through their autobiographies, Omprakash Valmiki and Langton Hughes refer to the history of how these differences have taken root in other discourses, too, in the context of autobiographical ideologies.

The fourth chapter, titled "The Gendered Others: Maya Angelou and Bama" analyses *The Heart of a Woman* of Maya Angelou and *Karukku* of Bama. It explains how women are marginalised within the race and caste systems in America

and India. The autobiographies of Maya Angelou and Bama continue to break the silence and absence of the African-American and Dalit women. They attempt to turn women into person and presence, and self-reflective and responsible. The gendered voices establish the unique identity of Black and Dalit women in the mainstream milieu, which was detrimental to their colour, caste, and gender. The voicelessness of Black and Dalit women is analysed in this chapter within a feminist theoretical framework. The intricacies of race, caste, and gender position Black and Dalit women as 'the other of the other'. The chapter examines the elements of labour, space, body and resources and interprets how these elements lead to the marginalisation and voicelessness of Black and Dalit women. The formation of the subjectivity of Black and Dalit women are also analysed and elaborated.

The fifth chapter, titled "Voicelessness in the Social Imagination: Issues of Caste and Race", focuses on a comparative analysis of Dalit and Black social exclusion and voicelessness. The Indian caste system is compared with the racial issues of America, along with specific problems of gender hierarchy. It attempts to approximate the similarities and differences of Black/ Dalit men and Black/Dalit gender reflections in the context of exclusion experience through the selected autobiographies.

The sixth chapter is the concluding chapter. It is an evaluative conclusion to the arguments put forward in the thesis. The conclusion reiterates the argument developed in the preceding chapters and endorses the thesis statement.

In this study, the autobiography is explained and analysed as a social experience than as a literary experience. More than the peculiarities of their

narrative modes, the thesis considers Black and Dalit autobiographies in terms of comparable aspects of their social experiences. Determinants such as labour, body and spaces and how it affect in Black/Dalit/Gender lives are seriously analysed on the light f the selected autobiographies. Autobiographies, here are, therefore, deemed as the history of the voice of the voiceless. Autobiographies play an important role in resisting and problematising centuries-long discrimination and prejudices. Autobiographies get autonomy based on the authenticity of the experiences. Omprakash Valmiki begins his autobiography by stating, “Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creations. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel and inhuman. And compassionless towards Dalits” (vii).

Autobiographies explain the ideology of cultural experiences. The autobiographies of Blacks and Dalits function as an extension of the subaltern studies. Through their works, Blacks and Dalits try to deconstruct the dominant, racist and casteist constructions of America and India and reconstruct the Black identity and Dalit identity. Therefore, the present study centres on different thematic concerns of the subaltern and cultural studies theories to identify and position the uniqueness of Black and Dalit social experiences in different cultural scenarios. Moreover, the thesis focuses on approaches that further explore Black, Dalit, Black/Dalit gender, autobiography and similar subjects. In this thesis, the autobiographies of Blacks and Dalits are considered as their voice and presence.

Chapter 2

The Context and Construction of the Voiceless

Blacks in America and Dalits in India, the two oppressed communities from different socio-political and cultural spaces, even though share comparable experiences of marginalisation and 'othering,' to some extent display specific grounds of distinction, too. The enquiry into Black and Dalit identities and Black and Dalit feminist identity formations reveal more variants and pluralities than similarities. It implies that, the issues of identity in both these classes is layered and complicated. It is not easy to describe the conceptualisation, comparison and demarcation of Black and Dalit identities. The political and cultural nuances in the subjectivity formation of Blacks and Dalits are problematised. The racial, ethnic, anthropological creed, caste and gender identities formed in the social discourses are taken for analysis here. Identity is considered primarily as a historical formation that is vital and continuously shaped by particular contexts.

Historical Context of Dalit Identity Formation

The discussions on Dalit conditions point out the prevailing caste system and its inherent hierarchical catogorisation in India. Most of the Indian social complexities lie within the caste system. It is a conceptual tool that runs deep into the roots and is a part of India's everyday life. Suvira Jaiswal, an Indian historian who has studied the evolution of Indian caste system, describes:

> The caste structure continues to survive as a salient feature of Indian society. This inference is further strengthened by the studies of the Indian Diaspora where despite the absence of notion of hierarchy and hereditary occupational specialization-features intrinsic to the traditional caste system-the morphology of caste is seen to prevail owing to the 'separation', 'repulsion' or recognition of 'difference' of one caste from another. (1)

History and nature of the caste system reveal that more complex ideologies and everyday practices structurally and psychologically envision it. It is the basis of the socio-political hierarchy of the Dalit situation. Susan Bayly, a professor of historical anthropology, defines caste: "As a system of stratified social hierarchy that distinguishes India from all other societies. Caste has achieved much the same significance in social, political and academic debate as race in the United States, Class in Britain and Faction in Italy" (1). In comparison, Black identity is not as rigidly defined as Dalit identity. However, from a larger perspective, one could find specific European contexts where the discrimination of Blacks has resulted in worse prospects than the condition of Dalits in India. If the identity discourse of Blacks in America is macro, the Dalit situation in India operates at a micro level, more like an ideology and mentality. The racial, national, ethnological and ethnographical ideologies shaped from the historical context of colonialism must be problematised and studied epistemologically. The social definitions and conceptions of Black and Dalit identity need to be reconsidered as a product of Eurocentric discourses. In the conceptualisation of the modern 'subject' and 'object', there are attempts to homogenise everything, though there is intolerance towards plurality and difference.

The anti-casteist ideology in India, mostly centred in Maharashtra, has a history that dates back to the 13th and 14th centuries. Leaders like Jyotirao Govindrao Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Periyar, and others fought for the cause of the Indian Dalits. Jyotirao Phule and Narayana Guru of Kerala were the first-generation Dalit leaders who raised their voices against the Indian caste system. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who belonged to the second generation of Dalit leaders in India, argues that, "the only way to liberation for Dalits, therefore, was to opt out of the Hindu fold" (Michael 34).

Eleanor Zelliot, an American historian and prominent writer on Dalits, on reviewing the Ambedkarite Movement points out that the concept of converting the Untouchables to the Dalits originates from Chokhamela, an influential saint who initiated a subaltern strand in the Bhakti Movement of Maharashtra. Zelliot states:

> Chokhamela, a thirteenth-fourteenth century Maharashtrian saint in the Bhakti tradition, and Eknath, a sixteenth century saint are both revered figures in the Warkari Sampradaya, the tradition of pilgrimage to Pandharpur which marks the important Bhakti Movement in the Marathi speaking area. (3)

In the history of the social discrimination in India, caste is an extensive and most profound social reality. In *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India,* the term Dalit is described as:

> The word Dalit is a vernacular form of the Sanskrit. In classical Sanskrit this means "divided, split, broken, scattered." This word was repurposed in 19th C

> Sanskrit to mean (a person) not belonging to one of the four Brahmanic castes. It was perhaps first used in this sense by Pune based social reformer Jyotirao Phule.(Mendelsohn 4)

The interventions made by Mahatma Phule (1828-90) and Savitribhai Phule during the 1870s have galvanised India's Dalit protests greatly. Under the leadership of Phule was formed the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873. With the new political slogans, Phule wrote a different history of Maharashtra. He unleashed protests against illiteracy, casteism, ignorance and poverty at once. From the ideologies and practices formulated against Untouchability, the cultural possibility and political meaning of the Dalit doctrine are formed. Phule is assumed to be the first to use the term 'Dalit' in its modern connotation. Arjun Dangle, an eminent Dalit writer, rightly points out that, "Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group of people who, as untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality" (22). Dangle's words clearly explain what the term 'Dalit' emphasises in the Indian context. The comments of Dangle bring to light a few frameworks in which the Dalit subject in India has been historically contained. In James Massey, a leading Dalit Christian theologian's words:

> They were 'broken men' and 'Protestant Hindus' to Dr.B.R.Ambedkar and 'Harijan' to Mahatma Gandhi. To the Britishers they were the 'Untouchables' and the 'Depressed Classes'. They were [put under a schedule and] referred to as the 'Scheduled Castes' in the Constitution of India. 'Dalit' is a recent term adopted by the Dalits themselves to indicate the

> fact that they are the most oppressed, exploited and dehumanized section of Indian culture. (81)

The studies of Ambedkar about the complexities of caste discrimination minutely examined the mythical aura that engulfed the discourses of the caste and tried a novel factual approach. His texts are an excellent examples to analyse the identities of not only Dalits but also the different ethnic communities that suffered from the discriminatory apparatus. B. R. Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste* was trying to establish Dalit identity critically and historically, and writes:

> Unlike a club, the membership of a caste is not open to all and "sundry". The law of caste confines its membership to persons born in the caste. Castes are autonomous, and there is no authority anywhere to compel a caste to admit a newcomer to its social life. Hindu society being a collection of castes, and each caste being a closed corporation, there is no place for a convert. Thus it is caste which has prevented the Hindus from expanding and from absorbing other religious communities. So long as caste remains, Hindu religion cannot be made a missionary religion, and *shuddhi* will be both a folly and a futility. (254)

The term 'Dalit' is used in this thesis as a critical marker that can examine the caste hierarchies and the discriminatory practices in India. Concepts such as Untouchable, Dalit, and subaltern have been repeatedly used in many contexts of this thesis, because of the general nature of the content of the analysis. The long history of the Indian caste system shares its complexities with the historical practice of Untouchability and the shifting of this practice into a new social canopy. B.R.

Ambedkar, who has studied the subtleties of the Indian caste system, states:

> Untouchability is the social practice of ostracizing a minority group by segregating them from the mainstream by social custom or legal mandate. The excluded group could be one that did not accept the norms of the excluding group. A member of the excluded group is known as an Untouchable. (9)

The history of caste system exposes the long history of Untouchability becoming a social practice and its organisational spread into a new social arena. Ambedkar, here,stresses that caste is an enormously practical and theoretical hurdle, and "the root cause of Untouchability lies in a pronounced cultural and racial difference of contempt and hatred coupled with a close economic dependence of the inferior society on the superior one" (Michael 19). On the practical side, Untouchability ushers in horrendous outcomes. It is indeed a regional blight, but it will not cause extensive annihilation (Ambedkar 6). Therefore, the barbaric practice of Untouchability is described as:

> The effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden, and morality has become caste-bound…There is no charity, but it begins with caste and ends with caste. There is sympathy, but not for men of other castes. (259)

The discrimination that one suffers inside the caste structures is a social evil that extends to all walks of life till death. In *Reading Sharan Kumar Limbale's Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature: from Erasure to Assertion,* Alok Mukerjee states:

> Dalits are the upper caste Hindu's Other. But this Other is not only separate and different, like the member of another ethno-cultural, religious or linguistic group. This Other is a part of Hindu society, and yet apart from it. Inscribed in that apartness and difference is inferiority. Dalits occupy the lowest place in the Hindu hierarchical order. (2)

Untouchability is a parallel constitution that regulates and shapes an individual's food habits, clothing, habitats, occupation, mobility, and almost the whole act of daily life. Ambedkar studies are necessarily and logically concerned about this set of devious rules.

The impact of caste hierarchy is different in different regions of India. In the 1990s, India witnessed the rise of new Dalit activism. In *Dalit Studies: New Perspectives on Indian History and Society,* Ramnarayan Rawat and Satyanarayana observe that the consolidation of Dalit identities and their increased presence in the public domain was a hallmark of the 1990s. They state:

> Autonomous Dalit organizations such as the Dalit Sangarsh Samiti in Karnataka, Dalit Panthers of India in Tamil Nadu, and Dalit Mahasabha in Andhra Pradesh and many other caste-specific Dalit forums such as the Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti in Andhra Pradesh and Adi Tamilzhar Peravai in Tamil Nadu were all established in the 1990s. (5)

Dalit Feminism and Identity Formation

Along with the nature of caste hierarchies, hierarchisation in terms of gender should also be considered. The discursive dimensions of race, colour, caste and gender hierarchy, within and outside India are found on and stand for diversity rather than similarities. The social position of women within the castes and sub-castes is more complicated than the hierarchical arrangements of the caste bodies within the caste and sub-caste structures. The experiences of Dalit women are more in-depth and more comprehensive than the general Dalit experiences that are necessitated by casteism and regionalism in everyday life. Her everyday life is not only complicated but also warped. The hierarchies that a Dalit woman encounters in the social discourse are different from the experiences of Dalit men, considering the nature and content of labour, social prerogatives, and physical discriminations. Therefore, unlike Dalit men, the traditional scientific determinants of the masculine/feminine divide need to be problematised, considering Dalit women. Ideologies and analyses of the representation of Dalit women fall within the purview of Dalit Feminism.

As said earlier in this thesis, Maharashtra has set an essential background for India's most potent forms of Dalit ideology and practices. Beginning from the 13th century Dalit Bhakti Movements, by 1850s, Jyotirao Phule and Savitribhai Phule have come into the public domain with active expressions. The contributions of Jyotirao Phule and Savitribhai Phule were crucial in determining the evolution of Dalitism. These icons have not only touched the particular case of Dalit women, but, also, "Phule and his wife, Savitribhai opened a home in 1854 for upper-caste

widows, who faced intimate violence ranging from physical abuse to impregnation. They were criticising a Brahminical order that sanctioned such practices even as they were challenging upper caste's capacity to protect their women" (Rao 519). Various models of the conceptual and practical implications of Dalit feminism have emerged in regional communities all over India since 1800s. In South India, the subaltern communities have organised protests over the Dalit's right to dress up in the early 1800s (Rao 519).

Feminism in the 1970s was, "conceived as being based on the collective state of women being oppressed by the fact of their womenhood which often led to exclusions around race, class, caste" (Rege 90). Sharmila Rege, an Indian sociologist points out that:"There was thus a masculanisation of dalithood, and a savarnisation of womenhood, leading to a classical exclusion of dalit womenhood" (91). The Foundation of National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) in 1995 has made a historical step in placing the Dalit women in the socio-political and literary spheres. Anupama Rao, an historian, in her *Caste and Gender* writes: "The Women's Movement has in its enthrallment of 'sisterhood' failed to note the 'caste' factor while the Dalit movement has remained patriarchal and sees the Dalit women's oppression merely as a caste oppression" (4). Uma Chakravarti, an Indian historian who deals with the issues related to gender, caste, and class tries to characterise the two faces of the caste system and gender as:

> If we take this argument forward, we need to recognize that cultural oppression as it operates in the lives of dalits and women, especially on women of the lower castes, is far more *dehumanizing* than economic

> exploitation, which we understand as the dominant feature of class, by itself. The consequences of caste-based exploitation, where access to material resources are themselves closed to the lower castes, are more pernicious than class- based exploitation and appropriation of surplus- which in any case in India is almost invariably drawn from dalits. Most reprehensibly, caste ideology denies subjectivity to the dalits by depriving them of dignity and personhood. (7)

The newly emerged Dalit women's consciousness have challenged the upper-caste Indian feminists' right to speak on behalf of all women. The Indian feminism, which has functioned only as Brahmanical, failed to recognise the caste women issues as a crucial element of social and political life. Within the caste system, women undergo multiple layers of exploitation, subordination, and hierarchy, which act as a pervasive network in everyday life. Due to the complexities and pervasiveness of caste ideologies and practices in its conception, Dalit Feminism has to theoretically move from the class analysis to reformulate new discursive tools and concepts. Ramnarayan Rawat and Satyanarayana state:

> Dalit feminist organizations have emphasized three distinct modes of subjugation. These are patriarchy (male domination of females in the family and society, and the exclusion of Dalit women from Dalit male–dominated political and cultural organizations), caste inequities (exclusion of Dalits by caste Hindu men and women), and sexual violence (especially used by caste Hindu men to enforce their domination over Dalits, but also used at times by Dalit men in the family context). (5-6)

Theoretical concepts of feminism formulated outside India, and used in the analytical projects are insufficient to explain the social life of Indian women. One of the main reasons for this is that, the nature of gender discourse is fundamentally distinct within the Indian paradigm. Anupama Rao, who has written widely on gender and sexuality studies explains the caste system produced within the gender. These observations need to be considered as a point of reference to understand caste and gender. Anupama Rao states:

> Caste is a form of legislated identity: the name for a culturally specific form of social stratification, controls access to land, capital and occupational mobility; the result of a ritual ordering of persons on a purity-pollution continuum, and justifies practice of discrimination and inequality. Significantly, the social reproduction of caste depends on regulation of female sexuality. Caste reproduces itself by subjecting women to the norms and expectations of (caste) endogamy and other forms of sexual discipline. (506)

The Historical Context of Black Identity formation

By 1970s, the signification of marginalised lives happened in the public sphere. In 1966, the Black Panther Party was formed as defensive force of Black community. It is not coincidental that the manifesto of the Black Panther Party, which carried the subscript “what we want and what we believe” (Society 2), primarily emphasised the right to self-determination. The Party claimed, “We want freedom; we want power to determine the destiny of our Black community. We believe that black people will not be free until we are able to determine our own

destiny" (Society 2). This realisation is the declaration of the survival of the society that has been crushed for centuries. The slogan, "We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace" (Society 3), is a new way of putting the necessities of their social lives. The Black Panthers adopted a resistance mode that highlighted the social needs of Blacks. This declaration is a manifesto that is emerged from an excruciating history of the slave trade in America, dating back to the history of the 1600s. Although the Africans were slaves in their land before the advent of Europeans, they were new to the dreadfulness of slavery after being shipped to the New World as slaves. They later realised that it was the beginning of suffering and injustices. Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider in *Slavery in America* writes:

> Beginning in 1636 Americans too sent ships to Africa, at first to transport slaves to the British colonies in North America but later more often on a triangular voyage. They sailed from, say, Rhode Island to Africa with a Cargo of rum to trade for slaves; on the next leg, the Middle Passage, they carried slaves to the Caribbean Islands and South America; finally, they returned home with molasses, with which to make more rum. (3)

The quoted text reveals the status of physical labour in the subject representation of Blacks and other interesting facts about the slave world. Tonya Buell, in *Slavery in America,* writes:

> Slavery is a shameful part of the United States' past. The institution that allowed people to be considered little more than private property was legal and accepted by Church and State alike. Some slaves, such as Harriet

> Tubman and Frederick Douglass, were able to rise above their stations and leave lasting legacies. But millions of others had no opportunities at all in the American system and lived and died without a chance to achieve their dreams. (6)

Though dreadful, the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 abolished the centuries-long slavery. Yet, Blacks in America suffered from racism. British biologist Steven Rose defines racism as:

> By racism is meant any claim of the natural superiority of one identifiable human population, group or race over another. By 'scientific racism' is meant the attempt to use the language and some of the techniques of science in support of theories or contentions that particular groups or populations are innately inferior to others in terms of intelligence, 'civilisation' or other socially defined attitudes. (Rattansi 94)

Organisations like The Black Panthers address the long history of discrimination. Till 19th century, the standard meaning of the term 'Black' was 'slave'. While using the word 'Black', one should understand why they are called Blacks. In America, the Black community is described in varied terms like Negroes, Afro-Americans, African-Americans, coloured people and Black-Americans. These are representational terms of their racial pride nurtured by their African roots and American heritage. According to Richard Wright, Afro-American or the Negro means, "Something not racial or biological, but something purely social, something made in the United States" (Kovel 80). The existential predicament of Blacks is clearly stated in the following lines:

> The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world…a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness- an American, a Negro; two souls, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 16-17)

The central idea offered at the outset of this chapter deals with the discrimination formed with labour. The Black, Dalit and gender identities should not be determined exclusively to physical labour. The 'white mask's (Fanon) social position is entangled with the labour of Black community. The foundation of this social position is little else than this physical labour of the Black community. The Africans were made slaves because they were, "Remarkable for their extraordinary strength and symmetry, their distinguished appearance and proud bearing. They were blacker and taller and handsome than their fellow slaves; vigorous, muscular and agile, intelligent, fierce, ruthless in war, fanatically attached to the idea of liberty and strangers to fear" (Schneider 50).

In the middle of 19th century, the slave narratives were emerged as an integral part of the African-American literature to voice their sufferings. Later the African-American literature had its momentum during the Harlem Renaissance between 1920s and 1940s. During 1960s and 1970s, both Dalit and African-

American literature emerged into a new writing genre by rejecting the mainstream literature.

Black Feminism and Identity Formation of Women

Since the existing feminist movements and Black liberation movements were insufficient to define the needs of Black women who are ‘othered’ from mainstream society and Black community, the Black Feminist Movement came into existence. In the feminist movements of the time, the term ‘Black’ embraced Black men, and the word ‘woman’ suggested White women only. Consequently, Black women remained unidentified and undefined. The newly assimilated self-consciousness demanded visibility for Black women in all spheres of society. The Black Feminist Movement aimed to establish a tradition that could bring momentum to their struggle for identification and end all forms of discrimination based on race, gender and class. Unprecedented attention given to gender within race and class is the format of the movement. In other words, the Movement declares, ‘gender matters’ within the race and class. Her effort to voice in public has historically been registered with Sojourner Truth’s speech ,‘Ain’t I a Woman’ in 1851 in ‘Ohio Women’s Rights Convention’. The declaration of Sojourner Truth is the foremost credential of the assertion of the identity of a subaltern Black woman in the history of Black Feminism. Patricia Hill Collins suggests that the “Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women that clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women’s reality by those who actually live it” (243). It suggests that, in the Black feminist movement, subjectivity

of Black women is placed at the centre of the racialised/gendered analysis. Writers like Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Maya Angelou, Jamaica Kincaid, and Gloria Naylor have authorised "Black women, especially those most marginalised by race, caste and class, to have their voices heard and their histories read" (Walker 94).

Problematising the Voice/lessness of the Marginalised

In the contemporary political context, it is relevant to analyse and compare the ideologies behind Black and Dalit cultural predicaments. Though they exist in two distinct domains of identity formation, Dalits and Blacks have much in common with regard to the complexities of social position. The traditional political logic of marginalisation places Black and Dalit identities at a homogenous level of social experience. R. Bhongle writes:

> What is Marginality? The term applies to those areas of human interactions and activities which had only peripheral values, which were relegated to and looked upon as irrelevant and insignificant to the mainstream interest, and which appeared occasionally either to entertain or as an object of pity and sympathy in the so-called mainstream literature (25)

Though Dalit and Black identity formation process is formed in two different social contexts; the depth, extent, and complexities of social forces of hierarchy such as race, caste, gender, and class disperse and dehumanise the individual at the experiential level in both cases. The voice of the marginalised classes began to be

widely recognised by 1950s. Recognition in a society means that the criteria to filter out the voices of the marginalised are evolving. In other words, the recognition of the marginalised can happen only by problematising the conventional mainstream and its notions about the margin. The term ‘voice of the voiceless’ does not designate that the marginalised society was ‘voiceless’. On the contrary, it is a phrase that tries to map how certain voices were silenced by the overpowering noise from the conventional mainstream.

The concept of ‘voiceless’ is used to point out the urgent need to problematise the traditional methodologies of historiography. The division of the mainstream v/s marginalised society needs to be considered with the cultural and social resources. As the value of the socio-cultural resources varies, the social hierarchies also change. Questions about ‘what a resource is’ and ‘what its value to society is’ are determined by social forces in the corresponding historical context. The concepts of ‘voice’ and ‘voiceless’ in this thesis exemplify how a specific society was historicised within a social sphere. Therefore, ‘voice’ here refers to various modes of social representations. The terms like ‘voice’ and ‘voiceless’ have been used as critical markers for the overall analysis of the structure and nature of the identity formation that enables demarcations such as Blacks and Dalits in social spheres.

The term ‘voiceless’ is problematised in this thesis. It is relevant here to note how Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak glosses over Foucault in her seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak’s attempts to describe the subjectivity of the marginalised society as, “Foucault adds that ‘the masses *know* perfectly well, clearly’-once again

the thematic of being undeceived-'they know far better than [the intellectual] and they certainly say it very well' " (69). The knowledge-experiences of the marginalised society and their voices, according to Spivak, are vital. She asserts that there is no justification for treating them as if they are absent in one's social experience. It may not be possible for all social sects to be equally represented in all social spheres. Spivak occasionally refers to the observation that the representation of subjectivity must be different in different spheres. She emphasises,"The limits of this representationalist realism are reached with Deleuze:'Reality is what actually happens in a factory, in a school, in barracks, in prison, in a police station'. This foreclosing of the necessity of the difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production has not been salutary" (69). Spivak, here suggests that the specific societies are marginalised in conformist history and epistemology, and that was not because of the absence of epistemological experiences.

It is tough to delineate why Blacks, Dalits, and others are distanced initially from the mainstream and to find out the ideologies behind such divisions. There should have been a series of complicated ideologies at work. The 'voice' of the marginalised society is nothing but the representation of different spheres of society. 'Voice' here is treated as a term covering a wide range of spheres, including language, costume, food, labour, race, class, knowledge-practices, and so on. Only while looking back into the history of representation in social analysis, the hierarchical forms of the social positions of different societies, the principles, and practices of various unstable and anti-democratic disciplines become apparent. Autobiographies from the marginalised communities are perfect examples to show

how the social histories of Europe and India are hierarchised based on race, colour, caste and gender.

The Emergence of Black and Dalit Autobiography

Today, disciplines like American studies, Black American studies, Women's studies, Black American Women's studies, Dalit studies, Dalit women's studies emerge in literary spheres by establishing their own specific identities. Autobiographies, in a way, have become one of the chosen literary texts for such studies. Autobiography turned out to be a distinct genre as it contains specific norms and order. Autobiography differs from a novel, a story, history and biography by its norms and order. In his *The Law of Genre,* Jacques Derrida conceptualises genre as:

> …"genres are not to be mixed". With reference to the same case, and to a hypothesis of the same type, same mode, same genre-or same order: when I said, "I will not mix genres, "you may have discerned a foreshadowing description- I am not saying a prescription-the descriptive designation telling in advance what will transpire, predicting it in constative mode or genre, ie. It will happen thus, I will not mix genres. (203)

Here, Derrida tries to cognise and explain the distinction of one genre from the other theoretically. Instead of centering on the degree of distinctiveness of one genre from the different literary forms and asking questions such as, 'what are the norms particular to them'? Derrida focuses on the differences themselves. Linda Anderson, in *Autobiography,* questions the politics of excluding memoirs and diaries from the norms of autobiographies. She states:

> Social distinctions were thus carried across into literary distinctions, and autobiography was legitimized as a form by attempting to restrict its use. By the nineteenth century there was a definite hierarchy of values in relation to self-representation with memoirs occupying a lower order since they involved a lesser degree of 'seriousness' than autobiography. (8)

By 20th century, it seems that there was no preclusion in embracing memoirs and diaries into the autobiographical genre. Instead, it is taken as a historical expansion of the norms of genre. A socio-cultural analysis of autobiographies takes into account the relational nature of autobiographies with other genres and disciplines. The thesis itself is valid in the light of this interconnected nature of the Black and Dalit autobiographical genre.

While discussing the development of genres historically, Linda Anderson makes a striking observation regarding what an autobiography is. She states:

> Autobiography came to be equated with a developmental narrative which orders both time and the personality according to a purpose or goal; thus the looser, more chronological structure of the journal or diary could no longer fulfil this 'higher' function of autobiography. According to Clifford Sisikin, 'development' in the nineteenth century becomes 'an all-encompassing formal strategy underpinning middle-class culture: its characteristic way of representing and evaluating the individual as something that grows'. (8)

The emergence and extent of Black and Dalit autobiographies and the possibility of studying them are highlighted thematically through Anderson's explanations.

James Olney in “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical and Bibliographical Introduction”, opines, “Autobiography-the story of a distinctive culture written in individual characters and from within-offers a privileged access to an experience (the American experience, the black experience, the female experience, the African experience) that no other variety of writing can offer”(13). Autobiographies that were mainly written for and by men are considered male-constructed and male-dominated genre for self-reflection. The voicing of ‘others’ through autobiographies suggests male voice only. The observation of Prof. Suzanne Juhasz on autobiography is relevant and critical. She states:

> …[as a] literary genre has traditionally been one of those masculine institutions: by and about men, it has established for us many of our notions about what people are like, what lives are like (especially, what constitutes important and meaningful lives) and how one writes about people like that. (221)

Autobiographies from the subaltern women obliterate what patriarchal writings write about women by giving their voices to their authentic experiences. Thus, the autobiographies of the subaltern women establish and question the ‘othered’ identity. Gangadhar Pantawane, one of the pioneers of Dalit literary movements in Maharashtra, boldly claims, “Dalits do not write for non-Dalits. The literature was not intended for this; its foremost purpose was to address directly the Dalit people. It speaks for them and to them” (Patteti 72).

Autobiography and other narrative structures become, or at least claim the stature of history by problematising the representation within the conventional

history. It is in the context of national discourses books are widely written. Observations of Benedict Anderson regarding the 'Imagined Communities' help to understand the concepts of historiography. He opines:

> These print-languages laid the bases for national consciousness in three distinct ways. First and foremost, they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars...In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that only those hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community. (44)

Anderson's observation stresses the revolutionary advancement of printing and, thereby, the formation of the concept of a nation. In that sense, the printing of books related to history, science, stories, autobiographies, and so on are the factors behind the nation spirit. History is nothing but the organisation of events in a chronological sequence. It can mean that the most crucial query raised by the subaltern studies is, 'Where are the communities in history behind the social changes?' Ranajit Guha, an Indian historian and an influential theorist in subaltern studies evaluate the existing historiographical approaches so:

> What clearly is left out of this un-historical historiography is the politics of the people. For, parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the

> principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country that is the people. (4)

Various volumes of 'Subaltern Studies' have attempted to explain the nature of the interventions in silencing the specific groups in the social evolution. All documented texts highlight the hierarchical relationship of the social classes that fall outside the traditional historicisation. All the institutions formed within the patriarchal structure can be considered as 'texts' in this context.

In her article, "Literary Representation of Women", Mary Eagleton elaborates on the nature of the representation of women in literary and social history. Western Feminists like Kate Millett, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Mary Ellman have extensively discussed the silence and absence of women in their writings. Mary Eagleton writes:

> This is the problem of all pioneers: what they are trying to do is precisely that which has never been done. Women's literary history is seen as 'subterranean' or an 'undercurrent'. In both the titles and introductions to numerous texts at this time, a vocabulary of 'silence', 'absence' and 'hiding' vies with one of 'revelation', 'uncovering', 'discovery'.(106)

Generally, in history and other narratives, the absence of women and marginalised in traditional history highlights the specific differences in the

hierarchical relations of the social structure. An autobiographical critic James Olney writes:

> If the Black autobiography is a paradigm, the history of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a paradigm of a paradigm. Until fairly recently, black writing in general was barely mentioned as literature—if mentioned at all it was usually in some other context—and until very recently, autobiography received the same treatment. Moreover, women writers have not always been given due consideration as makers of literature. But here we have an autobiography by a black woman, published in the last decade (1970) that already has its own critical literature. Is this to be attributed solely to the undoubted quality of Maya Angelou's book? Surely not. And here is the most striking sign of the critical/cultural times: her autobiography was Maya Angelou's first book. . . We can only conclude that something like full literary enfranchisement has been won by black writers, women writers, and autobiography itself. (15-16)

Labour and Social Construction of Identity

Autobiographies of women and the marginalised have indications of distinctive autonomy. This autonomy is woven into the social fabric of the everyday life of Black/Dalit women and the subalterns through their deeds and labours. Both their work and its transient nature are significant. Black/Dalit women and all subalterns move through circumstances of some everyday experiences of labour. These similarities are the primary grounds for comparing their predicaments. In her

autobiography, *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs,* Urmila Pawar writes:

> Women from our village travelled to the market at Ratnagiri to sell various things. They trudged the whole distance, with huge, heavy bundles on their heads, filled with firewood or grass, rice or semolina, long pieces of bamboo, baskets of ripe or raw mangoes. Their loads would be heavy enough to break their necks. They would start their journey to Ratnagiri early in the morning. (1)

Urmila Pawar, here, sketches the nature of the unremarkable labour that, somehow, always, falls outside the category of the significant labour. She is delineating the acts of voiceless subjects in the traditional history. The paradigms of the mainstream narratives concerning their emphasis are problematised here. It signifies that the domains of the subaltern societies and women are hidden or invisible in the traditional mainstream discourses. With the advent of the autobiographies of women and other marginalised people, labour is conformed into the basic level of the physical condition of bodies. Subsequently, social subjectivity through labour appears in their narratives. When Urmila Pawar writes about labour, she is also writing a new social subjectivity by emphasising a distinct conception of labour.

In *Joothan,* Omprakash Valmiki portrays the boundary between the two classes and states as, "Our house was adjacent to Chandrabhan Taga's gher or cow shed. Next to it lived the families of Muslim weavers. Right in front of Chandrabhan Taga's gher was a little johri, a pond, which had created a sort of partition between

the Chuhras dwellings and the village" (1). When it comes to the subaltern male, it is seen that the priorities change to suit the gender definitions. Furthermore, the amount of labour women have to shoulder when compared to men, has to be considered as an entry point into Pawar's autobiography. Writers like Urmila Pawar points to the reality that the social identity of women is severely linked to labour more than that of men.

The social duty of Black women and Dalit women, both indoors and outdoors, is inextricably intertwined with the conceits of labour. Historically and culturally, sometimes, this knot either stiffens or slackens. The identity of women in general, and that of Blacks, and the marginalised Dalits is also fundamentally tangled to labour. If they seem 'silent' from the angle of the conventional standards, the nature of the labour is precise.

Dr. Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, who has studied elaborately on labour history and Dalit studies, states:

> Dalit writers have never hidden the positioned nature of their writing which reveals the nature of their experience as labourers, as Dalits and as organic intellectuals. These autobiographies, therefore bring out various levels of reaction-as social inferiors and economic dependants, as those involved in instinctual and primary rebellion against unjust practice and exploitation, and finally, as activists and intellectuals of these ex-labourers. (209)

The profundity and extensiveness of hierarchisation in Black men, Dalit men, Black women and Dalit women differ in line with caste, gender, colour and

occupation. Upadhyay considers caste discrimination, labour and poverty as vital factors that determine the content of Dalit autobiographies. Upadhyay states:

> The world of dalit autobiographies is inter alia shaped around three core issues-caste discrimination, poverty and work. While the first two are explicitly talked about, the attitude towards work is often implicit and only occasionally do we find explicit reference to it. (209)

At this point, it becomes imperative to re-examine the methods of the traditional historiography and its related disciplines. Because, in a broader context, it seems that the conventional domains exclude labour. In other words, it simplifies or marginalises labour. To ignore labour means to exclude the working community. If the autobiographies prioritise labour by overriding the content of the traditional disciplines, the subaltern autobiographies deviate from the paradigm of the conventional narratives. Different narrative forms display different ranges. It suggests that there is a marked lack of labour in the dominant narrative forms. As a rule, especially the autobiographies of the subaltern and women, invariably accord central position to the nature of everyday labour they indulge.

Feminism and subaltern paradigms place labour as an ethical centre of discourse. It means that the tendency to downgrade labour from the centre to the margins is not present in such ideologies. Newer narrative forms share political justice of the new social order. The concept of social subjectivity is formed based on labour.

Class consciousness is one of the parallels between the social conditions of Black men, Dalit men, Black women and Dalit women. Labour happens to be the deep structure on which their identities are raised. Their social identities are integrally connected with the nature of their labour. Labour is systematised as part of meeting social needs. However, labour is socially imposed upon Black and Dalit identities. Precisely, there is an obligation about Black, Dalit and Black/Dalit women identities, to get rid of such socially oppressive forms of labour. The struggle involved in negotiating the nature of labour is a crucial aspect of their narratives. Belén Rodríguez Mourelo states:

> According to some anthropological studies, the criteria defining identity are, on one side, continuity of common experiences through time, which are comprehensible to the members of a given group or community, and, on the other side, awareness of difference from others, which emerges as a result of consciously being part of community with a specific culture in a given territory. (92)

The interface of Black and Dalit social condition is established upon labour. As a material reality, labour is a network of values that link various communities together. Networks are formed by exchanging labour generated products among communities. In this sense, labour is that factor that offers the society its identity. It would mean that, through labour, the labouring communities not only forge their identity but result in imbuing social existence to the non-labouring section, too. People need some kinds of resources to intervene in society. Black men, Dalit men,

Black women and Dalit women communities provide a surplus of their labour for others to consume and establish their social identity.

The Marxian socialist view that, all values are created by labour, is very useful in defining the social status of Black/Dalit men and Black/Dalit women. In "Work, Family and Black Women's Oppression" Patricia Hill Collins states:

> Thus, one core theme in U.S. Black feminist thought consists of analyzing Black women's work, especially Black women's labor market victimization as "mules." As dehumanized objects, mules are living machines and can be treated as part of the scenery. Fully human women are less easily exploited. As mill worker Corine Cannon observes, "Your work, and this goes for white people and black, is what you are . . . your work is your life". (45)

By 1970s, Dalit communities in India became increasingly vocal in their social and cultural spheres.Though there were insignificant upheavals, it is by 1970s, a potent and organised resistance occurred in the literary spheres. In her *Black Feminist Thoughts*, Collins records that 1970s were a great upheaval among the African-American communities in the United States (vi-ix). It indicates that the marginalised communities are gaining new momentum with new directions. Michel Foucault evaluates this phase by analysing it separately as 'The move towards power' (xv).

Background of Dalit and Black Uprising

By 1970s, the subjectivity of the marginalised people was reconfigured all over the world. The approaches of postmodern thinkers like Michel Foucault and

Jacques Derrida are crucial in bringing about this shift in thought. The number of autobiographies of the marginalised subjects mark the changing equations in the political and social spheres. Foucault regards the presence of the marginalised narratives as an attempt to gain power. Realities, that emerges at new levels should be treated as part of the marginalised identity formation. The evolution of the subjectivity and specific autonomy, in “Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth” suggests:

> How was the subject established, at different moments and in different institutional contexts, as a possible, desirable, or even indispensable object of knowledge? How were the experiences that one may have of oneself and the knowledge that one forms of oneself organized according to certain schemes? How were these schemes defined, valorized, recommended, imposed? (Foucault 87)

Foucault elaborates on the idea of subjectivity and states that:

> The guiding thread that seems the most useful for this inquiry is constituted by what one might call the “techniques of the self,” which is to say, the procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilization, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge. (87)

Foucault’s use of ‘self-knowledge’ in the above quote is understood, with the autonomy of the autobiographies. To evolve as an autobiographical author means ,to determine oneself within the specific epistemology. In other words, a special kind of

autonomy is at work within the autobiography. The autonomy of Black/Dalit men and the identity of Black/Dalit women are formulated mainly in connection with labour. Labour remains to be the basis of productive relations. None of the cultural constructs is possible in a society without labour positioned in the centre. It suggests that the working class, Dalit men and Dalit women, and Black men and Black women identities have individual autonomy even beyond the corollaries and corresponding cultural demarcations.

Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks,* comments on the complex identity of Black man as:

> The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question... No one would dream of doubting that its major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man. (17)

Frantz Fanon points out the social dimensions of discrimination that existed within the traditional societies as early as 1950s. In Fanon's words, these are some of the experimental phases that a Black man had to suffer during the post-colonial period.

Even when Frantz Fanon analyses and theoretically address the cultural context of postcolonialism, remarkably, he depends on the logic of self-realisation. It is not only his approach, but also the general characteristics of Black men, Black

women, Dalit men, Dalit women, and other marginalised categories.'I' that projects out of the marginalised self-writings defend itself against the larger schemes of the dominance of the traditional narratives by the authority of self-actualisation. For the marginalised community, who stand outside the linguistic ideologies of the conventional system, the references are their own lives, which are eventful and heavy. In this sense, the autobiographies of the marginalised symbolise decentralised social realities. Since the language and approach to describe the experiences of the marginalised societies are alien to the traditional ideologies, they resort to social justifications of their subjective experiences. Thus, in the narratives of the marginalised, a particular facet of subjectivity is visible. Fanon begins:

> I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language. That is why I find it necessary, to begin with this subject, which should provide us with one of the elements in the coloured man's comprehension of the dimensions of *the other*. For it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other.(17)

Fanon's insights about subjectivity and language make the autonomy and authenticity of the autobiographies more relevant.

The marginalised are the ones who stand outside the prevailing public consciousness and authority structure. They do not sculpt their identities by rules that pertain to the mainstream ideologies and narrative plans. The marginalised class is formed out of the dominant hierarchies of the mainstream. Therefore, the marginalised class identities exist as a unique world consisting of ideologies that cancel and resist the mainstream hierarchisation. Marginalisation happens because

of the absence of resources that the mainstream considers significant. Each society recognises and explains what they are through a realisation of their identity. When the mainstream people fashion their public consciousness and life within it a part of their identity, the marginalised people make good choices to resist the divisions and traumas they have experienced from the public life. One of the most pertinent planes in this choice is that of the 'individual geographies'. Individual geography is the overall space of an individual's physical, mental and political experiences. In this thesis, the term 'individual geography' is used to reflect on all spheres of everyday life experience of the marginalised. The fact that mainstream society has not yet valued the identities of Black/Dalit, Black/Dalit women, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender as individuals are not forgotten in this context.

The core of Black and Dalit autobiographies is the framework of individual experiences, especially his/her living conditions, social status, occupation, conflicts in social life, caste, colour, and gender. In many ways, these issues are kept off the frame of the mainstream topics. The social relevance of Black and Dalit autobiographies is the presence of the marginalised.

This thesis maps the collective history of the conflicts that the marginalised have to undergo on behalf of their caste, creed, colour, and gender hierarchy. The differences in the social spaces do not make the comparison of caste and race irrelevant. Though the social dimensions of discrimination exist differently in different places, there is no significant distinction in the magnitude and extent of its impact. The equations of hierarchical similarities in the context of economic conditions, social status, labour, and so on point their fingers in the same direction.

The nature of racial oppression in the new cultural environment envisions a framework that regulates all the world experiences. Explaining the nature of racial oppression in the contemporary context, a political scientist, Eunice N. Sahle writes:

> In this respect, their contributions act as an important reminder of the critical role that diverse intellectuals from the African continent have played in cultural, political, economic, and intellectual processes in the context of significant constraints. These constraints are generated not only by local structures of power, such as the apartheid system, but also by a globalizing economic and political system underpinned by a "racial contract" and other forms of "coloniality of power", including hegemonic forms of knowledge production and dissemination. (206)

In simple terms, Sahle, here, pronounces that the probes concerning racial discrimination do not limit within a nation or the history of a society.

Prof. Quintard Taylor's analysis of the history of Blacks in the United States is noteworthy. He writes:

> Modern races presumably descend from various mixtures of ancestral types. Some of the most obvious differences, such as skin colour, which divide us today, are a result of adaptation to different climates. For example, Mongolian features and skin colour are well adapted for survival in cold climates; African and Indian populations have dark skins that protect them from tropical ultraviolet rays; and the pale skin of Europeans are adopted to the scarcity of sunlight in a cloudy climate. (20)

Taylor, here, explains race by connecting it to the climate. It is not easy to understand how climate hierarchises human beings and their social interactions. In the words of Ursula Sharma:

> The concept of the 'Plural society' emerged from studies of ethnically diverse post-colonial states, especially in Africa and the Caribbean, though it did not find favour as a way of summarizing ethnic divisions in the west. A more familiar example will be that of slavery (considered as an institutional type distinct from serfdom, bonded labour and other kind of servitude). (1)

All these social scientists and observers point out that marginalisation happens due to the disconnections from social resources. With the resources, one can describe the predicament of Blacks and Dalits and the discriminatory cross they carry in their respective societies.

The traditional narratives, except the autobiographies, are not sufficient to depict the world experience of the everyday life of Dalits. In other narrative paradigms, only fragments of Dalit life experience are found. Therefore, autobiographies can be relied upon to understand and follow a series of highly ordered historical experiences. One should resort to the narrative capabilities of autobiographies as a genre. In "Mobility of Professions and Economic Independence", Mohan Rao points out the possibilities of Dalit autobiographies. He states:

> Dalit autobiographical personnel narratives are a kind of protest against the exploitation by the state. Dalit autobiographies are also the statements of

> protest against their exclusion from the public sphere, literary gatherings, academic gatherings, publishing sphere and other sphere of recognition like political parties. Sharmila Rege argues that the Dalit writers want their autobiographies to assert themselves and their various concerns through the act of writing their autobiographies. They have a sort of protest by writing their stories themselves. (80)

The recognition that Black and Dalit autobiographies are resistance narratives is a critique of the traditional social sphere. One of the most substantial specialties of Black and Dalit autobiographies is their multidisciplinarity. The life of Black/Dalit society lays in the plurality of subjects like culture, history, ecology and so on that other social classes do not have. Black/Dalit autobiographies acquire such pluralities because they engage in constructing other social groups to fulfill the material needs of the other social classes. Their life is a record of surplus liabilities. The additional obligations and generosity that Blacks/Dalits display in their social life determine the social status of the mainstream. The willingness to shoulder surplus responsibilities for *the other* morally enhances the lives of Black and Dalit.

Chapter 3

The Othered Souls: Langston Hughes and Omprakash Valmiki

In the prevailing social conditions, the race and the caste of Langston Hughes and Omprakash Valmiki have turned out to be one reason for their social exclusion and voicelessness. Race and caste are not mere socio-cultural milieus, but are social practices that can potentially impact the identity, and everyday social life of an individual and society. In the mainstream discourses and literature, Blacks and Dalits are the *other*. The discriminating and dehumanising experiences enforced the oppressed others to contest the identification by providing distinct and dominant voices to their specific agency. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and *The Big Sea* of Langston Hughes expose and critique the Indian caste system and racial discrimination in the United States. Autobiographies of the marginalised people with real-life experiences function as evidence of, how race and caste internally transform people into voiceless subjects in a conventional society. This chapter analyses social exclusion and voicelessness among the African-Americans in the United States and Dalits in India. It also seeks to examine the implication made by the unique physical imprints on vocation, economic status, social status, and power over resources of the marginalised Blacks and Dalits. The chapter analyses the autobiographies of a Black male writer and a Dalit male writer. How exclusion affects the subaltern man in their specific socio-political and cultural context is explored here.

As a social practice, caste can only be explained by understanding the context in which it has historically evolved and by its past functions, exchange

relations and evolutionary dimensions. Arjun Dangle, a prominent Dalit writer and leader of the Dalit Panther Movement, defines:

> Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary. (234)

These words depict the subtle political sense of how the spheres of Dalit experiences should be.

The profound outline of Indian Dalit experiences is the multiple facets of Untouchability. The intensity of Omprakash Valmiki's experiential sphere is the focal point of his autobiography. As a social system, the discussions on Black and Dalit identities precisely focus on the physical entity. Here, the term physical entity is used to stress the historical evolution of the caste and race. The body is considered as the collective space of social identities. In the introduction of *Joothan,* Arun Prabha Mukherjee defines the term 'Dalit', and the possibility of its cultural expression in the Indian context is significant. He says:

> The term 'Dalit' forcefully expresses their oppressed states. It comes from the Sanskrit root 'dal', which means to crack open, split, crush, grind, and so forth, and it has generally been used as a verb to describe the process of processing food grains and descriptions and lentils. Its metaphoric usage, still as a verb, can be seen in descriptions of warfare and vanquishing of enemies. (xi-xii)

Here, ‘Dalit’ is used as a term capable of characterising the empirical realm of caste discrimination in India. It is yet to search the extent to which the terminology ‘Dalit’ is competent enough to explain the socio-cultural layers of the Indian caste system.

The social conditions of caste and race shared by Omprakash Valmiki and Langston Hughes should not be mistaken as single narratives that reflect the entire Dalit and Black experiences in India and America. There might be people who would have faced severe discrimination than Omprakash Valmiki in the caste system, as well as there might have been people who would have met worse racial exclusion than Langston Hughes. The social subjectivity of Valmiki and Hughes is a unique signification compared with others in the marginalised communities. It happens, because Valmiki and Hughes possess a particular social subjectivity and dynamism in the sphere of education, occupation, and social status. The question ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is supportive here to recognise the dynamism of the social subjectivity. Not just the question she has asked, but the explanation itself is also relevant (69). It is not easy to explain the social conditions of a specific society by highlighting the uni-dimensional Dalit and Black expressions. To pursue the rifts and layers within Black and Dalit conditions, the limitations of the the cultural communities also need to be seriously considered.

Labour and Social Identification

Scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have pointed out that Dalit and racist ideologies undergo a remarkable transformation as part of the colonial epistemology. Black and Dalit communities being the dynamic communities of

exertion and productive relations overtake the rest of the communities because of the depth and richness of their day-to-day life experiences. They surpass other communities, because Blacks and Dalits are not just people who handle the system of production, but also fulfill the basic necessities of each society. Spivak criticises the knowledge and its discourses, which imagine Black and Dalit communities, and its subject reflecting the lack of 'desire'. Spivak considers:

> The link to the workers' struggle is located, simply, in desire. Elsewhere, Deleuze and Guttari have attempted an alternative definition of desire, revising the one offered by psychoanalysis: "Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is lacking desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject except by repression" .(68-69)

The most crucial factor is that being the base class of the society, the marginalised communities display a dynamic social function compared to the upper-classes. Omprakash Valmiki pointed to a significant event in his school life when he was forced to do the traditional occupation of his community in the school. He narrates:

> Obeying Headmaster's order, I cleaned all the rooms and the verandas. Just as I was about to finish, he came to me and said 'After you have swept the rooms, go and sweep the playground'. The playground was way larger than my small physique could handle and while cleaning it, my back began to ache. My face was covered with dust. Dust had gone inside my mouth. The other children in my class were studying and I was sweeping. Headmaster

was sitting in his room and watching me. I was not even allowed to get a drink of water. (4-5)

Joothan, in this context, dispenses a unique facet of exertion, visibility and dynamism. It is not the context of absence and void, but the political context of dynamism is conveyed through the anecdote. Valmiki has written his autobiography by making his exertion experiences tangible. The above anecdote reveals Valmiki's attempts to bring the marginalising factors of his communities from the margins to the centre. In a society where discrimination happens, the autonomy of productive relations and exertion are the historical reasons for marginalisation.

In a social system where liberation from physical exertion is possible, caste, religion and race are considered to be the dominant ideologies built to obscure the authenticity of the reality of exertion. Dominant ideologies construct caste, class, race, colour, and religious values by abstracting various exertion levels. Hence, autobiographies are against such abstraction of exertion, especially the autobiographies of women and the subaltern communities. Such autobiographies have to reveal whatever is concealed. While all forms of domination embody the ideology of obscurity, which is an abstraction of reality, these subaltern autobiographies from Black and Dalit are about unveiling the face of the truth. Valmiki, in the quote mentioned above voices the same. Valmiki's *Joothan* is built on the foundations of centuries-long traditional occupation his family undertakes. It is because the embodiment of social life is none other than exertion, significantly, the physical exertion. It is not possible to talk about Dalit society without mentioning exertion. Everything else is the eulogies of hegemony.

Caste, ethnicity, and such are rules forced upon certain sects to make them labour physically. More or less, all existing social institutions are the proponents of these sets of rules.The school life of Omprakash Valmiki points out, “All right… see that teak tree there? Go. Climb that tree. Break some twigs and make a broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is, after all, your family occupation. Go. Get to it!” (4). The quoted instance is a clear picturisation of what is meant by caste in India. The upper-caste people or non-Dalits wanted him to do the menial jobs entrusted to the *Chuhras.* They wanted him to clean the public places, the dead and lead a life expected of the subordinates. It is nothing less than the forced set of rules that fulfill the physical labour directly or indirectly. Since autobiographies are narratives that pass through real settings of an individual’s experience, the events and contexts that enter into the autobiographical content are more explicit than other narratives, and are open to reading in conjunction with the context.

Margaret Canovan, a political theorist, in the introduction to Hannah Arendt’s book *The Human Condition,* says:

> And indeed the book’s most obvious organizing principle lies in its phenomenological analysis of three forms of activity that are fundamental to the human condition: labor, which corresponds to the biological life of man as an animal; work, which corresponds to the artificial world of objects that human beings build upon the earth; and action, which corresponds to our plurality as distinct individuals. (ix)

Since labour is the basis of social identity, such forms of exertion naturally appear in Black and Dalit autobiographies. As Margaret Canovan points out, since

the foundation of the human condition is labour, autobiographies are also a narrative form of labour. The human condition disconnected from labour shows social discrimination. Although it is not possible to be so completely detached, the concept of severance from labour is conceived by comparing its fluctuations.

Prof. Udaya Kumar, who has been scrutinising autobiographies for academic purpose, has penned about Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboothiripadu (1891-1981), an upper-caste Keralite, as:

> Mr Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai suggested that I write my autobiography. I felt like laughing. Would anyone like to read autobiography, except those by great personages?... In my reply to him, I wrote: “it is not difficult to write my life history. Bathed in the morning, had breakfast, lunch, a coffee in the afternoon, and dinner at night, slept: now the history of a day is complete. If you change the date, and write “ditto”, the history of the following day is done. I am sixty-eight years old. If you write down the dates in all these years and a ditto against each of them, my life history will be complete. However, I do not have the audacity to publish this. If someone is ready to print and circulate it, I will happily give away the copyright for free. (423)

The autobiographer here draws a picture of the human state that was detached from the physical labour. But, it is essential to recognise that the notions about labour, social status and history are not easily solvable in the sense this autobiographer suggests. The answer to the question why Omprakash Valmiki, Langston Hughes, and others draw pictures of abstract physical exertion in their autobiographies must be traced back to the genealogy of discrimination. The

discrimination in all spheres of society is formed, because the burden of excessive physical exertion is imposed on Dalit and Black subaltern societies within their specific social systems.

In his autobiography, Langston Hughes narrates his working as a delivery boy, where the "Boss would always ask why in the hell you took so long to make a delivery. "Hurry up and get the next order out" " (BS 89). Even when he had to work four or five hours overtime in the night, the owner shouted at him for his late entry in the morning shift and denied the wage. The unjust treatment and economic exploitation of Blacks at the workplace was a common practice. Labour was forced on them. Moreover, they had to work in mean working conditions and under strict vigilance. They had to work like animals to survive in a White society.

Langston Hughes explains his school experiences in the same discriminatory terms as Omprakash Valmiki's life experience. Hughes writes:

> At first, they did not want to admit me to the school, because there were no other colored families living in that neighborhood. They wanted to send me to the colored school, blocks away down across the railroad tracks. But my mother, who was always ready to do battle for the rights of a free people, went directly to the school board, and finally got me into the Harrison street school- where all the teachers were nice to me, except one who sometimes cared to make remarks about my being colored. And after such remarks, occasionally, the kids would grab stones and tin cans out of the alley and chase me home. (BS 38)

In schools, the teachers used to treat Black students with stringent indifference. The anecdote reveals that race and caste are not the only factors relevant in any particular sphere of the existing social system. It is the heinous form of discrimination that one pursues in all spheres of his/her social experiences. Omprakash Valmiki recounted an instance when he informed his father that he got a job in the Ordnance Factory as an apprentice. His father responded proudly, “At last you have escaped “caste” ”(78), and Valmiki’s response to this remark is, “‘Caste’ follows one right up to one’s death” (78). The complexities of the caste system are underlined here.

Kingsley Davis, who has studied race as an essential subject in social studies in the United States during 1930s and 1940s, outlines some remarks that:

> Class [is] a type of stratum in which the positions are acquired at birth by succession from the parents but may be altered later by achievement or lack of it. [Caste is] a type of stratum in which the position constituting the station are acquired by descent and remain fixed for life regardless of achievement. (Sharma 15-16)

Body and Social Subjectivity of Blacks and Dalits

Perspectives of society about resources are reasons behind the construction of the presence/absence of the body. In the traditional discourses, caste and race are considered as congenital defects that cannot socially be resolved. In many ways, the autobiographies of Omprakash Valmiki and Langston Hughes are deemed to be testimonies that socially defend and overcome the allegations of the absence of

social subjectivity. Voicelessness, especially the voicelessness of Black and Dalit communities, can be understood and explained with the resources in the existing social system.

Subaltern societies, especially Black men, Dalit men, Black women and Dalit women, are not without resources. The absence of resources respected and valued by the mainstream societies is one of the main reasons for their discrimination. The construction of subaltern societies can be understood by analysing the social phenomena that shape the mainstream societies, their resources and political dimensions.The acquisition of resources and activities that are essential for social survival is instrumental in this social discrimination. But labour is fundamental in the analysis of values and resources. The mainstream society sequences the presence of the working class by pushing the labour away from the centre of social discourses to the margins. Here pushing something to the edges or margins means that some more factors become the focus of the discourse than the physical labour.

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt points out how labour is pushed into the status of humiliation. She states:

> The institutions of slavery is antiquity, though not in later times, was not a device for cheap labor or an instrument of exploitation for profit but rather the attempt to exclude labor from the conditions of man's life. What men share with all other forms of animal life was not considered to be human… And it is true that the use of the word "animal" in the concept of *animal laborans*, as distinguished from the very questionable use of the same word

> in the term *animal rationale* is fully justified. The *animal laborans* is indeed only one, at best the highest, of the animal species which populate the earth. (84)

The concept of dehumanised labour, in Hannah Arendt's argument, reflects the prevailing social condition. Hannah Arendt talks about the status of human body and explains how individual human bodies get degraded from the human beings' status altogether.

The human bodies represented in *Joothan* and *The Big Sea* never were considered individuals in those historical contexts and society. In particular, Valmiki and Hughes and other human bodies have become attached to their identity. Here, the human body refers to the physical body that has been merely objectified in society as the substantial atmosphere cancels the very existence of such a subaltern individual. The caste and race of a subaltern individual operate as the main constrain in constructing a modern individual.Through *Joothan* and *The Big Sea,* Valmiki and Hughes open the way to the political dimensions of social relations and historical contexts in which these autobiographies are formed.

The historical contexts of slavery repeatedly appear in the autobiographies of Langston Hughes. From Hughes' words, it is evident that his body and its entity are scattered over many spheres and regions. Hughes writes:

> On my maternal grandmother's side, there was French and Indian blood. My grandmother looked an Indian-with very long black hair. She said she could lay claim to Indian land, but what she never wanted the government to give her anything. She said there had been a French trader who came down the St.

> Lawrence then on foot to the Carolinas and mated with her grandmother, who was a Cherokee so all her people were free. During slavery, she had free papers in North Carolina and traveled at about free at will. (BS 37)

In the above quote, Hughes uncovers the cultural and political bodies that are embodied in many ways into many regions as part of slavery. It is the context when Langston Hughes identifies himself from the memories of his ancestors as part of the efforts to unleash the ties of the system in various ways. In both these autobiographies, the precision given to the bodies is carefully followed. The body cannot be excluded from caste, race and gender discussions,because it falls victim to the violence and transformations the most.

Audrey Kobayashi has studied the body by connecting it with geography. Some of the observations put forward by Kobayashi are helpful to understand the political implications that these geographical connections give to Dalit and Black identities. He states:

> The construction of the human body is a historical form of geographical knowledge that reflects geography's ocularcentric past. Although they have seldom been explicit about doing so, geographers have usually followed dominant social norms and intellectual trends, placing human bodies in particular landscapes, setting spatial limits upon the activities of those bodies, and linking the characteristics of those bodies (their gender, 'race' or ability, for example) to the specific places. (544)

Spaces of Voicelessness

Africa and India are two regions that stand opposite to the reformist directions of Europe. Hierarchisation of these regions is made possible first upon the nature, then followed by the epistemological environment. Consequently, the race is turned out to be the biggest problem that migrates to the everyday life of the subordinates. It is this colonial geography of migration that marks the race over the body.

The ideologies and experience spheres of Black racism are formed outside the history of the caste identity formation in India. Hierarchisation happens due to the association with material objects that are considered socio-cultural resources. Resource values fluctuate as regions and historical contexts change. It is the special order of these ideologies that divides the everyday life of the marginalised by racialised way. The historical construction of racism is intertwined with different ideologies. The cultural context of colonialism has shaped Black and Dalit identity in many spheres and envisioned it in many ways. Prof. Walia Shelley states:

> Colonialism is accompanied by exploitation, annexation, and conquest. Its hegemonic power rests on creating the binary opposition of the self/other, white/black, good/evil, superior/ inferior and so on. Thus a part of the world was able to enjoy supremacy because it convinced the rest of the world about the 'white man's burden' and his 'civilizing machine' (77).

Shelley, here, advocates that forms of racism must be sought within the cumulative discourse of colonial ideologies and practices. It means that the concepts

have to be understood by focusing on the contexts in which colour, caste and gender are shaped, evolved, and spread on each space on different levels.

By giving the title "Negro" to one of the chapters in *The Big Sea*, Langston Hughes portrays not only his ancestors, but also their whole life. He states, "You see unfortunately I'm not black. There are lots of different kinds of blood in our family. But here in the United States, the word 'Negro' is used to mean anyone who has Negro blood at all in his veins" (36). Moreover, *The Big Sea* points out how race was reformed in 19th century. In this work, Hughes goes back to his ancestral history to write about the experience and history of his race.While doing this search, he finds that none of his genealogy is pure and thinks of hybridity. He realised that his colour, expressions, imaginations, interests, and many things are all borrowed. Hughes writes:

> I am brown. My father was a darker brown. My mother came from yellow. On my father's side, the white blood in his family came from a Jewish slave trader in Kentucky Silas Cushenberry of Clark County, who was his mother's father, and Sam Clay a dust tiller of Scotch descent, living in Henry County who was his father's father. So on my father's side, both male grandparents were white. (BS 36)

Langston Hughes is trying to figure out what he is from this scattered identity. His disintegrated wanderings for a job with or without his mom and similar wanderings are the signs of his indiscreet survival. When this happens, it is mostly a socially imposed burden on his race.The life journey of Langston Hughes is about

that burden as well. The political cause of dispersal, as pointed out by Langston Hughes, is colonialism itself. Referring to Frantz Fanon, in each of Hughes's narratives, the culprit is Eurocentric racism. In her study on South Africa, Eunice N. Sahle, a Kenyan political scientist, states:

> From the preceding colonial perspective, pre-existing social, cultural and political geographies were not important. Essentially, there were geographies awaiting "discovery" by Christian Europe, which in the colonial world view had the divine right to occupy these spaces and civilize non-white "savages" and in the process "help" them transition to cultural, political, and economic modernity as mapped out projected, and governed by people of European descent. Over all European colonial projects accepted and promoted an ideology that classified humanity into socially racial categories. (210)

With the advent of colonialism, the pre-existing customs related to food, clothing, and linguistic world order are turned upside down and the colonised people are disintegrated. It was the logic of fragmentation that was imposed on the marginalised and the colonised. The race was conceived as a scheme to disrupt and disintegrate the people. These fragmentation tendencies are present in the conceptual prototypes of all epistemological projects.

Langston Hughes' constant travels and wandering experiences reveal the identity crisis of an excluded person based on his race. On many levels, *The Big Sea* is a book that deals with his insecure journeys for the procurement of social resources, particularly education and occupation across countries like Africa,

America, Mexico, and Columbia. It is important to note that, Langston Hughes was under the pressure of racially hierarchical experiences throughout these long journeys. This world experience opens up the idea that the Eurocentric colour consciousness of colonisation haunts Black people in different spheres of society. Anibal Quijano, a humanist thinker and one who developed the concept of 'coloniality of power' states:

> The process of Eurocentrification of the new world power in the following centuries gave way to the imposition of such a 'racial' criteria to the new social classification of the world population on a global scale. So, in the first place new social identities were produced all over the world: 'whites', Indians', 'Negroes', 'Yellows', 'Olives' using physiognomic traits of the peoples as external manifestations of their 'racial' nature. Then, on that basis the new geocultural identities were produced: European, American, Asiatic, African, and much later, Oceania. (171)

In a world hierarchised by Eurocentric consciousness, the Africans are left spaceless. So, Hughes gets isolated from many social spheres. In his African trip, Hughes recognised, how a place could make a difference in establishing a Negro identity. Martha L. Henderson states:

> Hughes's experiences draws attention to the fact that place matters in the experiences and processes that shape racial and ethnic identities. …the places and space in which individuals and groups operate influence how race and ethnicity have come to be understood, expressed and experienced. (3)

On his return to Harlem, Hughes initiated engrossing in the ghettos and the backstreets of Washington and New York, as Blacks occupied it. He writes about the liberation he had to experience on Seventh Street which was, "[t]he long, old, dirty street where the ordinary Negroes [hung] out [and]… played the blues, ate watermelon barbecue and fish sandwiches, shot pool, told tall tales, looked at the dome of the Capitol and laughed out loud" (BS 166). These incidents highlight the spaces Blacks share and the exclusion they encounter in the lane of identity formation. Hughes' attempts to highlight the political issues of race is seen in his poetry and autobiographical narratives. In the introductory study of *The Big Sea,* Joseph Mc Laren refers:

> Echoing images from *The Negro speaks of Rivers* is imagistic and anticolonial. The white man becomes symbolic of the economic relationship between the West and Africa. Furthermore, Hughes describes his interaction with the African as problematic in relation to his identity as a 'Negro', which he equates to being 'African'.(7)

Along with the above quote, Frantz Fanon's observation, too, is relevant. Fanon points out that dehumanisation happens because of the intrusion of Europeans into all corners of the world as part of colonisation. Fanon also suggests that, through the colonisation process of Europe they never even considered the colonial people, especially, the non-whites and their living spaces as inhabited areas.

Laour: Transformations of Dalit Autobiographical Experiences

Theoretical approaches of subtle nature are needed to read and analyse the social dimensions of emotions and expressions reflected in the marginalised autobiographies, which are different in tone, linguistic features, and other conventional narratives. Lack of adequate criteria to measure the autobiographies of the marginalised,or the presence of those excluded from the mainstream poses a methodological challenge when analysing such autobiographies. Colonialism has defined the subjectivity of the colonial subjects with new form and content. It is a complex dehumanisation process. Omprakash Valmiki talks about the dehumanising experiences they face due to their traditional caste occupation. He narrates :

> Every Taga would have ten to fifteen animals in his cowshed. Their dung had to be picked and brought to the place where uplas or cow dung cakes were made. There would be five to six baskets of dung to be taken out from every cowshed. During the winter months it was a very painful job. The cows, buffaloes, and bullocks could be tethered in long hallways. The floor would be covered with the dry leaves of cane or straw. The dung and the urine of the animals would spread all over the floor overnight. The matting would be changed after ten or fifteen days. Or sometimes, a layer of dry leaves would be added on top of the soiled one. To search for dung in the stinking cowsheds was extremely unpleasant. The stink made one feel faint. (8-9)

Valmiki points out, how social hierarchisations of labour happen. Constant contact with animals and their excrement are considered depleting of humanity. The problems of communities that undertake such labour have to be problematised. Valmiki's *Joothan* explains his repeated encounters with animals; including cattle, pigs, and buffaloes. Valmiki is conscious of, how daily chores hierarchise their caste status. Valmiki writes:

> Janesar was my elder brother. Both of us would leave home early in the morning. We would go around the fields, collecting wild grass for our buffalo. A few days before his death, Sukhbir had acquired a buffalo in barter from Suchet Taga. We hoped to make some money when she calved. Both Janesar and I were constantly busy, attending to the buffalo. I also had the responsibility of grazing the pigs in the afternoon. Pigs were a very important part of our lives. In sickness or in health, in life or in death, in wedding ceremonies, pigs played an important role in all of them. Even our religious ceremonies were incomplete without the pigs. The pigs rooting in the compound were not the symbols of dirt to us but of prosperity and so they are today. (13)

Apart from the relations between occupation and social status, human beings and physical circumstances, too, play a significant part in shaping the social consciousness. Physical circumstances refer to the material world in which people interact in everyday life. It means that the relations between the material object and the living world determine the relationships between human beings. Relationships

between human beings are determined not only by human beings, but also by the entire physical world they inhabit.

When the social concepts of class, race, caste, and gender are analysed, it is important to note the factors at work within the framework of social status formation. Furthermore, all aspects that can serve as the cultural capital in this particular historical context will have to be considered here. Region, language, food, worlds of contact, the market value of those objects, and social status are determinants of everyone's position within the society. These factors have the potential to transform into cultural capital in particular context. Associating with animals is treated as an occupation that degrades the social designation of a person. Hence, apart from the caste positions in the social thought processes, the social positions of animal also have to be analysed while talking about labour and caste.

Spaces of Voicelessness: Dalit Experiences

Black and Dalit identity are analysed in connection with the nature of human resources in the existing social order and its historical consequences.Writers from the marginalised communities start writing from a political context of the absence of humanity. Audrey Koboyashi studies racialisation by connecting with spatialisation. It means that the sphere of occupation is decisive here. The workspace as mentioned by Omprakash Valmiki is associated with animals. Engagements with animals, and the duration of time they spent in these spaces are the factors that define the caste and race into what they are today. Audrey Koboyashi states:

> The idea of 'race' has allowed the construction of the raced body according to historically, culturally and place-based sets of meanings. Thus the term 'racialization' refers to the process by which somatic characteristics (which *may* be phenotypical or genotypical) have been made to go beyond themselves to designate the socially inscribed values and the attributes of racialised bodies. The bodies are the results of normative vision, constituted by the eye of the most powerful viewer. Such values determine how those bodies will be used, as slaves, as racialized labour, or, in the case of 'white' bodies, in positions of power. (549)

Autobiographies of Langston Hughes and Omprakash Valmiki are ample medium to problematise body, labour, and space. It discusses the underlying subaltern identities with special consideration.

Hughes, who recognises the attitude of his father towards race as a social phenomenon that transcends blood relations, defends the traditional norms of the father-son relationship through *The Big Sea*. Joseph McLaren, in the introduction to this autobiography, states, "In Hughes' words, his father "hated Negroes" and disliked all of his family because they were "Negroes". This admission along with the statement "I didn't like my father", characterizes a conflicted father-son relationship" (4). This mindset reflects the dominance of ideologies that create a rift in blood relations and create constraints in relations altogether. The caste within Hinduism has the same depth and structure of the overbearing power that is formed and evolved in the discourse of race.

Race and caste communities face lifetime discrimination. To slacken the impact of this everyday discrimination, the excluded communities struggle a lot by procuring the cultural capital in the new socio-political contexts, especially by entering into the mainstream education system and occupation.Valmiki questions:

> I wanted to say, 'Neither am I Hindu'. If I were really a Hindu, would the Hindus hate me so much? Or discriminate against me? Or try to fill me up with caste inferiority over the smallest things? I also wondered why does one have to be a Hindu in order to be a good human being… I have seen and suffered the cruelty of Hindus since childhood. Why does caste superiority and caste pride attack only the week? Why are Hindus so cruel, so heartless against Dalits? (41)

Omprakash Valmiki drags out the vital forces of discrimination that work directly or indirectly in the Hindu religion. Valmiki realises that he gets more alienated by being inside the Hindu religion than being outside. From this realm of experience, he blurts out that for Dalits, Hinduism is heartless, cruel, and against Dalits.Valmiki criticises the world consciousness that is internalised in the religious life of India. The events and elucidations in the autobiographies of Langston Hughes validate that the ideas of scholars like Frantz Fanon are accurate when they tell that it was the colonisation that have expanded the intensity and depth of the racial experiences when compared to castes.

Transformations of Racism in the Colonial Context

Colonial contexts, particularly the invasions and practices of new ideologies over race, and use of power over Dalit have to be considered in distinctive ways. In the novel *Not Without Laughter*, Langston Hughes tries to draw patterns of his racial experiences. The lives of his ancestors and their social status are the focus of the novel. In the novel, he proclaims that the impact of the race upon his predecessors was minimal. Similar to the content of the novel, *The Big Sea* also exposes the context in which racism is prevalent more than ever before in the totality of their social experience.He states:

> My grandmother never took in washing or worked in service or went much to church. She had lived in Oberlin and spoke perfect English, without a trace of dialect. She looked an Indian. My mother was a newspaper woman and a stenographer then. My father lived in Mexico city, my grand uncle had been a congress man. And there were heroic memories of John Brown's raid and the underground Railroad in the family storehouse. But I thought, maybe I had been a typical Negro boy. (228)

Here, in the autobiography, the transition into a traditional Negro cannot be seen as natural transformation of the identity referred to in the novel. It is the evolution through historical events. The statement 'typical Negro boy' sums up the historically accumulated political pressures. Social scientists are trying to explain colonialism by linking it to geography in particular context (Kobayashi 184). It may mean that it is not just one or a group of people that enters into a specific situation,

especially towards the natives, but sometimes it is like an entire continent that comes up. By continent, it means a terrain that includes the complete value system of the invaders and the physical circumstances that serve as its basis. The whole atmosphere of Langston Hughes' poems is turbulent because they assimilate the violence of colonialism and racism.

In his work, when referring to various forms of violence, Hughes incorporates the dimensions of violence without distorting them into many directions. In his autobiographies, Langston Hughes drew several incidents of violence he had to face from the Whites. Hughes refers to one such anecdote in *The Big Sea,* where a group of White boys mercilessly beat him up for his going far into the White neighbourhood, which was stringently outlawed for Black children. When he returned home, his eyes were blackened, and his jaw was swollen. Hughes speaks of the wounds inflicted on his mind and body by the memories of racial discrimination that the Black encounters. Hughes writes:

> Mr Van Vechten became the goat of the new Negro Renaissance the he-who-gets-slapped. The critics of the left, like the Negroes of the right, proceeded to light on Mr Van Vechten, and he was accused of running, distorting, polluting, and corrupting every Negro writer from then on, who was ever known to have shaken hands with him, or to have used the word nigger in his writings, or to have been in a cabaret. (BS 197)

In *The Big Sea,* he refers to many scenes of exclusion, ridicule,and isolation he had to encounter in everyday life in the tag of racism. Hughes, being a mulatto with multiracial lineage, was intensely conscious of his race and ethnicity. To

establish a single identity in America's racial atmosphere was not easy, especially for the one with multiple ancestries. That is why Hughes, after returning from Mexico, moved to Harlem to identify himself with his people. He believed that he could engage with the African-American community in Harlem. Thus, the shift to Harlem signifies another vital step he had made to develop his own independent identity as a Black.

Social historians assert that racial mythology is originated in England from the profit motive of the sugar-producing plantation and the manufacturing industries, particularly about slavery and slave trade (Storey 168). From the background of the formation of racist ideologies, colonisation has expanded racism by 17th century. Charles White's claims of relating, "The White European…being most removed from brute creation, may, on that account, be considered as the most beautiful of the human race. No one will doubt his superiority in intellectual powers; and I believe it will be found that his capacity is naturally superior also to that of every other man" (Storey 169) should be considered as a justification of the slave trade. Such expressions reflect the fact that racism has remained a central focus in the economics of colonisation. The ideology behind such discrimination is the attempt to achieve hegemony, especially economic hegemony, by dividing society into two.

The social status of women has also been widely degraded under colonisation. The racial spirit of Edward Long is visible in the pamphlet he wrote in 1772. He states:

> [t]he lower class of women in England, are remarkably fond of the blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention; they would connect themselves with horses

> and asses if the law permitted them. By these ladies they generally have a numerous brood. Thus, in the course of a few generations more, the English blood will become so contaminated with this mixture, and from the chances, the ups and down of life, this alloy may spread extensively, as even to reach the middle, and then the higher order of the people, till the whole nation resembles the Portugese and Moriscos in complexion of skin and baseness of mind. (Storey 169)

While deliberating on caste and race, the contexts that formulate them are also to be studied. Such statements refer to the history of how Blacks have turned into the *other*. Colonisation conceives the hierarchisations of the colonial subject. Black/ Dalit women and Black/Dalit men have historically been degraded in the colonial context.

Colonisation is a process of alienating the colonised of their land, people, and the entire material world. Racialisation, in that sense, produces and distributes the physical and psychological relations of alienation. In other words, colonisation has re-organised the relations between the indigenous people and the material goods and relations among the people before the advent of colonisation. Therefore, the colonised are degraded from their subject position and are subjected to alienation. Such reifications are made possible by cancelling or depriving the natives of their status (Burris 22-43). The process of colonialism theoretically and practically reflects the history of reification. In the colonial discourses, Black is imagined as an alienated object. All narratives of political experiences of racialisation directly or indirectly reflect the evolutionary history of reification.

Social observers point out that capitalism is driven by the economic interests of the colonisers. Therefore, ideologically more profit and competition are driven from alienation. The estrangement of caste and race from all resources that procure capital serves as the basis for their discrimination. Georg Lukacs, a Marxist philosopher, and theoretician explain alienation "Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply into the consciousness of man…it stamps its imprint upon the whole of consciousness"(100). The intense and acute imagination of alienation is witnessed in race and caste. Gouthami Paltati writes, "Dalits writing comes from these margins of the caste code dictated for many centuries. Dalits use their voice not only to expose atrocities faced by the Dalits. Marginal representation of the lower-caste writers and their life experiences result in the psychological alienation and the anger that boils within them as a reaction to these prejudices" (Paltati).

Alienation is the distance between the communities in all spheres of occupation, food, tools, spaces, status, rituals, art and so on. The ideology of alienation is tied to power. The marginalisation of certain social groups from the public discourse is carried out by alienating the subordinates from the natural resources and the mainstream power relations. The racist face of alienation and marginalisation is a recurring theme in the autobiographies of Langston Hughes. This racist face becomes extensive in the context of colonisation.

Geography and anthropology, which were shaped by the conception of colonisation have also institutionalised race. Boundaries and divisions envisioned in

all these disciplines extend to all spheres of the everyday life with colonisation. In the article “Cultural Geography of Racialization:The Territory of Race”, Alastair Bonnett, and Anoop Nayak argue that:

> Perhaps surprisingly, it is only comparatively recently that social and cultural geographers have turned their attention to the construction of racial myths. It is surprising because a shared characteristic of the terms we have already mentioned is that they are territorial: to speak the language of race and ethnicity is, very often, to talk geography. Indeed, along with anthropology, geography is the most racialized of scholarly pursuits; a fact starkly evident from its institutional history. (300)

This article claims that race is discussed widely in all spheres of life after colonisation. They observe, “Unfortunately, it is the most familiar and widely employed racial terms that have, traditionally, received the least critical attention. Whilst more ‘exotic’ identities have attracted geographers and anthropologists for many years, being white and/or European and/or western remain comparatively new objects of enquiry” (Bonnett and Nayak 300). Even after colonisation, the same racial ideology is widely practiced and circulated. It connotes that race is reflected in all thematic concepts of language, dress, customs, beliefs, religion, region, and so on constructed by the European subject.

Langston Hughes’ description of his race in the political situation of 1920s can be viewed as a link to the history of the colonial power. He states:

> White people began to come to Harlem in droves. For several years, they packed the expensive cotton club on Lenox Avenue. But I was never there, because the cotton club was a Jim Crow club for gangsters and monied whites. They were not cordial to Negro patronage, unless you were a celebrity like Bojangles. So Harlem Negroes did not like the Cotton Club and never appreciated its Jim Crow policy in the very heart of their dark community. Nor did ordinary Negroes like the growing influx of whites toward Harlem after sundown, flooding the little cabarets and bars where formerly only colored people laughed and sang, and where now the strangers were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers-like amusing animals in a zoo. (BS 176)

Such racial gazes are evidence of, how colonisation has categorised the people across lands. Autobiographies, in that sense deal with the intangible relations of other social dimensions. In an autobiography like *The Big Sea*, the author seeks to travel back to the cornerstones of the economic, social, and scientific foundations on which the soul itself is historically formed.

The ‘self’ in Dalit and Black autobiographies can be read through a series of scattered spaces and states. Both these literary works go through subtle details of how this scattering is experienced by the subaltern groups in their everyday life. Hughes writes, “I didn’t want to return to Mexico, but I had a feeling I’d never get any further education if I didn’t, since my mother wanted me to go work and be, as she put it “of some use to her”. She demanded to know how I would look going off to college and she there working like a dog!”(53). Hughes questions the

hierarchically structured cultural atmosphere of all institutions that have remained mostly unchanged even in the twentieth century.

As Black person in White society, Langston Hughes had to experience the burden of physical and mental emptiness. Hughes recognises that the socially imposed racial labels upon him and his ancestors are the same. His writings are the comprehensive pages of his self-reflections. G. Casey Cassidy critically analyses the self-reflectiveness of Langston Hughes and states:

> *The Big Sea* opens with Langston Hughes throwing all the books that he had read at Columbia, and then some over the rail of the S.S Malone as far as he could as if he was shedding the shackles of conventional learning. This symbolic gesture represented everything that was unpleasant. In this life the memory of his father, the poverty of his mother the fear of not finding work, and the problem of colour prejudices. At that very moment on the open deck just Beyond Sandy Hook "Langston became a man ready to search for his true identity". (37)

All the works of Hughes mark the presence of Black community by problematising White world altogether. From his experiences, evidence and vision, Hughes divided the world around him into White and Black. Hughes urges people to distinguish the worlds of Whites and Blacks from their daily lives and religious beliefs, and this is highlighted in the poem "Christ in Alabama". It should be considered an attempt to defend the White who infiltrates the Black's lands. By the power of his own experience, Hughes was able to dismantle White man's Christ and

place Black's smear-soaked world and blood in that space. In his *I Wonder as I Wander,* Hughes writes that the impact "Christ in Alabama" creates is not trivial. The way the poem begins and ends is remarkable. It begins:

> Christ is a nigger,
>
> Beaten and black:
>
> Oh, bare your back!
>
> …….
>
> Most holy bastard
>
> Of the bleeding mouth,
>
> Nigger Christ
>
> On the cross
>
> Of the South. (Rampersad and Roessel 143)

In his autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander,* Langston Hughes highlights the mental agony of White man who reads this poem and mourns in conflict. 'Nigger Christ', here becomes a symbol of the life experiences and misery of the Black man. Scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois opine that the discussions on Black art at that time were more indepth. Du Bois recounts:

> I do not doubt that the ultimate art coming from black folk is going to be just as beautiful, and beautiful largely in the same ways, as the art that comes from white folk, or yellow, or red; but the point today is that until the art of the black folk compels recognition they will not be rated as human. And

> when through art they compel recognition then let the world discover if it will that their art is as new as it is old and as old as new. (Du Bois 51)

In the poem "Goodbye Christ", Hughes examines the structure of the spiritual attitudes of White man.Through poetry and autobiographies, Hughes makes extensive use of opportunities to interrogate religion and spirituality and re-examine the religious doctrines and their practical lessons with the principles of social justice.

Langston Hughes critically reflects all the internal-external contradictions between Black and White through his literary works. He shatters the unilateral world of Whiteness and raises newer questions about White supremacy. Towards the preface of *I Wonder as I Wander,* Arnold Rampersad writes:

> Hughes's simplicity is often deceptive, but his two books of autobiography are alike in that both tell of accidents and misfortunes but almost always - there are some exceptions – with lightheartedness and bubbling good humor. He saw laughter as an essential ingredient of the spirit of the blues, the complex way of feeling with which he associated the majority of black Americans as they faced life and its vicissitudes. Hurts and insults are mentioned but never dwelt on, and they elicit not rancor or bitterness in Hughes but irony, laughter, or a stoicism that values an almost unconscious graciousness. (xvi- xvii)

In his autobiographies and other narratives, Hughes tries to mark the marginalisation experiences at the micro-level. Such indications are sufficient to

problematise the ideologies and practices that dominate the existing social order. Not just his stories, but historically, Hughes corroborates a vast world of racial experiences through his works. It may be seen as an attempt to identify himself with those who have gone through similar writing experiences. Hughes' political sense of belonging to the outcaste and his sense of community displayed through the Harlem Renaissance is particularly relevant in the context of his autobiographies.

When K. Satyanarayana talks about Dalit life in India, he embodies the content of life experiences of Blacks on many levels. He states, "The Dalit movement characterized "the entire history of the Dalits as a tale of humiliation and violence, both physical and mental". This reading of history rejects completely "the traditional Dalit's self which is steeped, by and large, in the Hindu ethos"" (2).

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* talks about hierarchisation and marginalisation. It raises pertinent issues of discrimination within the Dalit community and the widespread injustices prevalent among the sub-castes. Through narratives, Valmiki has brought all forms of injustices for discussion in the public domain. The division of caste into many sub-castes and the particular bond created within the sub-caste group complicate the Indian caste system.Therefore, the issues of caste becomes complex than the problems of the Blacks considering the stratification within the specific communities. Smriti Singh, an Indian scholar on Dalit studies, points out that, "In 'Joothan' Valmiki has successfully narrated his painful ordeals but he glosses over the inter-caste conflict among the Chamar and Bhangi Dalits. One can conclude from this that he is re-emphasizing the narrative

agenda of the Dalit autobiography as being part of a larger movement of Dalit assertion" (5) .

Often, the sub-caste systems become a barrier to the transformation of Dalits into an organised community in the cultural context of India. Regarding the Blacks, socially, such scattering is not so severe. This sub-caste system does not just disintegrate the social cohesion but also hinders the assimilation of the ideologies and hinders the conversion of the social institutions into a public domain. According to religion and caste system, an internal system operates within the sub-caste categorising the community into sects. The upper-castes cleverly use this sub-caste system to hinder it from effectively intervening against the social structures that underlie the caste system. The subjugation and domination in the caste system have been reproduced over centuries in India.

The social and cultural discriminations suffered by the Dalits over centuries extend to the time of Omprakash Valmiki and other Dalit writers, too. It marks the historical experience that the ideologies capable of disrupting the foundations of the Indian caste system have not yet emerged. The internal and external dimensions of experiences that continue through generations of Dalits differ in many respects from the experience of Black. Dalits have to share a historical experience that is mostly excluded from the convention of myths and legends. Hence *Joothan* is full of bitter experiences a Dalit faces in the particular community. Valmiki writes:

> I have not been able to forget these bitter memories. They flash in my mind like lightning every now and then. Why is it a crime to ask for the price of

> one's labor? Those who keep singing the glories of democracy use the government machinery to quell the blood flowing in our veins. As though, we are not citizens of this country. The weak and helpless have been oppressed for thousands of years just in this manner. There is no accounting of how many talents have been wiped out by deception and treachery. (39)

Valmiki here critically exposes the nature of the Indian democracy that tolerates the existing injustices towards the marginalised. In the construction of modern India, Dalits are the ones who rear the mainstream communities through their labour. Hence, the term 'Dalit' does not mean the 'fragmented', but the one who has denied social justice. The underlying interpretation of the word Dalit in the Indian social context should historically be a society that deserves social justice.

Joothan turned out to be a powerful narrative as it attempts to problematise the ideology of discrimination in the caste system that is centuries old. In *Joothan*, Valmiki questions the Hindu identity of Dalits. His question is a preparation for a historical explanation of the caste system and Hinduism, especially from a Dalit perspective. He asks, "If I were really a Hindu, would the Hindu hate me so much? Or discriminate against me? Or try to fill me up with caste inferiority over the smallest things? I also wondered why does one have to be a Hindu to be a good human being" (41). A significant issue that distinguishes the problem of race from the problem of caste is implied in the questions raised by Valmiki and the answers he has given to it. Similarly, the circumstances in which Valmiki had to avoid his girl-friend also need to be taken seriously in the historical context of the caste system. In *Joothan*, he draws the picture of the institutionalised caste life that

outwits the instinctive man-woman relationship. It is the context in which he realises how systematic caste values are in the Indian social conditions. It also exposes the baseness of Indian culture and civilisation.

The autobiographical narratives analysed here are raised as political act. In their writings, Omprakash Valmiki and Langston Hughes register their protest and voice against all kinds of oppressions and discriminations. The writers assert their Dalit and Black identity by challenging the mainstream narratives that justify casteism and racism. They question the value system and criticise political hegemony. Black and Dalit autobiographical narratives resist the essentialisation of individual and social identities.

Blacks and Dalits are basic communities excluded from the existing social systems and the civilised institutions, though these were built upon the labour of the same Black and Dalit communities. In the autobiographies of Langston Hughes and Omprakash Valmiki, it is the ‘self’ that gets imprinted by connecting the history and geography of discrimination. The two male autobiographers from the different socio-political and cultural milieu problematise their community’s voicelessness and voice against the presence of voicelessness.

Chapter 4

The Gendered Others: Maya Angelou and Bama

Women worldwide have been designated as the *other* by specific societies that operate in patriarchal platforms. In such communities, ‘we’ refers to men and ‘they’ become the categorical address for women. Explicitly, a gendered ‘othering’ happens in each society where power structure works. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, “The subaltern, also called the marginal, the oppressed, the Other, has no space, and [f]or the ‘true’ subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself” (27). According to Linda Anderson writing autobiographies is, “To contest this socially sanctioned position of silence and submission” (33). The marginalised voice of women through autobiographical narratives get wide recognition from a context where they were muted for centuries. This chapter explores the dissenting voices of Maya Angelou and Bama who are pioneers in the American Black feminist literature and Indian Dalit feminist literature. It critically analyses, how institutionalised racism and casteism exclude these gendered classes in hostile environment they situate.

Acutely conscious of her ‘othered’ identity, Maya Angelou tries to offer the readers her observations and analyses as a woman writer in the African-American literature. She turned into an autobiographical narrative as she believed that life-writing mode could reflect her life experiences better than any other genre.The autobiographical discourses of Maya Angelou have to be read in continuation with

the African-American slave life, especially in such situations where they were entirely 'othered' from the mainstream. The African-American autobiographies attempt to establish a Black's position in White society and it originates from the felt experiences of the writer. The main reason for an 'othered' sentiment is that they are in White man's society.

Maya Angelou's works are an account of discrimination faced by Blacks in America concerning their gender and race.'Othering', whatever level is executed, does not happen spontaneously in society. It occurs as a continuation of past events and happenings. The 'othering' takes place, not only in race and gender ideologies but also in the conceptualisation of all prevailing ideologies and models. Recognition of 'othering' is crucial. William L. Andrews, a notable figure in the African-American literature contends that African-American literature has got a strong tradition of over one hundred and fifty years, which begins in 18th century (1-5). Cultural observers consider this as shift in the spheres of political and moral thought. Patricia Hill Collins points out a paradigm shift happening in African-American literature from the year 1970s onwards. She states:

> *Afrocentrism* referred to African influences on African-American culture, consciousness, behaviour, and social organizations. Despite considerable diversity among thinkers who embraced this paradigm, Afrocentric analyses typically claimed that people of African descent have created and re-created a valuable system of ideas, social practices, and cultures that have been essential to Black survival. (xiii)

Here one needs to remember how Black and gender hierarchies act as exclusions from the mainstream.

Racialised Spaces and Black Women's Identity Formation

Autobiographies of Maya Angelou talk about racialised spaces. Audrey Kobayashi points out, "The idea of 'race' has allowed the construction of the raced body according to historically, culturally and place-based sets of meaning" (549). Kobayashi explains how space racialises a body.The value system and ideologies embodied in the state of human body disparage the presence of ethnic-racial body as the *other*. It is expressly visible in all works of Maya Angelou. This experience reflects the geographical affinity of the race. Kobayashi notes that though geography is conceived as a discipline, race has historically been assimilated within it. She elaborates that "The history of the discipline, a very different and, as it turns out, more sustained approach to issues of 'race' was adopted within the rapidly developing subfield of humanistic geography" (Kobayashi 548).

In essence, the structure of racial experience in everyday life is reflected through different disciplines. Angelou has outstretched her autobiographical works on the foundations put up by the racial and gender discriminations that were prevalent in the then American society.The racial and patriarchal gazes she had experienced in schools, streets, shops, restaurants, work-places, and public places are detailed in her autobiographies. *The Heart of a Woman* is the tale of racial discrimination of her generation that extends to the next generations. Here, it is necessary to read how her son had to move from one school to another because of the exclusion the raced body faced in society. She states, "I began searching for

another school and another house. We needed an area where black skin was not regarded as one of nature's more unsightly mistakes" (HW 18). Angelou portrays a realistic picture of an American society that made schools, houses, and other areas as anti-humanistic as it could get with the racial ideologies and belief systems.

As nation with multiple historical experiences in its structure and nature, how America enforces racial ideologies to human body is meticulously stated in Angelou's autobiographies. Angelou shares her anguish and concerns over the geographical milieu in which she lives is divided into White and Black. Angelou positioned herself in the genealogy of people who have been humiliated by the burdens of bigotry, ideologies, practices, and intolerance. Self-positioning means recognising and envisioning race as concept that has its roots in everyday life in every subject. These issues are relevant not only at the level of the race, but at gender level also. In her first work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,* Angelou reveals the lives of people at Stamps living under Ku Klux Klan's terror-a White supremacist group. The Blacks were often beaten to death or humiliated in the cotton plantations "In the dying sunlight the people dragged, rather than their empty cotton sacks" (CB I8). This incident recaptures the Black/White conflicts in the South of the United States in the 1930s. The Whites enjoy full aggressive privileges upon the Black community. On such occasions, the Blacks adopt an imposing course of silent endurance and mode of keeping away from the White people. Angelou here acknowledges, "In Stamps the segregation was so complete that most black children didn't really, absolutely know what whites looked like" (CB 25). The context in which race was conceived of as an ideology is expressed through these lines. Mary

Holmes's analysis of race gives a clearer perspective of Maya Angelou's works. Holmes writes:

> 'Race' was a concept used by Victorian scientists in their attempts to understand physical differences between peoples from different parts of the world. Skin colour was the most obvious observable difference and nineteenth century scientists were particularly obsessed with classifying black people as a 'race', separate from whites. These white European scientists measured skulls and discussed lip and eye shape and tried to prove that 'whites' were more civilized than and superior to blacks, Asiatic or other peoples. (150)

Realisation regarding the real reasons behind such divisions based on the skin colour, shape of eyes, lips, any limb of the human body provides a clearer picture of this injustice called racial discrimination.The most important thing here is the 'knowledge' that race is formed out of the interests of a particular category in domination. Maya Angelou's works are protests against such partial and in-humanistic beliefs and ideologies. Angelou narrates a desperate moment of bigotry she had to face when she visited the dentist Lincoln. He retorts, "Annie, my policy is I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than in a nigger's" (CB 189). Recounting this incident, Angelou describes that more than the pain of her decayed teeth, she suffered the ache of utter humiliation received on account of colour of her skin. A similar critical incident is delivered in *Gather Together in My Name*. She faces an encounter with a White clerk in a General Merchandise Store of her grandmother in Stamps. The White man insulted her by mispronouncing her name, which she could

never tolerate, and for her, the name is the symbol of one's identity. Angelou yells at him, "I slap you into the middle of next week if you even dare to open your mouth again. Now take that filthy pattern and stick it you-know-where" (GT 93). When her grandmother came to know about the happenings, she warns Angelou, revealing her fear for the Whites. Grandmother blames:

> You think 'cause you've been to California these crazy people won't kill you? You think them lunatic cracker boys won't try to catch you in the road and violate you? You think because of your all-fired principle some of the men won't feel like putting their white sheets on and riding over here to stir up trouble? You do, you're wrong. Ain't nothing to protect you and us except the Good Lord and some miles. (GT 95)

This incident depicts how death-defying life could be for the African-Americans in White society. Maya Angelou recounts many such chapters from her life, where racist characters bullied her and her communities.

The knowledge regarding geography and race puts many questions on what 'science' is as discipline. In the introduction to *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, she writes, "The Stamps, a small town in Arkansas, in the United States in the 1930s. The population is almost evenly divided between black and white and totally divided by where and how they live" (CB v). The fact that Blacks and Whites live in two different worlds of discourse highlights how broad and rigid the discourses surrounding the race are.

Frantz Fanon theorises the process of 'othering' of Black community, "Dirty nigger!" Or simply, "Look, a Negro!" I came into the world imbued with the will to

find a meaning in things. My spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects (109). Fanon,here, emphasises the racial experiences which objectify Blacks and thereby make them speechless or wordless to the injustice of segregation.Voicelessness happens because of 'othering' from the mainstream world of discourses. In Fanon's language, the historical formulation, determination, and pervasiveness of racial experience prompt a re-examination of the human condition itself. It suggests that the autobiographies of Blacks are examples of the depth and complexity of voicelessness in the ontology of self-experience. At many levels, Angelou is not the one who has been able to delve into the inner folds of Black experiences, compared to Fanon's. But Angelou brings out the pragmatic world, especially the world of Blacks, which symbolises the features of women's experiences.

The African-American space is a conceptual domain that facilitates access to the threads of this subject matter. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, from the binary established by the terminology the 'African-American', the direct and indirect exchange of racially divided and hierarchical societies can be intertwined. Maya Angelou makes it easier for readers to differentiate between the two. As a Black, a woman and a Black woman, Angelou finds the notion of her Black experiences in the spaces of hierarchised series of exchanges. She realises that the polluted world in front of her is not just confined to economic and political boundaries between Whites and Blacks,instead, these are interconnected nets that spread across spaces. She writes:

> In 1959, Fresno was a middling town with palm trees and a decidedly southern accent. Most of its white inhabitants seemed to be descendants of Steinbeck's roads, and it's black citizens were farm hands who had simply exchanged the dirt roads of Arkansas and Mississippi for the dusty streets of Central California. (CB 28)

The social nature of circles around Blacks, and the spaces Blacks and Whites share are all explicit in these lines. It is the distance between White and the allied objects to the world of Blacks. It suggests the unseen psychological distance to the alienated world of Africans. Even here, space differs from gender roles. The distance /space of Black man and that of Black woman are not the same; they are two. While Maya Angelou writes, she also marks Black women as 'othered' from the White world. Her individual life experiences have become an embodiment of an extensive knowledge of Black women.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre describes how space and objects serve as social setters of 'othering'. Lefebvre analyses the process of 'othering' as:

> The fields we are cornered with are, first, the *physical*- nature, the cosmos; secondly, the *mental*, including the logical and mental abstractions; and thirdly, the *social*. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias. (11-12)

The ‘othering’ based on colour works in one dimension and takes a privileged form of dominance in all social interactions in everyday life. Lefebvre’s thoughts draw attention to the theoretical dimensions of the spread of racial ideology and its expression in new forms throughout the public and private spaces.Thinking about space is essential because the problem of race is manifested in the dimension of visibility. The concepts that take a qualitative analysis of race concerning the material real world are particularly relevant here. It may mean that ‘The Order of Things’ (Foucault) is mainly reflected behind the formation of Black/White binaries.

The Divided Spaces of Black Women

The social hierarchisation of Black women differs significantly from that of Black men.The Black feminist theorists perceive Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as a breakthrough in the African-American Black feminist thoughts (Keizer 154-55). Maya Angelou is not an isolated phenomenon in voicing against the existing racial discrimination and politics behind it.Angelou brings out her ideas into society with Black feminists who dared to speak against racial and gender discrimination from 1970s. Arlene R Keizer, a Black feminist theorist, writes:

> The year 1970 was a high-water mark in the publication history of African American women’s critical and creative work. Toni Morrison’s novel *The Bluest Eye,* Alice Walker’s novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland,* Maya Angelou’s memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Toni Cade’s anthology *The Black Woman* were all published in this year. (155)

The significant jump is that, by 1970s, a public space in America is formed to advance the liberation plans of Black women. It could be considered as an entrance to a new space for Black women.Toni Cade Bambara, a social activist and an African-American writer, in her preface to the anthology *The Black Woman*, outlines the resistance set forth by Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison. Bambara writes:

> We are involved in a struggle for liberation: liberation from the exploitive and dehumanizing system of racism, from the manipulative control of a corporate society; liberation from the constrictive norms of "mainstream" culture, from the synthetic myths that encourage us to fashion ourselves rashly from without (reaction) rather than from within (creation). (7)

Maya Angelou, here, problematises the struggles of Black women concerning their race and gender status.The rise of Black women in 1970s positions a paradigm shift to the long-standing legacy of voicelessness. Angelou writes:

> The black mother perceives destruction at every door, ruination at each window, and even she herself is not beyond her own suspicion… within the home, she must display a right to rule which at any moment, by a knock at the door or a ring of the telephone can be exposed as false. In the face of these contradictions, she must provide a blanket of stability, which warms but does not suffocate, and she must tell her children the truth about the power of white power without suggesting that it cannot be challenged. (HW 44)

From her personal experiences, Angelou remarks that White man owns every door Black women knock for refuge. Black women are alienated from White men and White women. It would seem to be a historical extension of the oppressor's attitude towards Blacks, who worked as unpaid slaves in the mines and plantations in America. In Alice Walker's *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*, the history of women's experiences and alienation can be seen as an unforgettable reality, creating new divisions in the African-American traditions. Moreover, Alice Walker points to the significant political insights into the degrading efforts of the White people to undermine the creativity of Black women (401-09).

For Maya Angelou, the image of Black women's spaces alienated from White and Black men is not a theoretical proposal. Looking at Black women's life spreading through series of autobiographies, one could see the bullying of Black men, too. In Black feminist works, the gendered Black is problematised in variegated manner. Keizer states:

> Contemporary black feminist criticism came into being in the late 1960s and early 1970s, fostered by the Civil Rights Movement and developed in conjunction with the Second Wave of American Feminism, which was dominated by white women, and the Black power and Black Arts Movements which were dominated by black men. (154)

There should be an additional perception that, behind the divisions of the Black women's spaces, the dimensions of Black male identity discourse are working. It suggests that White people and Black men also play an important role in ensuring the 'othering' of Black women in public spaces. Towards the introduction

of her work, *Black Feminist Thought,* Patricia Hill Collins has described whatever all kinds of oppressions Black woman have to undergo, especially in the African-American context. Collins states:

> Race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity among others constitute major forms of oppression in the United States. However, the convergence of race, class and gender oppression characteristic of U.S. slavery shaped all subsequent relationships that women of African descent had within Black American families and communities, with employers, and among one another. (6)

Black feminists depict the life of people whose doors towards the outer world are shut. Angelou speaks of experiencing the horridness of White prejudice as,"Living inside a skin that was hated or feared by the majority of one's fellow citizens or about the sensation of getting on a bus on a lovely morning, feeling happy and suddenly seeing the passengers curl their lips in distaste or avert their eyes in revulsion" (SS 260).

The Heart of a Woman, unlike other works, exposes Angelou's political views towards Black feminism.There are many moments in this autobiography in which women, especially Black women, enter the autobiography and historically reclaim the voices of Black women. *The Heart of a Woman* is the voice of all those women who have been driven out of the world of the Whites and those who have to walk very complex paths of 'othering'. The voices of millions of Black women blended into her voice make Angelou a warrior of all Black women in America. This autobiography traces the history of the political struggles of African women

since 1800s. It is a retrieval of the political ideas of Black feminism, too. Angelou ruminates over her live-in relation with Vusumzi Make, an African freedom-fighter who wants to make her a submissive wife like an African wife. Later, she realises that even African women are not as docile, powerless and submissive as Make stereotypically portrayed them. She quotes the queries of the Black women:

> What are we here for? Why are African women sitting, eating, trying to act cute while African men are discussing serious questions and African children are starving? Have we come to London just to convenience our husbands? Have we been brought here only as portable pussy? (HW 171)

To quote Sojourner Truth, the political motive of writing an essential account of a more extended history of slave emancipation and their struggles is quite relevant. Maya Angelou echoes these, to reflect that she follows the ideals and ways of Sojourner Truth. The White crowd who turns against her and who tries to silence her, Sojourner Truth asks:

> Yoked like an ox, I have plowed your land. And ain't I a woman? With axes and hatchets, I have cut your forests and ain't I a woman? I gave birth to thirteen children and you have sold them away from me to be the property of strangers and to labor in strange lands. Ain't I a woman? I have sucked your babes at this breast. (HW 171)

The questions raised by Sojourner Truth are the comprehensive pages on the reflections of the African society that fed the White society. But the relevant politics of those questions was not just about race, but it also establishes the female identity

and gendered dimensions. Through Sojourner Truth's queries, the history of the African-American women speaking in public spaces, who haven't done it so far, is formed .The meaning of silence here would be the segregation from the Whites' discreet spaces and privileges. Even though Blacks made Whites what they are now, through the question of Sojourner Truth it reveals the grandeur, social practices, and value concepts that hid the presence, struggles, and exertion of Blacks were questioned. Such political act was generally formed around 1800s. Black women seek to define their social status in the cultural context of the United States by setting the social doctrines of their exertion and presence.

New relationships in language and discourse are formed when Blacks speak not about themselves, but when they try to prosecute and socialise Whites. It connotes that, when Whites become the observant subjects before Blacks, people like Sojourner Truth are transforming into newer subjectivity. By changing the subjectivity, the world consciousness also changes. To understand 'who they are', the perspective shared in *Drylongso: A Self Portrait of Black America* is helpful. John Langston Gwaltney, an African-American anthropologist, states, "We have always been the best actors in the world…I think that we are much cleverer than they are, because we know that we have to play the game. We've always had to live two lives-one for them and one for ourselves" (238). Black people, therefore, have to live a double life on many levels. There are three levels of complexity in Black woman's life, especially, in the African-American context they live-for the Whites, for the Black men, and for themselves. It indicates that Black men and White men are psychologically distanced from Black women. Such distance has placed Whites

far beyond the reach of Blacks' voice. Maya Angelou remembers her mother's warning, "You had to be very careful in speaking to whites and especially white men. My mother said that when a white man sees your teeth he thinks he sees your under clothes" (GT 55). Racism is considered to be a psychological distance. By psychological distance it means that the totality of intolerance, the alienation that is created are repeated through many incidents of the day to day life. Sociologist like Prof. Judith Rollins perceive this as a 'psychological attack' towards the personhood and dignity of the Blacks (212). It is through such psychological attacks that silence is created between each other. Through her poem, "Phenomenal Woman", Angelou speaks about Black women's unique sensibilities and psychological distance between men and women:

> Men themselves have wondered
> What they see in me.
> They try so much
> But they can't touch
> My inner mystery.
> When I try to show them
> They say they still can't see.
> ……
> I'm a woman
> Phenomenally.
> Phenomenal woman, That's me. (Angelou 122)

Labour and Subjectivity of Black Women

From the first autobiography onwards, Maya Angelou takes the readers through multiple levels of racially marginalised spaces. It suggests that everyone enters into social structure that racialises jobs and spaces which designed to set apart the African-American society from others. In the life journey of Angelou, her careers, acquaintances , and the organisations she has associated with are far removed from the visible circles of society. Similarly, gender roles are conceptualised concerning the occupation and spaces. Liz Bondi and Joycz Davidson's article "Troubling the Space of Gender", attempts to disentangle the ideas about gender from the relationships between human subjects, subjectivity, and spaces. They state:

> Gender is thus understood as something external to the core of the human subject, as something imposed on but not residing within the essential nature of human being. At the same time as 'externalizing' gender, this understanding of subjectivity invokes a radical separation between the subject and the environment in which s/he exists…These two elements of the liberal humanist model of human subjectivity have together invited us to think about gender as belonging at least as much to enviornments-the spaces and places in which we live our lives-as to people. (328)

Compared with other communities, the association of Black women with exertion and spaces exposes bonding of more complex subjectivity and spaces. In the article, "In Search of our Mother's Garden", Alice Walker refers to the greatness of physical, mental, spiritual endurance, and efforts of the Black women (401). Self-

awareness is the cultural capital Black women have received from the social surroundings, which the other communities lack. They receive such cultural capital mainly from the sphere of exertion. These are the fires of discrimination and alienation the marginalised race face in their daily lives. Alice Walker speaks of the nature of exertion of her mother and all Black mothers:

> During the "working" day, she labored beside-not behind-my father in the fields. Her day began before sunup, and did not end until late at night. There was never a moment for her to sit down, undisturbed, to unravel her own private thoughts; never a time free from interruption-by work or the noisy inquiries of her many children. And yet, it is to my mother-and all our mothers who were not famous -that I went in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited, and that pops out in wild and unlikely places to this day. (406)

The similarity in the experiences of Black women is marked in the internal structure of Angelou's writings, too. The acceptability of Angelou's poems "Still I Rise", "Phenomenal Women" and "Caged Bird" is primarily due to the empirical structure of her association with the subordinate women. Angelou's women reflect the insights of the world experience shared by the subordinate women at the subjectivity level. It suggests the reality associated with the word 'Adhwanam' in Sanskrit.The word 'Adhwanam' means 'of that which does not have a voice' (Pillai 114) is relevant here. The unique hierarchy of labour is formed from the social structure which silence the subaltern. A mere linguistic unit like 'Adhwanam' is

enough to hold the key to the question, 'Why a group of people get alienated and assume a state of silence based on race?' The history of slave life begins with labour. It is the history of labour imposed upon Blacks to enrich the lives of the whites. Patricia Hill Collins views that, "In essence, their forced incorporation into a capitalist political economy as slaves meant that West African women became economically exploited, politically powerless units of labor" (Collins 56) is all about the reason of silence as well. Social observers point out that,United States is a place where there is a strong interconnection between labour and social discriminations. In "The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labour in U. S History", David .R. Roediger and Elizabeth .D. Esch write, "In the history of the United States, "Lowe writes", capital has maximized its profits not through rendering labor 'abstract' but precisely through the social production of 'difference',…marked by race, nation, geographical origins and gender" (343). The only solution is that various forms of imposed labour have to be taken away to reduce the distance towards voicelessness. In *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas,* Angelou shares the racial distancing at work-place. The White dancers, who were jealous of Angelou's public appreciation blame her for adopting mean ways to gain popularity with the customers. Then Angelou realises "The whiteness of their skin that allowed them to belong anywhere they chose to go" (SS 84). Black women in America breed a reflective strength and surviving spirit against all odds that intimidate their existence. Angelou poignantly remarks:

> How did it happen that we could nurse a nation of strangers, be maids to multitudes of people who scorned us, and still walk with some majesty and

> stand with a degree of pride? I thought of human beings, as far back as I had read, of our deeds and didoes. According to some scientists, we were born to forever crawl in swamps, but for some not yet explained reason, we decided to stand erect, and despite gravity's pull and push, to remain standing. (SH 2I1)

Angelou takes pride in her racial identity and labour she undertakes to sustain society. She argues, "We were maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen, and anything higher that we aspired to was farcical and presumptuous" (CB 180).

Feminine Experiences of Casteism

In India, labour and castes have degraded the structure of feminine experiences. Bama's *Karukku* reflects that same social structure remained virtually unchanged even in the latter years of 20th century. 'Karu' is a word used in Tamil and Malayalam, with a meaning of 'seed' and 'essence/sap' for a long time. As a keyword with many political undertones, 'karu' emerges from the Tamil traditions. Bama's interview with Manoj Nair is noteworthy. She states:

> The story told in karukku was not my story alone. It was the depiction of a collective trauma-of my community-whose length cannot be measured in time. I just tried to freeze it forever in one book so that there will be something physical to remind people of the atrocities committed on a section of the society for ages. I could not build a monument, I could not build a sculpture. I wrote a book. (Bama)

Existing interpretations of what constitutes caste, especially within the social sciences, are often flawed when viewed from real-life experiences.Testimonies of Bama are unique facet of the casteist life in India.They articulate not only the caste life of India, but the life narratives from the bottommost experiences disclose complex entrails of gender within the caste system.The miserable existence of Dalit women is stated in these words:

> If a woman so much as stands alone and by herself somewhere, all sorts of men gather towards her showing their teeth. However angry you get, however repelled by their expressions and their grimaces, even to the point of retching, what can you do on your own? We think so many thoughts. We hope so much. We study so many things. But in real life everything turns out differently. We are compelled to wander about, stricken and unprotected. (Bama 119)

Bama's writings reveal the experiences that have not yet been shared and articulated. It becomes newer voices on the level of discrimination, tolerance, and marginalisation and is also distinct in the way they see, care, and share pragmatic spaces. About the different voices of Dalit women, Prof. Gopal Guru says:

> 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 woman to speak on behalf of dalit women automatically valid. In doing so, the phenomenon of 'talking differently' foregrounds the identity of dalit women. (2549)

In the preface to *Karukku*'s second edition, Bama writes, how *Karukku* becomes the voice of the voiceless:

> My parents read it. They understood me little more. My siblings read it. They could comprehend the pain I had experienced in my life. My friends read it. They praised it because it was a new kind of writing. People from my village read it. Although they were hostile at first they realized that it was necessary. They rejoiced and encouraged me. Many Dalits read it and said it gave them strength. (viii)

Here, Bama shows how identity is formed. Moreover, the criticism of theorists that, it is not identity that exists, but identification (Ahmad 17) appears in Bama's explanation. The reaction of people after reading *Karukku* is proof of this identification.

Labour, Space and Resource Relations of Dalit Woman

Labour, space, colour, caste, economic ability to mobilise resources, gait and grandeur are social imaginations that lead to Dalit identification. Of these, the power over resources is significant.With the advent of religion, customs and beliefs in everyday life of Dalit, societal tastes and interests also change. Formation of identity, especially life prototypes, is a complex process. Bama mentions this fact while talking about how different roads in different castes were formed in her village. She narrates:

> Apart from us, following one after the other in a series, there were the streets of Thevar, Chettiyaar, Aassari, and Nadar. Beyond that were the Naicker

> streets. The Udaiyaar, too, had a small settlement there for themselves. I don't know how it came about that the upper caste communities and the lower cast 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. (7)

The critical idea is to understand the nature of the exchange patterns and the prevailing conventions that form boundaries. Boundaries are formed between resources and power, spaces and castes, occupation and social status. All these problematise the historical source of the divide between gender and social hierarchy. Bama's observation of how the road has become social hierarchy of divisive power is related to caste and gender.

Before entering her caste life and feminine life, the cultural and geographical spaces Bama draws in *Karukku* are significant. Bama tells how resources push certain people within the society towards margins. Although precisely, the knowledge of the resources rests with the people who produce them, they are not the one who is qualified socially to use those resources.They are either driven out of that sphere or are hierarchised. Bama depicts the water bodies in her village as:

> If you look in a westward direction, the lakes and ponds stand side by side, strung together in a row: Taamara Kulam (lotus pond), Baatharaang Kulam (named for the priest or podagar who lived nearby), Jeevaneri Kamma (the lake of life), Aiyar Kulam (pond of the Aiyars), Periya Kulam (the big pond), Poder Kulam (Probably also named for the podagar), Vlraang Kulam. (2)

Many ponds among these have connections with some caste communities. The following descriptions also reveal how ponds and resources in it are closely related to their social life, and have excluded them. Bama here details the spaces and natural resources they have. She states:

> People sold all sorts of fish like silabi kendi, paaruku kendi, keluti, ayirai, koravi, viraal. But in our own street, we mostly bought and cooked curries out of silebi kendai, and paambu kendi. Because that was the cheapest we could get. The upper castes bought and ate ayirai, keluti, and viraal. But we couldn't afford to pay that much for what we ate. (3)

By examining different types of fish available from the pond, Bama clarifies what and why they are socially and economically accessible. She points to a social situation in which the downtrodden are unable to come into close contact with the natural resources. It is not an easily explainable social structure. Oppressed are those who have a close relationship with nature, who care for and sustain the natural resources. Moreover, they collect and spend a lot of exertion in that sphere. But, just because of this, the resources may/ not make available to them. Even when they are close to nature, the Dalit subalterns are socially alienated from such resources the most. Bama states:

> I share to some extent the poverty of the Dalits who toil far more painfully through fierce heat and beating rain, yet live out their lives in their huts with nothing but gruel and water. Those who labour are the poorest of the poor Dalits. But those who reap the rewards are wealthy, the upper castes. This continues to happen in my village to this day. (79)

Labour and knowledge of nature alienate the downtrodden from the capitalist system. In the face of alienation and marginalisation, those with financial capital establish a unique level of capital-centred parallelism with the resources. Simultaneously, socially dominant ideologies that justify separation with subordination and natural resources gain prominence.The different conceptions of religion, ethics, government, epistemology and technology lie within the ideology of economic-centred world consciousness. Along with new subject-subjectivity relations, the marginalised caste and feminine identities are also extensively developed. It may mean that religion, ethics, and government dodge women and the downtrodden ideologically and practically on many levels.

While examining the nature of hierarchical relationship of the day-to-day discourses, one can understand where the Dalits stand. In essence, it means that there are caste hierarchies within every small and large act. Alok Mukherjee recounts:

> Hindu settlements, they are actually outside the boundary of the village. This physical segregation signifies other separations. Dalits do the work, live the life, eat the food and wear the garment that the upper caste Hindu will not. They draw water from a separate well, and cremate their dead in a separate space. Dalits are the upper caste Hindu's Other. (2)

Similarly, Bama's *Karkku* also problematises the specific capitalist system and ideologies that are considered parameters for alienating people.The writings of Dalit men/women are attempt to bring Dalit subjects into the centre, which were hitherto alien in the literary sphere.

Unlike other literary forms, the autobiographical narratives integrate Dalit subjects close to the discussion spheres and decentralises the existing ones. With the advent of Dalit subject-subjectivity in the discursive space, where, hitherto only the value system of the elite social experiences have been the subject of reading, the marginalised narratives have dispersed the existing hierarchical spheres of the reading aptitudes. This dispersal happens on many levels. The vital aspect is that the newer social subject and subjectivity come towards the centre. Secondly, the Dalit women subject-subjectivity come as new forces of resistance and struggle against the prevailing elite value system and reading culture.The most important aspect is that more than the resistance raised by Black women subject-subjectivity in the African-American context, in the socio-economic and cultural spheres, Dalit women in India are raising it from the complex layers of the caste system to some extent. The large-scale printing and distribution of the writings of Black and Dalit women writers mean that new value systems of those who listen to their voices are created. It suggests reconstruction and rebuilding of the existing value systems of race, caste, and gender.

Prof. Gopal Guru in *Relegated Other* concludes that as far as Dalit women are concerned, the state of exploitation they have to undergo is severe. Moreover, the plight of Dalit women is worse than the experiences of their Black counterparts anywhere in the world. Dalit women face subservience with Dalits themselves.They are exploited by the social, Brahminical, Dalit patriarchy, government and market system (347). Guru's gazes help to shape a new Dalit subjectivity. About the hierarchical nature of the caste, Dalit observer Raj Kumar opines:

> With the chaturvarnic order, the Indian caste society gradually came to be established in between 500 BC-AD 500 period. It is during this period that many caste laws and restrictions were made for the Shudras to keep them permanently away from the so-called dwija society and degrade them to the position of virtual slaves without rights of citizenship. (Kumar 121; Manorama 445-456)

Here, the history of the social hierarchy is pointed out. Bama's questions are all about the layers in caste and gender.The gendered voices in *Sangati* also reveal:

> We have to labour in the fields as hard as men do, and then on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our children. As for the men, their work ends when they've finished in the fields. If you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man. Born as women, what good do we get? We only toil in the fields and in the home until our very vaginas shrivel. (6-7)

In India, caste is, in a way, directly or indirectly established through marriage. It connotes that caste is produced and perpetuated into an institutionalised social hierarchy through the existing patterns of marriage. In India, the caste system restricts the physical relations of men and women of another caste, and justifies such restrictions. Marriage is not a central issue in India while dealing with the concept of caste and gender. The value system of identity concepts such as caste, class, colour, and religion survives and perpetuates through marital ties. It suggests that the caste system does not endorse matrimonial relations with members of another caste. It is how the caste functions in India.

The Past and Present of Exclusion

Caste and gender subjectivity are envisioned from the social experiences of exclusion and elusion.The value system of pure/impure traditions alienates the caste and gendered body from the mainstream. Bama recollects the caste experience in the school. She writes:

> The next morning at assembly, the headmaster called out my name. 'You have shown us your true nature as a Paraya', he said. 'You climbed the coconut tree yesterday after everybody else had gone home, and you stole coconut. We cannot allow you inside this school. Stand outside'. I was in agony because I had been shamed and insulted in front of all the children. (19)

The Headmaster argues that the reason for expelling Bama from the class-room was that she showed her caste character in the school.When she approached the priest to clarify what exactly happened in the school, the response of the priest was even more surprising, "After all, you are from Cheri. You might have done it" (19). Bama's parents and predecessors were abused and criticised for remaining unchanged from the caste character treated as impure by the upper-castes. It is taken not as the character of an individual, but as common traits of particular caste. Here it is the Paraya community, Bama's community, in which many were born, lived and died.

It was not just the school that set a venue for Bama's othering, but, whenever social encounters occur with other ethnic groups, these exclusions

happened, too. That were recurrent and obsessive. Bama recounts the marginalising experience in the bus:

> When I went home for holidays, if there was a Naicker woman sitting next to me in the bus, she'd immediately ask me which place I was going to, what street. As soon as I said the Cheri she'd get up and move off to another seat. Or she'd tell me to move elsewhere. (20)

It is within the bus, which is generally considered modern space, the bodies are mutually separated or negated. Secondly, there is social marginalisation of the experiences of Dalit women beyond such caste-based exclusion. She sadly continues:

> How is it that people consider us too gross even to sit next to when travelling? They look at us with the same look they would cast on someone suffering from a repulsive disease. Wherever we go we suffer blows. And pain. Is there never to be any relief? It doesn't seem to matter whether people are educated or not. They all go about with caste hatred. Why, even nuns and priests, who claim that their hearts are set upon service to God, certainly discriminate according to caste. (27)

It is crucial to understand, by what social and scientific parameters the impact of exclusion can be measured. Modern institutions such as public schools, courts, jails, trains, bus, and such are generally regarded as spaces where a new value system is envisaged despite the prevailing traditions of race, colour, and gender prejudices. This incident reveals the social attitude towards the 'othered'

souls and their social positioning. About Dalit /Black perspective of social division, Sharan Kumar Limbale states:

> Because of their lower status in the social order, and the many cultural issues raised from serving the master society, there is a split in the mindset of African Americans and Dalits. It is certainly different from that of whites and savarnas. Because of this different mindset and the inferior treatment received in every sphere of life, the emotional world and hopes and desires of African Americans and Dalits are distinct from those of Whites and savarnas. (96)

Psychologically, the everyday lives of Dalits and African-Americans have significant internal and external differences. Regardless of the long history of hegemony, purity, resource ownership, and divisiveness of dominant societies, the value of modernity cannot be overestimated. In *Karukku*, Bama points out, how schools can become the social spaces that establish and strengthen casteism and discrimination.Bama recounts the continuous humiliation in the teenage years of her school life. She declares:

> All the same, every now and then, our class teacher or the PT teacher would ask all the Harijan children to stand up, either at assembly, or during lessons. We'd stand. They'd write down our names and then ask us to sit down again. We felt really bad then. We'd stand in front of nearly two thousand children, hanging our heads in shame, as if we had done something wrong. Yes, it was humiliating. (21)

It cannot be argued that the new institutions, especially the modern ones, in effect, have positioned Dalit and African-American women qualitatively in every respect. In these situations, largely conflicted and complex relations are produced on the level of caste, race and gender status. The autobiographies of Dalit and Black women have a special significance as a narrative venture that marks this complex social state. It happens,because the autobiographical narratives differ in their treatment of caste, race, and gender issues from that of social science and other disciplines.

The stated matter may have another side.It means that the public spaces such as schools may lead the society in conflicting encounters for untying the knots of caste and gender stereotypes and their long traditions. It should be carefully noted that, previously, there were no such public spaces. Now, there is a widespread chance for upper-caste groups to engage with Dalit women bodies in modern places like railway-station, hospitals, schools, courts, and so on.The evolution and subjectivity of Dalit women may not be possible without having such encounters and ensuing conflicts with the public.The transformative nature of such encounters can only be identified by taking into account the aim of spaces and discourses associated with them. It does not mean that every encounter is transformative. Bama describes a scene in the Naicker family and states:

> Both my grandmothers worked as servants for Naicker families. In the case of one of them, when she was working in the field, even tiny children, born the other day, would call her by her name and order her about, just because they belonged to the Naicker caste. And this grandmother, like all the other

> labourers, would call the little boy Ayya, Master, and run about to do his bidding. It was shameful to see them do this. (16)

The loss of pride that Bama feels now is the result of her new life encounters. Instead, the grandmother's encounters make her reverently address even the smallest children as 'Ayya'.This practice positions the upper-caste people at the topmost hierarchy and paves the way for silencing the lowest caste. It connotes that whether an encounter is transformative or not can only be determined by considering the hierarchical relationships in the spaces of encounters. More often, it is seen that these encounters, especially the traditional ones, endorse or replicate the lower status of the caste and woman. The 'ayya' salutations offered by the downtrodden reproduce and establish caste relations each time.

Bama writes about her grandmother, who has a habit of bringing stale food from the house of the Naickers. She would say, "These people are the maharajas who feed us our rice. Without them, how will we survive? Haven't they been upper caste from generation to generation, and haven't we been lower caste? Can we change this?"(17). Casteism and hierarchy are upheld intact through such question of Dalits. The problem lies in the mindset of individuals within the community. The only solution is to pay attention to the social practices that endorse the hierarchy of discrimination. Dalit women work hard, but are destined to be silent.They are not voiceless, but stand outside the social realms that never value such voices. Ambedkar's remark about Dalit , "The untouchables whom he saw as 'broken men' settled outside the villages" (316-17), is meaningful in this context. It suggests that Dalits are evicted from the valued spaces of society. Moreover, men and upper-

castes are treated as authoritarian in society. Here, the silenced Dalit women are outside the socio-economic and gender status of the upper-caste and Dalit men discourses.

Dalit writer and critic Raj Kumar remarks, “Dalit women are yet to be united to raise their voices and thus, far from making their presence felt in the day to day politics of our country” (211-12). That is why none of the socio-cultural and political groups in India tries to listen to the voices of Dalit women. Only if they organise like the upper-caste men and women, will then they receive acceptance in the existing social realms. In other words, the absence of domains that value their presence and accept their social authority is the reason for the silence of Dalit women.The ideologies that persist in their realms proclaimed the predominance of the privileged caste. Bama critiques the servile mentality of women ancestors in *Karukku.*She states:

> It was a long time before I realized that paatti was bringing home the unwanted food that the Naickers were ready to throw away. One day I went with paatti to the Naicker house. After she had finished all her filthy chores, Paatti placed the vessel that she had brought with her; by the side of the drain. The Naicker lady came out with leftovers, leaned out from some distance and tipped them into Paatti’s vessel, and went away. Her vessel it seemed, must not touch Paatti’s; it would be polluted. (16)

Bama, here, reiterates the nature of hegemonic ideas instilled in the mentality of Dalit people. The obedience of Dalit men and social obedience of Dalit women

are different. She objects to the 'leftover food' as Ramakrishnan views that, "Leftovers are seen as fragments from which the self has to be constructed" (69).

Dalit women express a more affirmative attitude towards the upper-caste system compared to their male counterparts. And, this is related to the kinds of jobs they undertake for an upper-caste family. Their obedience is because of this physical and mental slavery the upper-caste has imposed on them for centuries. Such interference helps to understand the theoretical aspect of subjectivity. In essence, Dalit women live in a state of bondage or an extreme level of subjugation.

Scholars of autobiographies like Maureen Perkins opine that the autobiography of White man is about the dignity, power, and privilege that the White society provides (2). It is mentioned here not to point out the characteristics of the White autobiographies, but to understand the racial identities. In other words, if the cultural themes of inclusion are interpreted in the autobiographies of White people, then the autobiographies of Blacks incorporate social exclusion. The autobiographies of Blacks and Dalits reveal the existence of two distinct social phenomena. Bama states:

> In this society, if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste-difference does not disappear. Wherever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy. It is because of this that we are unable to find a way to study well and progress likes everyone else. And this is why a wretched lifestyle is all that is left us. (26)

Testimonies of Inclusion and Exclusion

The social exclusion of Blacks and Dalits happen not because of the power over resources, but because of the conceptualisation of hierarchy. In her autobiography, Angelou refers to James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name* (HW 277) and establishes that social humans who are neither remembered nor recognised by anyone is the one who is excluded, or is from their lineage. Frantz Fanon, on many occasions recounts the retreats and exclusions made by Blacks. He declares, "I am black; I am in total fusion with the world in sympathetic affinity with the earth, losing my id in the heart of the cosmos" (27). Fanon's words are the testimonies of those who have been ostracised and expelled from the world for being Black. He tries to bridge the boundaries between Blacks and Whites, that the world has hitherto said.

Research on the social status of Black women is relevant, because it recognises that much of the prejudices that society perpetuates about Blackness are related to power over economic resources. Frantz Fanon evaluates the attitude of Europe towards Black in this respect.The writings of Blacks reflect the psychic alienation Blacks experience.Frantz Fanon views these exclusion processes not in response to personal experiences but in the dimensions of social experience. Here, the segregated souls are the one who experiences process of exclusion which exists and continue in the socio-cultural spheres through ages.They spread to all spheres of everyday social life through a long history of ideologically envisaged theories and practices. Different forms of estrangement operate in caste, race, and gender.

Through their autobiographies, Bama and Maya Angelou take the effort to problematise social estrangements.

Dalit autobiographies are an affidavit of Indian caste system. It helps to recognise the caste life historically on many levels. Many studies are not made in social science as to what the caste system was like in India after 2000, and how it existed ideologically and practically in society. In Dalit autobiographies, Dalits come in the subject position and therefore, it helps the writers to document their social life from the centre of discourse. Instead of the traditional historical narratives, Dalit autobiographies diligently write about the social life and realities they experience. It is important to note that most of the marginalised autobiographies are written by questioning the prevailing literary and historical narratives. In an interview with T. D Ramakrishnan, Bama opines that *Karukku* created ripples of controversy in Tamil literature. Many took it as a different literary genre in terms of style. Others raised the question if it were a novel? An autobiography? And they added how it could be accounted for? (15). These questions ascertain that *Karukku* has taken a different path from the existing narratives.While considering the level of sentimentality and narrative structure, *Karukku* stands apart from other narrative forms so far produced by mainstream writers.The reason for this discrepancy is its content itself. In *Karukku,* Bama details how caste is assimilated into different spheres of life. She emphasises the social patterns of discrimination the Dalit communities face in other religions, especially in Christianity. Bama states:

> 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. If a girl tended to be on the plumb side, she'd get it even more. 'These people get nothing to eat at home; they come here and they grow fat', she would say publicly. When we returned to the school after the holidays, she would say, 'Look at the Cheri children! When they stay here, they eat their fill and look as round as potatoes. But look at the state in which they come back from home-just skin and bone!' It was really embarrassing. (20)

Dalit Christians often undergo perpetual enslavement and discrimination in the convent. Bama recounts her experiences of disowning or exclusion from becoming a nun through the statement:

> Sister told us that in certain orders they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns and that there was even a separate order for them somewhere… I wished I could have disappeared from that spot and vanished then and there. I lamented inwardly that there was no place that was free of caste. (25)

Karukku displays exclusion faced by the marginalised Dalit women from the upper-caste men and women as well as from the patriarchal Dalit men. Apart from them, Dalit women had to face severe intimidation from the state also. Bama recounts an experience of Police chasing their men. She reports, "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 them and shoved their

guns against their bodies" (40). The impact of the caste system on Indian society is noticeable here.

Dalits' conversion to Christianity in India was, in many ways, the choice made to manipulate the socio-cultural capital under the colonial occupation.The atmosphere of caste discrimination pushes Dalits and other backward classes into such selection. India has the largest number of Dalits who had converted to Christianity due to the harshest exclusion atmosphere. But, Bama criticises that the nature of religion chosen by Dalits as means of salvation from the caste oppression was significant setback to them, especially the exclusion experiences of those converted into Christianity.

Black and Dalit autobiographies are an inextricable part of marginality discourse. It evolved into an unequivocal literary genre of resistance and assertion against the race-based and caste-based hierarchical social system prevalent in America and India. Autobiographies from the subaltern women uniquely resist the gendered othering. Black and Dalit women writers have created a space of their own by asserting their socio-political identity. The autobiographical narratives of Bama and Maya Angelou signify their voices of/ from the margins. The study exposes the exclusion and voicelessness these women face in every stage of life and also designates the power of the marginalised voices.

Chapter 5

Voicelessness in the Social Imagination: Issues of Caste and Race

The ostracised Blacks and Dalits are signified in heterogeneous ways in regional as well as world literature.The autobiographies taken for analysis in this thesis critically examine and reflect race and caste life in America and India. This chapter attempts to compare the representations of the marginalised Blacks and Dalits in specific societies. Autobiographies that analyse race and gender in the African-American context, and caste and gender in the Indian context are taken for a careful comparison.The role of gender in defining the social conditions of race and caste is a matter for serious discussion. The distance from *Joothan* to *Karukku* and *The Big Sea* to *The Heart of a Woman* is significant. The dimensions of social inequalities seem to be enlarged as casteist and racist ideologies focus more on gender, especially the subjectivity of the subordinate women.

The complexities of caste signify, “All castes in a caste system recognise the same basic hierarchy and accept (or at least tacitly acknowledge) their own position within it, though there may be variations and disputes. On the other hand, every ethnic group can have its own version of a social hierarchy in which it usually places itself at the top” (Deshpande 103). Deshpande, here, briefs how caste exists, and was shared in a society. The issues of Indian caste system are problematised and discussed by taking autobiographies also into account.When autobiographies commence to be written, caste becomes a central theme in its new spheres. If the caste subject represented in other literary genres was marginalised, the

autobiographies of the marginalised communities would change this situation. In the face of this change, new approaches and analytical strategies, including the subaltern studies, emerge. In this postcolonial context, the world started to listen to the voices of the voiceless from many corners.Therefore, the existing methodologies and emphasis have to be restructured to follow and divert attention to such spheres.Only if alterations and additions are made in the genealogy of aptitudes, can new subjects come in front of society. In the cultural context of such changes in aptitudes, the issues of Black/Dalit men and Black/Dalit women take on new dimensions. Kancha Ilaiah writes:

> I would argue that this is the only possible and indeed the most authentic way in which the deconstruction and reconstruction of history can take place. Dalit autobiography, then, is not just a remembering of things past, but a shaping and structuring of them in such a way as to help understand one's life and the social order that shaped it, on the one hand, and to arouse a passion for change in the Dalit reader, on the other (xxix).

The changes that Ilaiah points out here are about Dalit identity, which was not made a subject or subjectivity so far.

Dalit autobiographies emphasise more extended history and consequential language for expressing their lives than other communities. Compared with other societies, one could identify that indigenous people have an excellent perception of life, culture and diversities. Deep ideologies like caste are not confined to a single religion in India. The hints given by K Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu about Dalit writing are noteworthy. They argue:

> Dalit writers demonstrated that humiliation, rejection, and exclusion based on caste were common practice in contemporary India. In fact, caste discrimination takes on new forms in modern life. Its workings are comparable to the workings of race and gender discrimination. (15)

Caste, race, and gender are not a lucid internal social problem in India and America, but are society that is excluded from the subject concerns of the mainstream discourse.Though, the social implications of caste, race, and gender have to be discussed ideologically, on many levels, there is visible silence in the existing system. Society has started recognising these silences (Pattetti 403).

The Past and Present of Marginalisation

The direct and indirect spaces of marginalisation and ideologies provide the victims with a complex and conflicting social situation. Literature, especially Dalit and Black writings have endeavoured to unleash this state of affairs. Earlier universal justice of the predators was seen as right. In general, the hunters uphold and impose upon prey dualistic notions of Black and Dalit identities, which are ‘God made’ and ‘Nature made’. It is what transpires gender status as well.The writings of the marginalised are seeking to unravel these ideologies and practices of dualism. If the effort to unwind dualism is to be effective, the existing ideologies and ordinances of the predators have to be either beaten up or broken down. Therefore, it requires a clear understanding of the predator’s weapons and ideologies. The works of the marginalised, especially in the early days, may serve as a warning to the hunters. Only a few have been able to rise to the position of defence. Because of the precise dimension, depth and extent of the social practice of race, caste and

gender,they are engendered out of long historical processes.Without uprooting its social practice, Dalit/Black men and the Dalit /Black women cannot dream of social justice. J.M. Waghmare comments:

> Their identity has travelled from coloured to Negro, from Negro to Black, from Black to Afro-American and now from Afro American to African-American. They are fullblooded African-Americans. This long dark shadows fall across two continents- America and Africa. Their history is a long passage of time telling a tale of two continents. They were thrown out of their own history, faith and culture. African history has given them a full page, but American history has given only a small and narrow margin on its page. (21)

Blacks in America are trying to stretch out from that thin margin to the entire page. It also means that Blacks will become Americans only when that effort is completed. To become humans and individuals, and to transform from the social status of the victim, both the hunter and the victim must be socially annihilated equally. Therefore, caste, religion, rituals, regions, and so on will have to be reconstructed. Annihilating means not to let them remain in their present social status.Those who are pushed to the margins can come to the fore only if they uproot all discriminatory social discourses. It will require indispensable social forces. The discriminated can move towards equality of social status only by exploring different social practices rather than efficaciously confronting the existing ideologies. It is not a simple undertaking. Harihar Kulkarni refers to some of the theoretical issues encountered while analysing and redefining social identities such as race, gender, and colour. Kulkarni states:

> …all the oppositions ultimately come back to mean that there exists negative value to the female/ black/ Third World, and positive value to the male/ white/ and the West side of opposition. (145)

There is no way that social marginalisation can be eliminated or solved by any simple means. To understand the scarcity of resources, more efficient approaches need to be devised. Carl Schmitt, a social thinker, points out some of the glaring dualities like beautiful/ ugly (aesthetic), profitable/ unprofitable (economic), and friend/enemy (political) in expounding the social state of discrimination (11). These are prominent binaries in the history of ideologies that structure the two frontier worlds of discrimination. Blacks, lower caste communities and women are often marked as ugly, unprofitable and enemy in the discriminatory discourses of caste, religion, race, and gender. The notion of ugly, unprofitable and enemy are created from the ideologies of interconnected value concepts. In social life, ugly, enemy and unprofitable turn into the same when they are viewed from the standpoint of particular value systems and doctrines. The premise of such parameters can be traced back to the ideologies of modernisation. Instead of being perceived as diverse and distinctive, these societies are envisioned as a unified hostile group. The social diversities such as race, colour, caste, gender, occupation, beliefs, and so on are treated as essential differences.Women and the downtrodden become groups uglier rather than hostile. In nutshell, all these lead to social ostracism. In short, class hierarchies within the caste system are formed by this ugliness, hostility and profitability notion. Ostracism is a political act that estranges the toiling class from its fruits. Social exclusion is, “Caste was the instrument of

deprivation /exclusion. Caste automatically becomes the instrument of mobilization and reserved access. It was also the natural result of the unnatural, but long and deeply entrenched institution of caste system" (Krishnan 10). The common characteristic of Dalit autobiographies in India is the recognition of ancestry of the excluded. The voice of the outcastes is seen in these lines:

> I do not feel respect for you
> I do not sing of your honour
> I feel like spitting on you the beetle-leaf juice as I hold it in
> My mouth now
> I want to drown you into potful of semen
> I curse you, curse your scripture, your culture
> Curse your hypocrisy. (Dhasal 32)

Such voices of dissent arise from the historical context of exclusion experiences of Dalit communities.

The institution of caste has been maintained by the extensive hierarchies at the level of ideologies that do not integrate value or authenticity to the experiences. It is a powerful ideological attack and an intricate spectrum of issues.Ambedkar highlights, "There is no racial difference between the Hindu and the Untouchables" (114). It connotes that caste and Untouchability are ideological attacks. It does not mean that race is not ideological. But it signifies that caste is a conceptual weapon that is potent. Subsequently, gender within caste confronts complex ideological attacks in Dalit community.

Considering caste, race, and gender empirical records are powerful than the documented evidences.There are many instances in *Karukku*, where Bama negates the canonical documents. It is noteworthy how Bama opens up her testimony and problematises Untouchability while remaining silent in the mainstream discourses. She states, “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” (13). Bama, here, testifies that all mainstream exchanges are purely forged documents.These are useful illustrations to identify the nature of the exclusions in the current narratives in spheres of caste, race, and gender.

The history of Dalits and Blacks is the history of majority who have been subjected to exclusions from the existing epistemological spheres. Dalit autobiographies have assimilated new sensibility and history by resisting this ouster. A constant presence of exclusion is explicit in treating Dalits and women within and outside India.While talking for the excluded, Kancha Ilaiah opines that:

> Personal experience brings out reality in a striking way. This method of examining socio-cultural and economic history is central to the social sciences; significantly, the method of narrating and deconstructing experiences has been used by feminists. Further, Indian Dalitbahujan thinkers like Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar Ramasamy Naicker have also used this method. Instead of depending on Western methods, Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar spoke and wrote on the day-day experiences of the Dalitbahujan castes. (xii)

Joothan, in every sense, is a testimonial of the outcastes.The caste system in India has a long history of stratification and exclusion. Dalit thinkers perceive autobiographies as an endeavour to liberate themselves from that history. Such self-expression emerges from those driven out of the mainstream spaces can be considered as chances for democratising the casteist and racist spaces.

Fundamentally, norms of exclusion and omission enter into the content of the social concepts of caste and race. Giorgio Agamben's hypothesis posits that norms are manifested only for exemption and the exception is significant (Deuber-Mankowsky 6). Social imaginations like caste, race and gender exist on the act of exclusion. Mary Holmes, while analysing the stages of Black Feminism, highlights some of the earnest issues. One of these is the reprehension from Blacks, that the conception of feminism was ideologically organised under the domination of White women. Holmes recounts:

> There were unquestionably 'ideological barriers' constructed by Black liberation that stood in the way of Black women's joining white women's liberation; but ideological barriers were erected privilege by white (as well to the extent that the white women's movement privileged) gender oppression over racial oppression. (79)

Here, Mary Holmes cites the arguments of many other theorists about racial exclusions.Significantly, the nature of discriminatory processes practiced by White women to expel Black women is consequential. For them, the racial issue becomes a profound social problem than the problems of gender. It implies that there are theoretical situations where the issues of subordinate women and Blacks cannot be

discussed within the standpoint of the general perception of discrimination. Moreover, through their autobiographies, Bama and Maya Angelou record the imprints of deeper and wider exclusion faced by women of their community. In her *Black Feminist Thought,* Hill Collins highlights that the whole of American epistemology lies within the paradigm that subsists and perpetuates to exist within the hegemony of White men. Hence, the Black feminist epistemology will have a strong basis when a political situation emerges from the White man's authority. Hill Collins points out that:

> Because elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship. As a result, U.S. Black women's experiences as well as those of women of African descent transnationally have been routinely distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge. (251)

Black feminists and downtrodden Dalit women are amidst various forms of social exclusion. Maya Angelou and Bama look from that subordinate position. Patricia Hill Collins suggests that in the current cultural environment in Europe, virtually, all cultural institutions are under the control of White men. Music, literature, day-to-day exchanges and such structures exist under their control.

There are many limitations in analysing the social position of African-American women compared to the social status of Dalit women in India by focusing on some autobiographies. Concepts of other social sciences besides the literary text also help to make the subject matter of this comparison more meaningful. Amartya Sen, the world-renowned Indian economist, compares the living standards and

average life expectancy of Blacks in the United States and other third world countries, including India and Sri Lanka. He says:

> It turns out that Chinese men and those in Kerala in India decisively outlive the American black men in terms of surviving to older age groups. Even African American women end up having a similar survival pattern for the higher ages as the much poorer Chinese, and decidedly lower survival rates than the even poorer Indians in Kerala. So it is not only the case that American blacks suffer from relative deprivation in terms of income per head vis-à-vis American whites, they also are absolutely more deprived than the low-income Indians in Kerala (for both women and men), and the Chinese (in the case of men), in terms of living to ripe, old ages. (620)

Such observations based on the social status points out that Black women in the United States are worse off than the poor in the Third World countries. It is noteworthy to mention that Amartya Sen has made such a comparative analysis two decades before this thesis which focuses on a comparative study on the historical conditions and social status of Black women in America and Dalit women in India is attempted.

Bell Hooks, an American feminist writer, critically opines that women of Black descent in America have been subjected to the most heinous and horrific dehumanisation and exclusions. Black woman's life is muted by the experiences of boundless pain and violence. Such silences are not an isolated one, but a cumulative recollection of the misery of Black women. She points out that there is a pragmatic world around her that sickens the entire clan of Black women. Hooks states:

> We did share the understanding that it is difficult for black women to construct radical subjectivity within white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, that our struggle to be "subject," though similar, also differs from that of black men, and that the politics of gender create that difference. (80)

This is not completely a foreign experience for Dalit women either. Still, there are obvious distinctions on some levels, especially in the manifestation of the subjectivity of the African descents in America, which was formed around colour. Bell Hooks emphasises, "In a white supremacist context "loving blackness" is rarely a political stance that is reflected in everyday life. When it is present it is deemed suspect, dangerous and threatening" (26-27). Hooks argues for another way to look at Blackness, Black subjectivity and Whiteness.

In his second autobiography, Langston Hughes highlights many layers of colours between Black and White. Black is not a mere colour, so is White. He elaborates:

> In spite of the fact that Cuba is distinctly a Negroid country, there exists a sort of triple color line. This triple line in varying degrees of application is common to all the West Indies. At the bottom of the color scale are the pure blooded Negroes, black or dark brown in color. In the middle are the mixed blood; the light browns, mulattoes, golden yellow and near whites with varying textures. (IWIW 10)

In powerful language, Langston Hughes opines that, as region, climate and background change, the race and approach of the people towards men also change.

Here, colour works as a yardstick for social and political exclusions. In a broad sense, autobiographies taken for comparison here subtly follow different contexts where exclusions work.The Political conditions of voicelessness is formed from the historical dilemmas.The subtle politics of those dilemmas can be unearthed from the autobiographies of the excluded.They live with a scattered, dismantled self, which is shadowed from the mainstream experiences. The history of the subaltern and the outcastes, as Ranajith Guha opines, is something that should be revealed by stooping over and looking subtly into it (Guha1-12). Such gazes regarding the subaltern life and history is an effect created by the mainstream history writing gimmicks. In terms of Agamben, the history of the excluded society is that of the history of Homo Sacers (Deuber-Mankowsky 6). In traditional history, people who keep society at the core of their labour are perceived as excluded from the mainstream.

The Present of Voicelessness

The history of voicelessness can, in many ways, be the history of powerlessness.Yet, the history of powerlessness may not have to be the history of community formation and existence. Because, the content of the autobiographies of Bama, Maya Angelou, Omprakash Valmiki, and Langston Hughes is the history of exerting society that serves as the foundation of sustaining society. Hence, they are at the centre of their respective communities. The past and present of the African-American slaves and Dalits are the history of production and social construction. It is the history of those who are dedicated and have sacrificed for the community. They are excluded only in the traditional confines of power structures.

Voicelessness, sometimes, becomes just a name for labour (‘Adhwanam’ in Sanskrit). The word ‘Dhwanam’ means voice and ‘Adhwanam’ (labour), in that sense, is voicelessness. It means that an excessive amount of labour leads to voicelessness. Here, voicelessness does not designate that there is no sound or verbalisation at all.The history of diverse use of verbalisation and language can be traced in the lives of Dalits and slaves, frequently,among the subaltern Dalit women and Black women.The diversity and richness of voices and experiences in Langston Hughes, Omprakash Vakmiki, Bama, and Maya Angelou are cultural capital that is the result of their extra labour. The extra labour they undertake is deliberated as ‘exertion’ in this thesis, considering the political implication of the term. Compared to the exertion experiences in the social life of Omprakash Valmiki and Langston Hughes, the testimonies of Maya Angelou and Bama bring out that the exertion experience of subaltern women is higher. It is a different social world and exertion experience of women who are separated from men.To enter that world, to the world of subaltern women, new approaches, criteria and concepts are required. Scholars like Kamala Visweswaran suggest that domesticisation is the reason why women are expelled from the mainstream, especially from the male-centered exchanges. Visweswaran states:

> But even where recent work by Subaltern Studies historians such as Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty situates gender as a structuring principle of nationalist and colonial relations, deftly accounting for how ideas of wifely domesticity mark the formation of (male) nationalist subjectivity, their own complicities in identifying the domesticization of women , prevent

> them from seeing such as a strategy for the containment of women's agency, of asking what it is that makes women subaltern. (88)

The answer to the question, 'what is domesticisation?' reveals that women have to deal with an extra amount of labour within the house than men. If one argues that excess labour silences women, it may mean that some sort of social experiences freed from physical labour gets more traditional visibility. If the exertion is valued, women should be placed at the centre of these social contemplations. To historicise and ascertain extra labour of subordinate women, there is no need to stoop down to the ground as Ranajith Guha authoritatively mandates. (1-12). Even in the subaltern studies, women are pushed into those outlines established by the visibility of men.

Patricia Hill Collins in the *Black Feminist Thought* remarks about the marginal quest that has to be made on Black women's work. Subordinate women denied access to social visibility through extra labour like mainstream men. Such are solemn questions to be answered. Curiously, even Patricia Hill Collins does not verbally express anything about the necessity of emphasising the visibility of exertion of the subaltern women. In short, she is governed by the same political interests that seek to fit women into the existing male patterns. Patricia Hill Collins writes:

> In general, Black feminist analyses of Black women's work emphasize two themes. On the one hand, much scholarship investigates how Black women's paid work is organized within intersecting oppressions of race, class and gender. Documenting Black women's labor market status in order to see the

> general patterns of race and gender inequality is one primary area of analysis. (52)

In reality, the issue of traditional norms about the content of the social sphere is paramount here. In the context of a culture, where physical labour is berated in discussions centered on the socio-cultural spheres, one needs to conceptualise the nullification and degradation of the manual labour. Even while, there is high social visibility in the spheres related to the physical labour and production of the subaltern, that cultural and political necessity is being pushed out or obscured by the mainstream. It is meaningless to lament the voicelessness of the subaltern society even when there are multiple levels of social visibility in the public sphere. It suggests that social discourses are formed regarding the authenticity of the documented evidence. In the context of voicing specific experiences through the writings and narratives that get a privileged position over the value of exertion, the voicelessness becomes a lame excuse for exclusion. It suggests that ,it is not the absence of the subaltern, but to mark their absence, documented evidence is taken as a referent. Professor Nizar Ahamed states:

> When the physical exertion and objective of the work are separated on the existential grounds, the labour turns into non-work. While the physical exertion- labour- is attached to an external sense of toil isolating it from the radiant-activity-context of the body, the concepts of work and labour are to be viewed distinctively. Thus, the othered labour is created when the work gets separated from the natural and easier exertions of the body. (100)

This ‘othered’ labour produces and maintains hierarchical relations of the downtrodden.That is why Dalit, Black, and downtrodden women are expelled from the same society they have erected.

Spaces of voicelessness

Spaces are vital, because the process of exclusion begins primarily on spaces. Enquiries like ‘Where do Dalits and downtrodden live in India?’ and ‘What are the socio-economic resources they have?’, especially, the resources with market value within the conventional casteist and patriarchal society, and so on, are connected to spaces. About their habitat, Valmiki writes:

> On the edges of the pond were the homes of Chuhras. All the women of the village, young girls, older women, even the newly married brides would sit in the open space behind those homes at the edges of the ponds to take a shit…All the quarrels of the village would be discussed in the shape of a Round Table Conference at this same spot. (1)

Valmiki, here openly affirms the spaces he shares and the position he holds in the social spaces for being a Dalit man in a caste-ridden Indian society.

The caste system in India is complex with its bifurcated hierarchical communities. They keep different social boundaries, disapprove of any sort of marital relations, interconnectedness and any means of exchange among themselves. Omprakash Valmiki begins his story by speaking about these divided boundaries. It means that he looks at life from the margins. Further elucidation is needed on how those who maintain mainstream society through labour, and how those who stand as

the backbone of productive systems and ethics are demoted to margins instead of to centre. It is a relevant question, and the answer to this question leads to capsizing the existing social structure and its stratification.To maintain society through labour is a matter of pure ethical and political significance. There is a solemn issue in arguing that the basic class is/on the margins. It is a hypothesis that is used as the basis of the subaltern studies.They advocate the subaltern groups as communities living on the margins. Subalterns are analysed continuously under the assumption that they lack the power and financial capital.

Subaltern studies face a crisis as they lack concepts that examine interactions in the social system by bringing the subalterns towards the centre of the society. It happens because all social science projects are manifested by keeping the subaltern in their former positions themselves. How one who lives amid loud noises becomes voiceless is the lacking rudimentary issue in these approaches. Some of the most important questions are, 'Who is looking at the subaltern scenario?', 'Where is s/he looking from?', 'What is the approach s/he pursuing with?', and so on.It is under the shade of these perspectives that the lack called voicelessness appears.

Omprakash Valmiki, Langston Hughes, Bama and Maya Angelou fall in the lineage of those who made greater voices. The subaltern autobiographies in 19th and 20th centuries reflect a history of distinct and plurality of voices. Langston Hughes, too, has a long history of building living in a society that lacks the sensitivity to capture so many different voices. Such recollections do not emanate from the margins. All of them emanate from the centres. Those books contain lives and descriptions of generations of slaves who fed a nation through their labour. To

emphasise how powerful a link was their ancestry in history, Langston Hughes recounts a fragment from the life of his Indian grandmother. Hughes writes:

> Through my grandmother's stories always life moved, moved heroically towards an end. Nobody cried in my grandmother's stories. They worked, or schemed, or fought. But no crying. When my grandmother died I didn't cry either, something about my grandmother's stories (without her ever having said so) taught me the uselessness of crying about anything (40).

The stories that Hughes' grandmother recounts are not mere stories. They are the routes and truths she had surpassed in history. There is the legacy of great exertion, fortitude, and confidence that envisions society. Moreover, there is not an absence of voices; instead, there is loud echo.These are the signs of what they were in history. In nutshell, it signifies that they were not on the margins, but in the centre itself. Hence, the essence and soul of the subaltern Black and Dalit can be seen not in the spaces of silence, but the centre of a plurality of voices. Their place is amidst those who make the world. There are social depth and profoundness in their exchanges. The substructure of this sociality is the plurality of voices, richness and examples engendered out of it. Bama expresses her wonders:

> 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 streets. So why

> would they need to come to our area? Besides, there was a big school in the Naicker street which was meant only for the upper- caste children. (7)

The mechanics of exertion that Bama theorises is important. Subordinates maintain social responsibility to keep the non-working class.Without visibility, the voice and presence of the subaltern, other castes and communities cannot exist. In the caste system, the generosity and supplemental liabilities of the subaltern are overturned and the generosity of the upper-castes is transformed into kindness and commiseration. Because of this, the subaltern is pushed to the edges. Marginalisation, indeed, is an ideological husk. By using myths, legends, religion, and dominant ideologies, the upper-caste societies and Whites upturn the dimensions of socialism and productive relations.

Bama reiterates that the forces of caste system over body and mind encircle the lower-castes in every aspect of everyday life. She states:

> In the society if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste-difference does not disappear. Wherever you look, however much you study, whatever you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy...if you are born into a low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle. (26-27)

Bama refers to the state of degradation she had undergone at each moment as a subaltern Dalit woman.

Divided Identity and Body

In the caste system, labour, social experiences, and everyday practices hierachise each man and woman at every moment.This stratification exists and perpetuates in the form of layers. On comparative level, Dalit women do the extra social labour than Dalit men. In the caste system, the same relations and equations do not exist regarding gender and social status. Different levels of capital are intertwined in various ways within the upper and lower class hierarchy. In addition to the extra labour one does to maintain the society, Dalit women have to work strenuously to fortify their own family, too. Bama describes the plight of Dalit women:

> When I saw our people working so hard night and day, I often used to wonder from where they got their strength. And I used to think, that at the rate they worked, men and women both, every single day, they should really be able to advance themselves. But of course, they never received a payment that was appropriate to their labour. And another thing. Even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. I could never understand why. (54-55)

Bama, here, points out the unjust social positioning of women evicted without any value for their work inside and outside the home. The yardstick is not how much work is done but by a man or a woman. Therefore it could be made clear that the social system applies the logic of tradition upon Dalit women. Since women are not valued as individuals within the tradition, equal pay for equal work does not exist in such social contexts. When men are treated as individuals, Bama underlines

that women, especially, Dalit women are viewed with discrimination. While seeking the underlying cause of this discrimination against women, the ideology of religion, caste system, and patriarchy are being condemned. In India, it is generally seen that all religious affairs have a long association with the hierarchy of the caste system. That is why social reformers like Ambedkar have advocated to disown Hinduism. Raja Sekhar Patteti talks about Ambedkar's approach towards Hinduism and states:

> Ambedkar has lucidly exposed the Hindu scheme of Divine Governance laid bare in *Manusmriti* (The code of Manu Laws). He has critically exposed Manu's scheme of ordained unfettered slavery that discouraged inversion of the social order. Manu has classified slavery and has confined it to the Shudras. Manu has ordained social and religious inequality. (407)

The physical labour enforced upon certain communities makes them excluded from the centre. Therefore, such enforced labour shouldered by people in the margins could be considered as 'exertion'. To escape from their everyday physical labour the upper-caste societies hierarchise the society, and impose such labour upon the marginalised communities. Such bondage has many social, emotional, and psychological layers. Ambedkar was trying to problematise the ideological layers of slavery.Women are more vulnerable and exploited than men within the patriarchal structure of religious doctrines and practices.

Bama talks about the nature of stratification she sees and experiences within Hinduism and Christianity as well. Bama points out the intensity of discrimination that children in the Convent school assimilated.She declares:

> As a token gesture they took four or five poor children into the school. These wretches usually shunned the rich ones and lurked in corners, trembling. Every now and then there would be complaints about them. The rich children would say we don't want to sit next to these ones, they are dark-skinned, they are poor, they are ugly, they don't wear nice clothes. Even in a play or dance performance the rich children didn't want to put on the costume of the poor. (112)

Here, Bama exposes the walls of stratifications and divisive policy that exist among the young students in the school; which is generally regarded as a positive space in everyday life. She points out that in school, vigorous stratifications perplexed by colour, caste, occupation, and other factors exist. Both Maya Angelou and Bama generally share realisation about their space and status in the social hierarchy. It suggests that subjectivity in the marginalised autobiographies is self-reflective on many levels. Lack of self-reflectiveness is the main reason for the marginalisation based on caste, race and gender. It is not the case for the marginalised, but this also makes sense for White, elite and male subject existing in the centre of discourse, too. Only when Dalits, downtrodden and Blacks self-reflectively identify their subjectivity, do the upper-classes recognise their social status. In other words, self-reflectivity as a social process is a two-way process. While the social positioning of the upper-lower relations is unleashed, the untying process extends to both directions in a similar fashion.

Presence and Absence of the Voice: Context of Self-Reflectivity

Dalit community in India, and Black community in America acquire reflectivity in the unique evolutionary stages of social conditions. In this thesis, autobiographies, especially, autobiographies of Black/Dalit men, and Black/ Dalit women are chosen as a medium to problematise the presence of the voiceless. The autobiographies which are taken for analysis in this thesis are quite pertinent. They are powerful narratives written in the social context where the print media is widespread with printed books, prose literature, literacy, and literary publishings. It suggests that it will not be possible to problematise the presence or absence of Black/Dalit men and Black/Dalit women's lives before the advent of printing and autobiographical literature. In that historical context, the absence of medium was quite an important factor. Moreover, the medium is not a neutral thing. It gets evolved through different political circumstances and priorities within the special structure of privileges. It is impossible to reach social consensus by discussing the presence or absence in the medium.

The nature of representation and reflection within an autobiography is relevant only in the structure of a medium. It is worth mentioning here, because the thrust area of this thesis is the presence of the voiceless. Along with this, it is relevant to quote a few lyrics that would problematise the written history of Poykayil Appachan, the redeemer of slave-castes in Kerala. Appachan states:

No, not a single letter is seen
On my race
So many histories are seen

On so many races

Scrutinize each one of them

The whole histories of the world

Not a single letter is seen

On my race (17)

These lines reveal, why Dalit men, Black men, Dalit women, and Black women are often absent in earlier autobiographical literature. Appachan's lines reveal such questions, too, while searching for the presence, absence,and voicelessness of a society. Hence, writing about Dalit men, Black men, Dalit women, and Black women should start with the question "Who writes for whom?" (Mukherjee xv).While addressing the marginalised autobiographies, even if it problematises the question of 'who' and 'for whom', it may not be possible to unravel the power relations within it.Whether written for Dalits or Blacks, by a Dalit or Black, the content, vocabulary, emphasis, and ideologies of narratives are subject to forces of persistent power structure.Omprakash Valmiki shares some questions which are part of the self-reflectiveness underlying beneath their life experiences. Valmiki records an instance from his school days when the teacher details the poverty-stricken life of Dronacharya and Ashwathama.Valmiki writes:

> Once in school, Master Saheb was teaching the lesson on Dronacharya. He told us, almost with tears in his eyes, that Dronacharya had fed flour dissolved in water to his famished son, Ashwatthama, in lieu of milk. The whole class had responded with great emotion to this story of Dronacharya's dire poverty. This episode was penned by Vyasa , the author of the

> *Mahabharata* to highlight Drona's poverty. I had the temerity to stand up and ask Master Saheb question afterwards. So Ashwatthama was given flour mixed in water instead of milk, but what about us who had to drink mar? How come we were never mentioned in any epics? Why didn't an epic poet ever write a word on our lives? (23)

Dalit organisations get strengthened in the emergence of the different self-reflectivity streams in each categorical spheres.When one Dalit student asks such a question, it becomes an event, because no one else was asking such questions. There are many social reasons behind not trying to ask such questions. It is within such power structures, writers like Omprakash Valmiki make self-reflective declarations through autobiographies.

Joothan becomes an 'event' in the literary sphere, because it creates a public society, where social behaviour, aptitudes, and sense of justice are consummately different from the social conditions that preceded the work. It may suggest that the political background where the self-reflection happens is consequential.With the emergence of incipient discourses on equity and individuality, the traditional caste-driven values and sense of equity are undermined. In this context, the advocates of the new value system enter into the public sphere. For the same reason, the uniqueness of Black's life experiences that Langston Hughes portrays in his autobiographies becomes an important part of Black's self-reflection. One of the most significant ideas pointed out by people like J.M Waghmare is that a special sense of harmonious self is reflected among the marginalised autobiographies. He writes:

> Why is our situation so marginal? Where are our roots to be found?... They too are in search of their identities. They are however forging their identities in the crucibles of their plays, poems, short stories, and novels. Their writings are autobiographies of their communities. A strong feeling of "we-ness" is writ large in their books. (22)

This "we-ness" is formed in the cultural atmosphere of self-reflectivity. Such identification owes to the entry of Dalits and subordinates into the new realms of printing, book publishing, literacy, and education.

In the context of a sizably voluminous rupture in the traditional values of the society and the structure, micro-histories, particularly, the subaltern studies become relevant. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states:

> The subaltern studies group seems to me to be revising the general definition and its theorizations by proposing at least two things: first, that the moment (s) of change to be pluralized and plotted as confrontations rather than transition (they would thus be seen in relation to histories of domination and exploitation rather than within the great modes-of production narrative) and, secondly, that such changes are signalled or marked by a functional change in sign-systems. (330)

For society, especially those who have a sense of conventional value system and aptitudes, special attention towards the social spheres of the subaltern groups is a move against the priorities and interests that have existed so far. It connotes that the centre of the subject itself is changing.When Dalit/Black men and Dalit/Black

women enter the field of narrative spheres, the interests and approaches also change. Moreover, there is a large displacement in the structure and content of all traditional discourse models, too. Foregrounding the subaltern historians, Spivak says that this happens with the ingress of the subaltern (331). In this research study also much prominence is given to the marginalised autobiographies.Such autobiographies make way to put forward new subjects, emphases, and approaches regarding the social situations, people, and social justice.

Subaltern learners in the analyses of the narratives, subjects, and approaches, give particular emphasis on problematising the world consciousness, norms and social resources of colonialism, widely in the Indian context and partly in the United States. It is persuasive while approaching autobiography as a literary genre or as historical writing. While talking about marginalisation and centralisation, even on the levels of Black, Dalit, and Black/Dalit gender status, one could detect that the social situations of the existing centralities and priorities on epistemological issues are formed into several layers. One important thing among them is the construction of the subject-subjectivity of colonialism.

The space of subaltern autobiographies is not any centralised spaces, nor does it end at home or work-space.But the subaltern entity is positioned in the totality of extremely complex and decentralised social experiences.For the marginalised subaltern communities, their caste, religion, kinship relations, occupational relations, exchanges with the world, interactions with soil, human beings and other co-habitants, the distances they cover in such interactions, their footprints, and similar social exchanges provide new world experiences.The

diversities of each person's experiences and their affinity with the community signify individuality that has spread into society.The levels of social consciousness shared by Dalits and Blacks are concentrated in their exertion. Maya Angelou and Bama share politics of empirical evidence by pointing out that exertion is used not to sustain oneself, but to maintain the society.

In the current social sphere, women are left to be absent in a wider context or voiceless. It points to the male-centred content in the emphasis of the existing discourses. The division of gender spaces can be seen in the subject-matter created in the autobiographies of Bama and Maya Angelou. If the lives of women who are exorcised on many levels are reflected as feeble voices and groans in the content of male autobiographies, there will be greater visibility to female life in the autobiographies of women. Every woman who writes an autobiography does not come to it all alone, but comes in large group. An extensive network of women from their social sphere, including late grandmothers, neighbours, friends and sisters, enter the autobiographies. Bama writes about an epidemic that has spread among the family. She states:

> The school gave us a holiday though. And just by chance, my younger brother and sister both fell ill. It seemed it was always like that with the twins. Whatever illness they had, they always had it together. My mother took one child, my grandmother the other, and they set off, carrying them, to walk the two miles to the hospital. As they left, they told me to look after the house and see to my other sister. At that time, I was the oldest child among

> those of us who were at home. After me, there was my seven year old sister. (24)

A lot of people come together in this autobiography. Because, it is the autobiography of a woman, especially, the autobiography of a Dalit woman. The bonds among the joint family, especially, those among the subaltern women are broad and strong. The mobility of Dalit women is pointed out here.

Women in the subaltern societies exhibit strong sense of survival, which is absent among the upper-caste women. It is something socially assimilated in the context of a variety of exertion and co-existence they indulge in. This survival instinct may be seen as the socio-cultural capital on many levels. In the autobiographies of Maya Angelou and Bama and many other subaltern women, in general, the manifestation of this capital can be seen in their surviving struggle. The social interactions of the lower-caste women and the kind of labour they do to sustain society cannot be found among the upper-caste women. Little mobility is discerned in their living spaces. Uma Chakravarti states:

> The high value to restrictive mobility and tight control over the sexuality of the women of the higher caste was regarded as a crucial basis for being granted the right to high status for the uppermost castes whether brahmana, kshatriya, or vaisya...The control over female sexuality was in common even though other cultural practices might vary among these castes: meat eating, for example, among kshatriyas. It was expected therefore that upwardly mobile castes would adopt new practices for their women folk….both the rajibansis, who claimed Kshatriya status, and the chandalas, who adopted the

> name of namasudras, banned their women from going to the hat- the marketplace- and sell goods, which they had done earlier. (129)

Such taboos are not related to the downtrodden women, since they are seen involved in farming, animal husbandry, domestic chores, sanitation, and such exertions in everyday life. It is understood that the 'high status' of the so-called upper-class women was barbaric.The mobility experienced by the subaltern women in society is not permissible for the upper-class women. It happens because the male dominance about sexuality was a set of rules imposed to preserve the caste purity. Uma Chakravarti points out that:

> Enforced monogamy for women in particular, also played an important role substantiating the purity of the genealogical lineage of the caste, the creation of a pure unalloyed past which was being reflected in the new histories of these castes. (129)

Another important fact is that the codification of the man-woman relationship in India into monogamous and nuclear families dates back to the colonial period. It creates a unique situation that cancels the previous mobility and choices about women. In nutshell, the values of assimilation associated with colonisation served as multiple layers for women. Maya Angelou repeatedly talks about the prejudices of Black man about Black woman. She writes:

> When I said nothing, he relaxed and leaned back in his chair, spreading his vast thighs. "To an African man, the act of sex is only important as long as it

> lasts. It is not the factor which holds a family together. It pleases and relieves tension, so that one can get about the business of living".
>
> I asked with sarcastic sweetness. "And what about African women? Don't they want pleasure and release?". (HW 304)

In this conversation, Maya Angelou poses some questions which help her enter the politics of Black feminism. Angelou, here, questions the prevalent public consciousness of the African man regarding body, mind, and worldly experiences of man and woman. She repeatedly depicts the emotional, mental, and physical exclusion Black women had to encounter in the patriarchal society that celebrates their voicelessness. The encroachment upon Black women's feminine identity is always questioned and problematised in her literary expressions. Moreover, Angelou asserts a gender gap between Black women and Black men regarding their bodies and sexuality. The division of gender spaces can be seen in the subject matter formed through the autobiographies of Bama and Maya Angelou. Angelou recounts a conversation between her and Vus, "A man (An African Man) requires a certain amount of sexual gratification much more than a woman needs, wants, or understands". That's a lie, Vus. You're not a woman, how do you know what I need?" (HW 304). Even while problematising the widespread perceptions among Whites about Black body and sexuality, Angelou questions the reductionist and patriarchal attitude of Black men upon their gender counterparts. She describes:

> In the United States, White men with the implements of slavery and racial oppression had taken from Black men their names, languages, power, wives, daughters, innate sense of self-value, and their confidence. Because they had

> been unable, however, to kill the sexuality, white men began to envy it, extol it, adore and fear it. (HW 306)

Patricia Hill Collins points out how the prevailing patriarchal society undermines the identity of Black women. She discerns that, "As Evelynn Hammonds points out, "Black women's sexuality is often described in metaphors of speechlessness, space, or vision; as a 'void' or empty space that is simultaneously ever-visible (exposed) and invisible, where black women's bodies are already colonized" In response to this portrayal, Black women have been silent" (133). In the existing discourse, the patriarchal society has marked women as absent. It means that the social system is meant to exclude Black women from all centres of power and participation, and from religious and political spheres.

Through her autobiographies, Maya Angelou reminds and testifies that she survives as a woman, a Black woman in a racial and gender-sensitive society. The testimony of Black women is about proposing newer ideas, models, and ideologies that are capable of stirring up not only the world of Whites, but also of Black men. As part of this, the marginalised societies seek new world ethics and a sense of justice using new contents and other means. In this way, the marginalised autobiographies enter the mainstream with unique contents and try to manifest a new world.

The arguments, explanations, statements, and testimonies in subaltern autobiographies are the codes and patterns of the material world. These autobiographical texts reproduce and mitigate such rules. Patricia Hill Collins points out how such texts raise question marks towards the set rules of the material world.

She states:

> Those who control the schools, news media, churches and government suppress Black Women's collective voice. Dominant groups are the ones who construct Black women as "the embodiment of sex and the attendant invisibility of black women as the unvoiced, unseen-everything that is not white. (134)

Collins, here, highlights the politics of the absence of Black women in the social spheres. The fact is that, spaces where Black women work are far more important than the contribution of schools, news media, and churches in sustaining society. But such spaces never ever receive visibility. Bama and Angelou see the spaces outside the mainstream,especially, where Dalits and Blacks exert and carry out exchanges as discourse spaces in their autobiographies. As far as a society is concerned, spaces where core activities occur enters into visibility is an ethical social work. In this sense, autobiographies of Dalits and Blacks are testimonies that contribute enough to sustain the marginalised society.Therefore, thinkers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak call subaltern consciousness as collective consciousness (43). Autobiographies of the subaltern are morally tied to its sociality.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Analysis of Black and Dalit autobiographies helps to fathom the nature of life experiences of the marginalised communities in America and India. As a unique literary genre, the signified subject matter makes Blacks and Dalits distinctive from other conventional canonical narratives. In the thesis titled “Voice of the Voiceless: A Comparative Study on the Selected Autobiographies of Black and Dalit Writers”, autobiographies are approached not only as a literary genre, but the precise political content of the subject matter are also taken into consideration for the comparison of Black and Dalit social conditions.The factors behind the social exclusion and voicelessness of the subaltern society, especially, Black men, Dalit men, Black women, and Dalit women, are enquired in the thesis within the theoretical framework of the subaltern and cultural studies. Autobiographies of Omprakash Valmiki, Langston Hughes, Bama and Maya Angelou are taken as a tool for problematising and analysing voicelessness of the downtrodden communities in the different socio-political, and cultural environment of India and America. *Joothan* is an autobiography written by Omprakash Valmiki, a Dalit man from the socio-political context of the Indian caste system. *The Big Sea* is written by Langston Hughes, a Black man in the background of racial discrimination in America. *Karukku* is an autobiography from Bama, a Dalit woman who tries to contextualise socio-political and gender hegemony within the framework of the Indian caste system. *The Heart of a Woman* by Maya Angelou is a representational

autobiography from a Black woman who establishes her womanhood and Black identity in the racial context of the United States.

The thesis attempts to enquire the reasons for the voicelessness of Black and Dalit communities. The caste and race systems in India and America make the subaltern communities voiceless. Therefore, voicelessness is related to the resources that determine and maintain the social status of an individual in terms of capital, resources, power, and so on. Hence, voicelessness is paralleled with the absence of food, lack of justice, and lack of equal opportunities. It is social discrimination, too. This chapter attempts to sum up the argument so far discoursed through the previous chapters and an effort is made here to deliberate the findings and conclusions.

There are many similarities in the historical contexts in the formation of autobiographies within Black community in the United States and Dalit community in India. As both the communities are socially and politically distinct, their life experiences are subjected to comparisons on many levels considering the political and social nature of the exclusion. In *Dalits and African Americans: A Study in Comparison,* S.D Kapoor states:

> Comparisons between oppressed groups are not only natural but also sometimes necessary; natural because their struggle to reclaim the human space denied them for centuries is almost similar; necessary because the group that has taken a lead in reclaiming that space influences the other group in devising their strategies, far removed from the area of their operation. (13)

Kapoor, here, tries to highlight the necessity of comparison between Black and Dalit social conditions to ignite the society.

The thesis puts forward many similarities in the level of exploitation and exclusion of Black men, Dalit men, Black women, and Dalit women in their distinctive communities. Caste is an ideological attack and an intricate spectrum of issues. Race and caste show similarities in class consciousness. There are differences in the level of identity representation and discrimination. It also suggests that the experiences of these two social classes vary regarding the gender.The discrimination based on gender is unequivocal in the case of Dalit women and Black women. The layers of exclusion are thus complex and are intricately signified in each region, identity exchanges, and values.

Although Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan, The Big Sea* of Langston Hughes, *Karukku* of Bama and *The Heart of a Woman* by Maya Angelou share similarities at the level of class consciousness, it is not often possible to relate the hierachisation of Dalits with the visibility experiences of Blacks. Moreover, stratifications among Blacks do not exist as extensively and structurally as among Dalits in India.There are many differences between Black and Dalit identities in the social structure and ideologies. Arjun Dangle in the *Poisoned Bread* compares Black and Dalit social conditions as:

> Both have been victims of a peculiar class structure; the Black of a racial type and the Dalit, of Untouchability. Race is nature-made while caste is man-made…. Man alone is responsible for this unholy distinction based on colour and caste…. There is no difference whatsoever between the position

> of the Blacks in America and that of the untouchables in India…. Both were kept behind the bars of fatalism. In order to perpetuate this imprisonment the Whites resorted to some myths and symbols from the Bible, and the high class Hindus, to the Vedas and the Manusmriti. (Dangle 314)

Factors such as education, power over resources, religion, labour, body, space, and so on largely exclude Blacks and the everyday lives of Dalits. From the analysis of Black and Dalit exclusion in the light of the selected autobiographies, the thesis resolves that theories and concepts that can lead to a more critical paradigm are required to identify their voicelessness.The socio-economic capitals and cultural resources are to be decentralised and envisioned from a theoretical perspective to understand a society historically. The existing concepts and methodologies are insufficient to critically weigh the social nature of discrimination based on colour, caste, class, and gender. The social nature of exclusion in each society has a different content. Hence, layers in the marginalisation process could be understood by formulating new methodologies concerning society. In India, the streams of Dalit and subaltern studies give special attention to the approaches of marginalisation process.

The second chapter, titled “The Context and Construction of the Voiceless” explored the theoretical ideologies about the Indian and African-American cultural contexts, where Dalit, Black and Dalit/Black gender subjectivity is formed. This chapter dealt with the theoretical concepts of caste, colour,and gender marginalisations in relation to labour, social resources, spaces and cultural hierarchies.The chapter focused on how Dalit men, Dalit women, Black men and

Black women are historically signified in narratives like autobiographies in different contexts in India and America. The content of all concepts related to religion, social science, art and literature lay a strong stream of anti-Dalit, anti-Black and anti-women ideologies.This chapter embraced an enquiry for more dynamic concepts that disintegrate the existing parameters and yardsticks about marginalisation.

Researchers do not find autobiographies confined to any specific discipline in literary and social studies.Autobiographies specify inter-textual relations with many disciplines. So, it is possible to analyse subjectivity formation, regions, and hierarchies of social groups through autobiographies. Hence, in this thesis, autobiographies are considered as tools to understand and explain the discourses of the marginalised society. This thesis brings forth life experiences of the marginalised communities that have been excluded from the traditional mainstream historical epistemological discourses and positions them at the centre.Consequently, the thesis posits a more decentralised epistemological environment that challenges the mainstream discourses.

Social vigilance behind the attempt to find political clues of marginalisation from the everyday life of the Black and Dalit communities is crucial. It is the concern for others that leads the autobiographical subject into writing an autobiographical narrative. Subaltern autobiographies focus on the subject's social awareness, interests, and priorities in specific spheres. That is the politics of social vigilance. The difference in the thematic emphasis sets the autobiographies of Black/Dalit men and Black/Dalit women apart from other conventional autobiographies.Therefore, traditional parameters and theories are insufficient to

define each specific community. That is the relevance of studies upon Black and Dalit autobiographies.Black, Dalit and gender representation in discourse spheres often point towards extra responsibility and social vigilance the marginalised had to undertake in the everyday social activities. Extra responsibility refers to the mental, emotional, and physical exertions contemplated as indispensable to sustain a society. Blacks and Dalits work harder than other communities by making other communities parasite on them. In essence, Blacks and Dalits are the ones who go through pains of extra labour, and physical and mental setbacks throughout their life.

To recognise how Black and Dalit identity formation becomes the manifestation of the *other*, one should closely follow subtle forms of ideologies and hegemony. The third chapter titled "The Othered Souls: Langston Hughes and Om Prakash Valmiki", mainly focused on the social forces that marginalise particular community, especially, with social power based on colour, caste,and gender characteristics.It does not mean that the chapter attempts to analyse all factors and indications leading towards the marginalisation process.The study on the selected autobiographies of Omprakash Valmiki and Langston Hughes is an attempt to bring them to special consideration.Through their autobiographies, Langston Hughes and Omprakash Valmiki historicised the existing power structures of the mainstream ideologies and its practices that refuse to regard human beings within the race and caste as social creatures or fellow beings.

Humans who have not yet become individuals and subjects are historically exposing desires, aptitudes, and experiences of exclusion through their autobiographies.The autobiographies taken for analysis in the third chapter of the

thesis provide enough evidence to problematise the manifestation of the modern man.These autobiographies are the testimonies of dehumanising experiences of American Blacks and Indian Dalits in their everyday lives. In society, hierarchies are formed by excluding a social being from the norms and ideologies that transform him/her into a social individual.The process of Dalit dehumanisation is deep-rooted over and above thousands of years in India. But, the African-American stratification historically seems not to be farther than 600 years. Race formation in America happened at the historical juncture of colonisation and migration. In this sense, the history of racial hierarchisation in America and the history of caste hierachisation in India erupt from a different social context.Consequently, the thesis observes that the complexity of casteism is profound than racial discrimination in the United States, considering the complexities arise out of caste hierarchisations within the lowest caste and the practices of exclusion within it. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* refers to the history of how these differences have taken root in other discourses, too, in the context of the autobiographical ideologies.

Black and Dalit autobiographies highlight the connection between social exclusion and natural resources. It is a political and crucial act as far as the everyday lives of Blacks and Dalits are concerned. Outwardly, it may not be possible to explain the relationship between proximities and distances with the resources. As said earlier in this thesis, Black and Dalit communities shape the social and natural resources into a commercial good with transaction values. Yet, the transaction agency falls upon mainstream society.The powerlessness over resources and disconnection from the transactions of these resources are homogenous social experiences in Black and Dalit social conditions.

While examining the social reflections of exclusion, the relationship between spaces and identity is also made clear.Dalits in India and Blacks in America spent most of their daily lives interacting with animals as part of their labour. The image of their habitat described in the autobiographies also provides a background for labelling Dalit and Black souls as the *other*.It is an indication that identity is expanding into more complex dimensions.Dalit social experiences voiced through the autobiographies of Omprakash Valmiki and Bama exhibit how space and cultural capital lead to marginalisation.Similarly, Black lives represented through the autobiographies of Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou also receive similar identification based on the spaces they share. Valmiki's *Joothan* and Bama's *Karukku* begin with a narration on the physical delineation of the living spaces of the villagers, which were drawn based on the caste. Bama describes, "Just at the entrance to the village there is a small bus stand. This is the terminus. The bus will take you no further. It is as if our entire world ended there" (6). The caste-based exclusion of spaces is a real and tangible experience for Dalits that would get embedded in their psyche to condition their self-perception. By revealing the ghettoised habitat of Blacks and Dalits in the autobiographical narratives, the autobiographers stress how social living for them has been a perpetual experience of segregation. Since the autobiographies that share Dalit experiences within Indian caste system and Black experiences living under White supremacy in America happen in different spaces, they remain distinct, too. One of the important conclusions the thesis puts forward is that the relationship between social space and identity determine the social status of Blacks and Dalits.The critical aspect is that social space works in the formation of identity and identity works in the formations

of social space mutually. It can mean that the distance from the centre to the margin depends on social space.It is not the psychological distance within the caste system that exists between Blacks and Whites. Even though Dalits and Blacks are marginalised, it is the social space in India and America that determines an individual's social status in particular historical context. The educational institutions, church, post office, Panchayat boards, milk depots, big shops, Church, and all other social institutions were set up only in the settlements of the upper-caste people.Dalits are allowed to draw water from a separate well and even the space for cremation is also separately set for them. Denial of common space and physical segregation of Dalits from the upper-caste habitats suggest the making of the *other*. The autobiographies of Black women and Dalit women indicate that the distance from the centre to the margins extends further in their case and distinct stratifications are formed within the existing formations.

Dalit liberation movements are considered as struggles with ideologies and practices that are only possible in the defence against the upper caste-centric system. Similarly, Black liberation movement is also contemplated as protest against the religious and Governmental exercise that has placed Whites over Blacks. In the Indian and African-American contexts, the struggle of the downtrodden communities for equality and liberation has shared voices.The roots of caste supremacy are historically the oldest and more complex ones. But White supremacy over Blacks initiated through colonialism has worldwide visibility and massiveness compared to the Dalit social conditions in India. Therefore, it persuades a more defensive preparation in the struggle for liberation than the one needed to defend

casteism in India.The analysis reveals that the extent of racism is wider than that of casteism in India. It happens, because the history of the African-American racist ideology and practices is not limited to the discourses confined to the United States only. The atmosphere of colonialism took on new forms and evolution in colonial counties. The writers like Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and all other African-American writers had to confront White supremacy, which has historically been a unique exercise of hegemony all over Europe. It has different content from the pre-colonial cultural atmosphere. Here, in this thesis, autobiographies are taken as a tool to study the social exclusion of Blacks and Dalits.The historical reason for the selection of autobiography as a field of study is colonialism itself. With the advent of colonial era, caste, and gender have changed drastically on many levels in India, too. Prose literature, literacy, printing and books spread in India in the colonial cultural atmosphere. Autobiographies become more pervasive as a literary genre in the wake of colonial cultural domination. Moreover, a comparison of race and caste as two distinct cultural categories is made possible in continuation to the postcolonial political experiences. In that sense, in its contents, this thesis discusses the postcolonial subject and subjectivity. In the thesis, this idea is only partially touched upon.

The fourth chapter of the thesis, titled “The Gendered Others: Maya Angelou and Bama”, formulated an analysis of the hierarchical and patriarchal nature of gender within the race system in America and the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of gender within the caste system in India. This chapter analyses how gender has discoursed within different social contexts. In India, gender does not

operate in linear fashion. Factors like caste and sub-caste categorisation within the caste system, occupation of women, household labour, animal husbandry, rearing the old and children, education, sexuality, extra burden of labour to share the public space, the hindrances due to patriarchy, religion, morality, and many such internal and external forces manifest the complex subjectivity of Dalit woman. Bama's *Karukku* posits its politics into these unjust social practices and exclusions. This autobiography reveals the inferior position of Dalit women in the Indian caste system. In *Joothan*, Valmiki refers to his girlfriend, who tries to form a friendship with him by misunderstanding him for an upper-caste Hindu. There are at least chances of being mistaken as an upper-caste Hindu for Dalit men in the spaces where they study or work. It suggests that modern spaces expand for men only. Even if a Dalit woman can sometimes transform into the social status of an upper-caste woman, she cannot transform her identity into the social status of a Dalit man or an upper-caste man. This happens because women are the designated victims of patriarchal discourses that undermine morality, occupation, extra labour, and so on. Institutions like religion, family, education, literature, and so on, which hinder women's access to the public sphere are identified as homogenous elements in Dalit and Black women's world experiences. Such worldly experiences are embodied in the conception of identity in the autobiographies of Bama and Maya Angelou. Despite this, there are many social experiences distinctive to both Black and Dalit women.

In India, a handful of modern spaces open for a Dalit woman to transform or disguise as an upper-class woman or a Dalit man as an upper-class man, even if it

happens accidentally. It is something related to the visibility of identity. It opens up for further studies on the relationship between physical dimensions of the body, especially the visual dimensions, genetic dimensions and social positions of Black and Dalit male and female bodies with identity. Often, the complexity and hierarchical relationship of the caste system seem to be variant and volatile in the race-based system. As the caste bears more hierarchical affiliation and internal imprints, it is easy to unravel the visibility and intensity of race in many realms. Though caste is innately determined, it is a cumulative form of ideologies and practices inherent in the body. The way caste is written within the human body is different from the physical markings of race. There is a notable context in Valmiki's autobiography, where his girl-friend and family mistook him for a Brahmin when she takes him to her home. He narrates:

> 'Yes, the SCs and the Muslims who come to our house, we keep their dishes separate,' Savita replied evenly…
>
> I pushed her away and asked, 'OK… would you like me even if I were an SC?'
>
> 'How can you be an SC?' she laughed.
>
> 'Why not, what if I am?' I had insisted.
>
> 'You are a Brahmin,' she said with conviction.
>
> 'Who told you that?'
>
> 'Baba'
>
> 'He is wrong. I am an SC.' I pull all my energy into those words. I felt that a fire had lit inside me. (Valmiki 97-98)

This context reveals the visibility of caste. Caste is something that is assimilated by the internal systems. According to Valmiki, the internal system is the failure of his girlfriend and her family to distinguish Valmiki's caste from the social atmosphere. It suggests that the caste of Valmiki was not something exposed through his appearance. But race, in essence, is generally different. The race has a concrete system and signs which are revealed through a single glance. Hence, in the visual dimension of discrimination, race has more intensity in comparison to caste. It points out that race and caste can only be discussed with many other social factors. It designates that a few more explanations are sometimes desired in special circumstances to reveal the caste.When Valmiki moves to another place, he is freed from the everyday relationship where he was born and brought up and is elevated to a newer social status.His caste identity is cancelled in the wake of migration from Uttar Pradesh to Maharashtra. Similarly, as Bama moved to convent life, she, too, was being mistaken for a non-Dalit. These incidents from Dalit lives have to be read in conjunction with many other factors such as occupation, education, and so on. As location changes, caste is likely to be obliterated in another discourse order. However, the visibility of race is being espoused on another level. Although there are physically distinct cultural identities, distinctive costumes, language, and similar factors between people of India, there are other aspects that nullify the cultural caste forces between Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.Even the rare possibility of such cancellation is less likely to occur at the race level. It means that there are at least several geographical areas in which race can be quickly identified. The levels of caste and race can only be defined by considering new levels of identity formation. Concepts about the essence of race can only be formed by understanding how the

formation and exchange of race are conceived in a society. The race is determined, exchanged and transformed in a socio-cultural context different from the Indian context in which caste operates. From the above-mentioned personal anecdote, Valmiki explains that caste is an identity that needs to be articulated. Race, on the other hand, is neither envisioned nor exchanged in a society in this manner. Race is as tangible as the dimensions of visibility determine it.Therefore it could be concluded that the complexities that arise out of the visibility aspect are more expansive and extensive in the case of Blacks in America.

The social mobility of the Dalit female body in the Indian caste society is not available for women of African descent in America. Not just the African-American women, but the African-American men also do not have the social mobility of Dalit men in India. Social mobility here means all sorts of independent undertaking, physical movements, choices, and selection. In nutshell, just like Omprakash Valmiki's experiences when he was mistaken for a Brahmin by his female friend and her family members, social environments to be mistaken as White are rare for Black men and women. It is related to Black and Dalit mobility and spheres of physical representation. Langston Hughes recalls an instance when he was sitting in a restaurant, "A white man came in and took the seat just across the table from mine. Shortly, I noticed him staring at me intently as if trying to puzzle out something. He stared at me a long time. Then, suddenly, with a loud cry, the white man jumped up and shouted: You're a nigger, ain't you?" (BS 50). It is perceived that Whites show a weird sense of recognising Black, even though Black has slightly different physical features and moves from one location to the other. In the chapter titled

"Negro" he shares another experience with an African who "Looked at me and would not believe I was a Negro. You see, unfortunately, I am not black" (BS 37), due to the copper brown of his skin and straight black hair. It is the 'physical imprint' of body and identity formation the thesis has put forward as an initial argument.

The social mobility experienced by Dalit women in the Indian social condition is greater than that of upper-caste women. It has been seen that Dalit women move liberally, take part in outdoor activities and engage with physical and manual labour rather than upper-caste women.Though hierarchical, such social enforcement liberates Dalit women and makes them actively engage with social spaces provided to them. These conditions, in a way, supply extra mobility and self-reflectivity to women of the lowest castes.

One of the most important experiences Maya Angelou recurred in her autobiography was about the social vigilance Black has to take against the intrusions of the traditional thinkers in her status as a downtrodden in a White world and Black patriarchal society. From many episodes in Black woman's life, it can be seen that there is repeated exercise of 'freedom' in the manner of infiltration irrespective of time and nature. These are forces that occur in the existing society, especially, in a society where Blacks and Whites are hierarchical.These are indications that draw attention to the moral dimensions of interpersonal relationships, freedom, privacy, and pride. Similarly, the social position of Dalit women also gets degraded in the caste system. The patriarchal structure widely formed within the African-American

racial society, and caste-based Indian society is also problematised. Behind the divisions of the spaces of Black women, the dimensions of Black male identity discourse,too, are working. It suggests that White people and Black men also play a major role in ensuring the othering of the public spaces of Black women. Just as Black women's literature in African-America counter the cultural and social domination of Whites and Black men, so do the Dalit women's literature in India protests against the proponents of the caste system and its socio-cultural dominion and gender discriminations. It is the reason for the potential similarities between Black and Dalit women subjects. At a micro level, the concepts of Black and Dalit are different.

Sexuality is a significant factor in the narratives about caste and race. The caste/Dalit hierarchy in India and the race/Black hierarchy in America exist on sexuality, too.The sexual choice is important for an individual. Sexuality is the fundamental factor that directly and indirectly determines caste and race ideologically and practically. But the narratives of events and description of sexuality lack in the autobiographies of Bama and Omprakash Valmiki. It can be taken as an indication of man-woman relations and the closed social structure of sexuality in India. In the autobiographies of Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou, the sexual choice is exposed as important events. It refers to the systematic nature of moral concepts in the man-woman relationship in Dalit lives. It also concludes that the African-American social structure is more open to sexual choice than Indian caste system.

The third chapter generally focused on distinctions in the social position of Black and Dalit women subjectivity. Here the thesis does not argue that the liberation of Dalit women can be achieved by comparing the social position of Dalit women to that of upper-class men and uplifting them into that status. Moreover, it does not share the idea that becoming White men is the way to the liberation of Black women.The thesis tries to explain the complexities of the system regarding the traditional transformation of Black and Dalit social position.

The fifth chapter, titled “Voicelessness in the Social Imagination: Issues of Caste and Race”, envisions a general comparison of Dalit and Black concepts detailed in the first chapter of the thesis. The Indian caste system is compared with racial issues of America along with specific issues of gender hierarchy. Caste itself is assimilated and reflected differently in the local communities of India. It has regional variations and impacts. Therefore, no single methodology and criteria can be adopted to understand and explain caste.The caste hierarchy in *Joothan* and the status of Dalit-Christian-woman detailed in Bama’s *Karukku* are principally different.These variations cannot be found so deeply in Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes. It implies that the complexities and discrepancies within the Indian caste system are not reflected as such in the African-American race system .Through the autobiographies of marginalised Blacks and Dalits, it is learned that the social dimension and depth of exclusion cannot be compared as tangible practice considering the experiential level.

In India, the caste and sub-caste stratifications provide Dalit men and women with more complex hierarchical social experiences than Black men and women in America. Dalit colonies are catogorised based on their caste and sub-castes, such as *Nadars, Koravars, Chakkiliyar, Kusavar, Palla* and *Paraya* (7). Bama pronounces the sub-caste divisions within the caste system and elaborates on the segregated spaces of the caste settlements:

> Beyond that, there is a stream. If it rains, it runs full of water. If not, it is nothing but a stinking shit field. To the left there is a small settlement of ten to twenty houses, known as Odapatti. It is full of Nadars who climb palmyra palms for a living. To the right there are the Koravar who sweep streets, and then the leather-working Chakkiliyar. Some distance away there are the Kusavar who make earthenware pots. Next to that comes the Palla settlement. Then immediately adjacent to that is where we live, the Paraya settlement. (7)

The complexities of sub-caste division in the Indian caste system do not allow one sub-caste to mingle with the other. There was a quoted incident in *Karukku,* where Bama describes the fight between the Paraya caste and the Chaaliyar community. The dispute started over the possession of the cemetery and ended up killing one Paraya man. Bama describes the incident, “Maama Paralokam spoke up with frenzied show of heroics, ‘What sort of low-down louts these are! It’s shameful that men of their sort should come and strike down our fellows. Chi, it’s a disgrace, it strikes. Never in history has it been known for a Paraya to die at the

hands of a Chaliyar'"(31). Thus, it could be concluded that Dalit social condition in India is intense than racial intricacies among the African-Americans.The patterns of social experiences of Black women cannot be compared to the Dalit caste and sub-caste hierarchy in India. It should be taken as a more linear, less complex social process.

The emphasis and content of Black and Dalit autobiographies differ from other literary genres. Deeper narrations about physical exertions, special relations with natural resources, cohabitation with animals, and other organisms and such content of the downtrodden lives are the basis for these distinctions. The downtrodden are marginalised or excluded from many other spheres due to the burden of extra labour forced upon them. Such discourse prevented the entry of the downtrodden into the public spaces rather made them invisible. The autobiographies of the downtrodden provide the marginalised subjects and subjectivities more public visibility through self-expression.The visibility of Black and Dalits through autobiographies, irrespective of their being big or small, try to signify newer society through different world experiences.

The identity of Black men, Dalit men, Black women, and Dalit women are fundamentally tangled to labour. Labour has directly connected to their body also. So an inordinate amount of labour leads to voicelessness and marginalisation. Compared to the exertion experiences in the social life of Omprakash Valmiki and Langston Hughes, the testimonies of Maya Angelou and Bama bring out that the exertion experience of the subaltern women is higher and discrimination is more.

She states, “Even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. I could never understand why” (55).

Dalits and Blacks spent most of their daily lives interacting with animals as part of their labour. Therefore, identification of Blacks and Dalits with animals happens .The human bodies were not regarded as individuals. Identification of Dalit bodies with animals happens in relation to the spaces of interaction. Social space determines the identity of Dalits and Blacks. Denial of common space and physical segregation of Dalits from the upper-caste habitats suggest the making of the *other*.

This thesis considers Black and Dalit autobiographies as paradigms to initiate the subaltern autobiographies into mainstream discourse centres in India and America. Another important argument the thesis puts forward is that it decentralises the existing centres of power at various levels of social experiences. Subaltern autobiographies and studies based on it largely help to alleviate the absence of the downtrodden in the traditional conceptual epistemology and disciplines. Subsequently, autobiographies from the marginalised groups and studies based on it underline the micro-politics brought out by the marginalised communities like Blacks, Dalits and Black/Dalit women. It highlights the core ethics of the arguments and approaches that the thesis generally raises.

Autobiographical reflections on exclusion, discrimination, and hierarchies within the specific subaltern communities are not visible in social science studies. Therefore, it is hoped that this study on Black and Dalit autobiographies will make a significant contribution to the study of social science and exclusion studies within

the field of literary studies. Moreover, this research work on Black and Dalit autobiographies will help the researchers who make a comparative study on Blacks and Dalits in America and India. It will help the researchers understand and explain Black and gender discourses in America and caste and gender hierarchisation in India. The general observations in this thesis will help defend the anti-Dalit/anti-Black world consciousness and studies in the prevailing literary,cultural and social spheres. The thesis is further highlighted by the historical relevance of its quest for more democratic approaches against the exclusion and hierarchisations of social diversity.

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