

I. Subordination of Dalit Women

This research focuses on the selected poems as subaltern's perpetuation as well as subordination of Dalit women particularly. It analyses Dalit poems on the light of subaltern studies project. It also endeavors to study their "voice" which has been suppressed by the mainstream higher class of the society. The main objective of the present research is to analyze Dalit women's triple marginalization in the form of class, caste and gender. It deals with Gramscian idea of hegemony, Subaltern consciousness, Ranjit Guha's Subaltern Studies and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's Representation theory.

An Anthology of Dalit Literature redraws the elite's historiography, mainstream literature and attempts to establish Dalit's identity and their literature. It mainly foregrounds the troublesome lives, traditions of the so called untouchable communities and reveals how the hegemony of society based on casteism have suppressed the Dalits for centuries. It shows how the social, cultural, religious policies had been prepared beyond their knowledge and with the convention they have been hegemonized and always discriminated unjustly and have been forced to live a life of Subaltern. Ranjit Guha, who leads Subaltern Studies Group, defines subaltern as the person who has lower position in terms of class, caste, age gender and office. Analyzing the position of Dalit women in terms of these criteria provided by Guha, they can be defined as Subalterns. The denotative meaning of Dalit, Yam Bahadur Kisan cites *Bhargav Adarsha Sabda Kosh* are "shattered, over- burned , suppressed, squeezed upon; kneaded; ground down; shamed by being required to bow someone elite's feet; or silenced through suppression".(6)

This definition of "Dalit" has similarity with the definition of the word "subaltern". Dalit women are marginalized in multitude of avenues. Firstly, most of the women are landless, very poorest of the poor. Secondly, they are dominated in different layers of patriarchy. The whole patriarchy dominates them. Within the Dalit community, Dalit males

also dominate them. In other way they are most subaltern because they are women. Within the women too they are untouchable women. Within untouchable women too they are very poorest of the poor. Most of them are uneducated too, so most of their sensibility is different. Their feelings do not match with Non Dalit women. They are the group of people who are subordinated, discriminated and suppressed. So my thesis is trying to concern this group of women at the center. To prove that I'm planning to show how these females voice are reflected in literature. I've selected Dalitpoetry which is Dalit friendly and even in Dalit Poetry, I'm planning to show how Dalit women are victimized. The poems "Request" by Anuradha Gaurav, "I Don't get Angry" by Waman Kardak, Waman Nimbalkar's "Mother", "Slave" by Hira Bansode and Joyti Lanjewar's "Mother" are analyzed to make the thesis prove the hypothesis.

In Nepal Dalits are oppressed, suppressed by the elites and they are considered as untouchables. Their presence in temples, public taps and social organization is considered as an insult and disobedience of the rules constructed by the elites. Within Dalits also Dalit women's problems are different. Domestic violence, untouchability, witch, labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, girl trafficking etc problems are mostly faced by Dalit women. They are raped, burnt, tortured in the name of religion, culture, law etc. The life Dalit women are living makes them the real subaltern. Suppression and oppression on female are the primary issues in subaltern studies.

According to Mary Cameroon, "Dalit women of South Asia are on the bottom of religious/holy areas. There is vast difference in high caste women and Dalit women" (71). High caste women are made untouchable in the name of menstruation, widow, pregnancy etc. But Dalit women suffer from the discrimination on the basis of gender, class caste. So, Dalit women are the main subaltern in the context of Nepalese Society. Issues of Dalit women should be addressed while raising the concern about women or women movement. The

women leading the women movement are only of high caste as a result the concern of Dalit women became only their issue. After analyzing *An Anthology of Dalit Literature*, Christian Novetzkes in her article *The Journal of South Asian Literature* explores the vast gap between upper caste Hindu women and Dalit women. She further writes;

There is an unbridgeable gap between upper caste Hindu women and Dalit women that cannot be bridged by organizations. Dalit women must not be compared with other Hindu women because they are in the double marginalization. Without addressing Dalit women specifically they cannot be generalized with other women. (4)

Hindu society is very barbaric towards Dalit women. They have to bear extreme torture just because of their caste. Even the religious books of Hindus have given license to exploit them. According to *Manusmriti* "A Brahman, Kshatriya, or Vaishya Man can sexually exploit any Shudra woman" (*Manusmitri* IX 25). In contrast, Hindu women of upper caste enjoy their birth in prestigious caste. They are neither molested nor face the domestic violence. So, Dalit women cannot be categorized under other women.

The representation of Dalit women is found nowhere in the mainstream areas. In South Asian society Dalit women are socially, economically tortured. Domestic violence, Untouchability, witch, labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, girl trafficking etc problems are mostly faced by Dalit women. They are raped, burnt, tortured in the name of religion, culture, law etc. The life Dalit women are living makes them the real subaltern. Suppression and oppression on female are the primary issues in subaltern studies.

For centuries Dalit women have been confined within false or bad and mentality of requirements imposed by patriarchal Hindu upper caste ideology which is completely based on myth and ignorance. Similarly under the patriarchal Hindu upper caste ideology, Dalit women are forced to accept the laws and customs that always made them inferior in various

ways. Such patriarchal ideology is spread all over the world that advocates the supreme power of males and it seems natural because of its long time used. When patriarchal society creates stereotypical images about women then it serves a powerful function in our society and when such patriarchal norms, values rules and regulations are long time used then those exaggerated ideas of inferiority and weakness of women are internalized by the women and ultimately, they feel themselves powerless and inferior. These women are perceived and treated as using different languages and images. Dalit women are always undermined under the male domination and treated as objects that have no identity of their own. Dalit woman is the worst victim of the evil called caste system: the Dalit woman is just taken as a play-thing, play with her as if it is the personal property, cheat her, rape her, and kill her. But the Dalit poetess still pleads for sanity. She doesn't become vengeful or vindictive. She doesn't ever dream of becoming a suicide bomber or a terrorist like the Tamil tigress. Instead, she still hopes for the better sense to prevail.

As long as much hegemonic representation remains, the voice of women will suffocate under the great expectation created by those self-representations. BamaFustina is the most distinguished Dalit feminist writer in Tamil. She explains:

The position of women is both pitiful and humiliating, really. In the fields they have to escape from upper caste men's molestations. At church they must lick the priest's shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with tales of God, Heaven, and Hell. Even when they go to their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husbands torment. (122)

Women's life is hellish either in her own home or in the religious places like temple or church. They have to protect themselves even in the working area from the upper castes man. Similarly the so called religious places are also not safe for her. The priest of church sexually

exploits her by threatening with the myth of god. After the long work of field and kitchen they have to satisfy her husband's sexual desire. Thus women have become the puppet of males everywhere.

When we look at the struggles of the Dalit women's movement we find a clear similarity with the movement led by black American women. Both of them were in a more or less similar situation where either their interest was represented by others or they only had a token appearance in other Rights movements. Like Dalit women, black women were doubly oppressed, because they were women and because they were black. Though they had played an equal role in the movement for liberation from slavery they never got a similar status as men even after slavery was abolished. Elements of patriarchy had a strong hold on the minds of black males and they demanded a secondary and subservient position for women. The movement which started against racial discrimination gradually started serving only the interests of black men. It is generally assumed that since white women initiated every movement against male domination, black women had no interest in liberation. But this is not the complete truth as it is quite evident that they were no less aware of sexist oppression. They suffered more than any other group of females. Scholars have tried to put rather more emphasis on their struggle against racism and not enough on their participation in the women's movement. As bell hooks argues "while White women's organizations could concentrate their attention on the general reform measures, Black women had to launch a campaign to defend their 'virtue'(165). In this way we can see that Indian Dalit women suffered a fate similar to that of their black counterparts. They had little influence while struggling for their rights and rightful social position.

Dalit women need to be represented as subjects and not as objects with the emphasis on their active role in the betterment of not only their family but for their whole community. Generally speaking, Dalit women considered to be the most underprivileged group left out at

the bottom of the hierarchal caste society for centuries. In centuries to Dalit men, they suffer more to their dual oppression: being Dalit and being woman. Being Dalit, they suffer due to caste discrimination and being a woman, victimized by the patriarchal social order both in their homes as well as outside. Dalit women believed to be alienated at three levels; caste, class, and gender positions. Sharmila Rege comments on *An Anthology of Dalit Literature* in her article *writing Caste, Writing Gender*;

Although all the Dalits are treated as untouchables but a Dalit woman becomes touchable for so-called upper castes for this heinous act of rape because the victimizer knows the victim cannot do anything against him. Neither the local people will protect her nor will the police and administrative machinery come to her rescue as they are dominated by so-called upper castes. Dalit women's rape is, on a number of occasions, a group activity in which so-called upper castes invade the Dalit localities and rape Dalit women, in a group, without caring whether she is very aged or just a child.(10)

Dalit women are regarded as untouchables but they are repeatedly raped by upper caste people mostly in group. The Dalit women survivors of sexual violence confirm that they are deprived of justice and their human rights are violated. Most of the survivors find themselves in vulnerable situation. They say that they are not much confident enough to overcome the hurdles they face after they are victims of sexual violence. The perpetrators threaten them not to expose the incidents. They get threats of murder by the culprit if they disclose such incidents to anyone. The survivors admit that they remain silence most of the time. They cannot speak about the injustice that happened in their live due to the fear of the family, the community, the perpetrators, the police administration, and medical authorities. The survivors of rape cases express their dismal resentment towards police administration. Instead of guaranteeing security and investigating the cases of incidents, the police administration itself

asks to compromise the justice in few rupees. The survivors do not believe that there is a mechanism that provides justice. Dalit women survivors of sexual violence and those women who feel they are mistreated by society say they feel uncomfortable filing complaints at the police office because the police officials are not sensitive about the matters related to sex and sexuality and women's rights.

The plight of Dalit women is far more horrible in the Indian society as they are oppressed on the basis of caste, class and sex. They have to be subservient in all areas. Unemployed unmarried women are not treated with due respect. Dalit women have been described as the silent suffering minority in the works of upper caste and Dalit male writer. They are denied voice and the Dalit women withers away at the margins of such literature. Being illiterate they are the ones most exploited peripheral groups in the society. Dalit women is been sexually exploited, education is been denied to her and there is also caste race bias. Within her own family she is been alienated by the dominant male and are considered as mere objects for sexual satisfaction and for reproduction and are often defined in terms of the other. They have been labeled ugly, sluggish and unintelligent. They have been often asked to identify themselves before others and undergo color test and are never treated with respect. Bamawrites;

We have to labor 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 have finished in the fields. If you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man. Born as women what good we get? We only toil in the fields and in the home until our very vagina shrivels. (64)

Due to the extreme poverty, Dalit women work hard more in the field than their male partners as well as the whole responsibility of children is always on female. So, for Bama, the best

birth for human being is to be born a man. Further she expresses the bitter truth by saying that they have to work extreme hard until the vagina shrivels.

It is the patriarchal division that defines woman as a marginalized creature. The condition of Dalit women in their society is lowered and they are lowered into mere objects. For Bama writing is to liberate Dalits, the women and children. Bama's writings celebrate Dalit women's life, resilience and creativity and everywhere she suffers humiliation each and every time.

In January 2013, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on violence against women in India which includes several references to caste discrimination and the situation of Dalit women. The resolution expresses "deep concern about the widespread violence committed against Dalit women and girls in India, including sexual violence committed by men of dominant castes".(32)

The caste system declares Dalit women to be intrinsically impure and 'untouchable', therefore socially excluded. In class terms, the vast majority of Dalit women are poor; many are landless daily wage laborers who are systematically denied access to resources. Anil Suresh Dangle on the poem "Mother" in *Semiotic of Dalit Feminism* writes;

The poem "Mother" by JyotiLanjewar repudiated the traditional notion of perceiving woman simply as an object of beautification. She projected the 'Mother' as a Dalit woman who never aspired for the so called womanly pleasure like wearing 'brand new silk sari' and avoiding gold ornaments like bangles and bracelets which are the signs of slavery to the Hindu customs.

(24)

Generally women are taken as the symbol of beauty with high sophistication. She is highly beautified by patriarchal society. Contrary, JyotiLanjewar presents the rough picture of mother who does not desire for branded new sari and ornaments. She has freed herself from

the chains of Hindu customs by rejecting the bangles, bracelets etc. She extremely works hard to support her family. She has abandoned all her comforts and luxury.

As women, they are subjugated by patriarchal structures. Due to this intersectional discrimination, Dalit women are specifically targeted for daily, egregious acts of violence, in particular for sexual violence, including the Devadasi system of forced and ritualized prostitution. On account of their 'impure' caste and poverty, Dalit women comprise the majority of manual scavengers, that is, laborers who clean human excrement from dry toilets. When they assert fundamental rights, Dalit women are targeted for punitive violence by dominant castes. Due to patriarchal notions of community honor residing in women, dominant caste violence against Dalit women functions to punish the entire Dalit community and teach Dalits a lesson of obedience to caste norms. Moreover, Dalit women are discriminated against not only by dominant castes on account of their caste, class and gender, but also by their own communities on account of their gender. When considering discrimination and violence against Dalit women, one can state that impunity is the key problem Dalit women face today – not only while seeking legal and judicial redress for violence, but also while attempting to access and enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms. Perpetrators enjoy virtual immunity from prosecution for violence against Dalit women, as the police, who themselves often harbor caste prejudices, willfully neglect to enforce the law. Not only the police, but perpetrators and their communities use their political, social and economic power to silence Dalit women, thereby denying them access to justice. The nature of collusion between state and dominant caste actors is such that the modern rule of law has no place in the hierarchical order of socio-economic and political power relationships, as caste-based power supersedes state-derived executive authority. Bama further says;

Why cannot we be the same as boys? We are not allowed to talk loudly or laugh noisily. We always have to walk with our heads bowed down, gazing

at our toes even when our stomachs are screaming with hunger, we must not eat first we are allowed to eat only after the men in the family have finished and gone. (65)

Bama strikes on the traditional norms of our society where she is confined within the bad practices. The religious books of Hindus like Vedas contain the long list for women which she should not do and do. The woman is not allowed to talk and laugh loudly. She has to bow her head while walking as well as before seniors. She is forbidden to eat the food before her family members despite the extreme hunger. If she violates these rules then there several punishment on her deed. Due to the fear of the punishment and curse she never tries to protest and has to live in pitiful condition. Bama questions why they cannot be like boys or get freedom and rights like boys.

In Hindu society, particularly in South Asian societies, belonging to the sphere of Hinduism turns out to be a means of idealizing themselves and suppressing the lower caste people. People belonging to Hindu religion were supposed to be the next to God in terms of practicing Vedas in their lives and attaining salvation. Surprisingly, on the other hand, people belong to lowest or untouchable castes were not allowed to touch holy Vedas as well as practitioners of those Vedas like Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Such orthodoxy act of Brahmins and Kshatriyas, sowed the seeds of human degradation, humiliation and suppression.

Sunil D. Ramteke in his article *Dalit women in An Anthology of Dalit Literature* writes "The anthology is a critique of the Hindu Social system as well as patriarchy. It does not question on the character of Lord Rama but forces Sita to prove her fidelity on similar act. It also compels women to be burn on their husband's pyre". (19)

The most devastating effect of Hindu social system is seen on women. Males enjoy their birth whereas females have to curse their birth. They are declared witch, whore as well as impure

during menstruation. The peak of subjugation is seen when a wife has to burn in the pyre of her husband. But the males easily marry next women.

As the essay *India: Hidden Apartheid of Discrimination Against Dalits* records, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reported in 2007 "the plight of Dalit women and the multiple forms of discrimination they face. Abuses documented in the report include sexual abuse by the police and upper-caste men, forced prostitution, and discrimination in employment and the payment of wages". There is a limit up to which such a treatment can be tolerated. This limit had been crossed a long time ago by the exploiters as "Agony is not always a forgotten memory" (Kandasamy, Prayers). The hitherto dormant volcano of the hearts of the Dalits erupts and the lava of their anger, discontent, frustration and angst flows out with force. The age old system of oppression and discrimination finds staunch opposition. Those who had been silenced by the forces beyond their control wrote back. Their poems assert their identity and the pride they take in it. They also emphasize their right to be treated as equals to their fellow mortals who claim themselves to be the more equals among the equals. The dispossessed, those whose dignity was snatched away, reclaim it and don't hesitate to snatch it back from the usurpers even violently, if the occasion demands it. Upper caste men and their gods are equally hated and condemned in Dalit poems of catharsis.

The Mainstream literature failed to represent the true picture of agony, trauma and exploitation of Dalits. The non-Dalit writers never experienced untouchability in their real life. So their literature never portrayed the pathetic situation of Dalit. Dalits also argue that mainstream literature, mainly authored by upper caste people is worthless for them because they are inspired by Hindu deities and written in the elite stream of Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram. SharankumarLimbale says that:

Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram is the foolish aesthetic concept. There is no truth and beauty in the world comparable to that which is found in human beings. Therefore it is essential to discuss the equality, Liberty, justice and fraternity of human beings.(Ibid 22)

Taking the lead from B.R Ambedkar's theoretical basis of the Dalit identity, literary writers and activists began to narrate the Dalit experiences. Dalit writers and activists brought awareness among the Dalits. The concerns of the writers include denial of access to resources, participation in political processes, exclusion from social institutions, construction of Dalit identity, demanding equal share in resource, among others. Their writings are aimed at building awareness. Gopal guru identifies that the Dalit literature is classified into literature of Dalit cities and that of mud house writes. To him, mud house Dalit literature means writing about oral traditions of the Dalits which is ignored by the elite Dalit writers.

As Dalit writers themselves being the victims, they use literature as a vehicle to express their sufferings. The Dalit literature, that includes all the genres like short stories, novels, poetry, critical essays, plays and autobiographies, provides critical insights into the question of the Dalit identity. The Dalit writings are used to educate the Dalits. They use different vocabulary from the one used by the mainstream writers. They use the pronouns "I", "We", and "Our" for representing Dalits and "You", "Yours", "They" and "Their" for addressing the Non-Dalits especially the so called upper caste Hindu elites. The Dalit narratives capture the local idiom finding global space. Subverting the conventional epistemology, Dalit writers challenge the Mainstream literature. Though Dalit writings consist of all literary forms but poetry and autobiographies have strongly expressed the domination of upper castes people based on Hindu Ideology.

The teachings of Ambedkar sharpened their sensitivities, and made them outward-looking, articulate and assertive in their expression. The Dalit writings are used to educate the

Dalits. The prose narratives, especially mediated between Dalit writers and the Dalits to form the modes of social protest. The Dalit narratives are used to raise awareness that caste is the root cause of social discrimination. Subverting the conventional epistemology, Dalit writers challenge the Brahmanism through their writings.

In his article *Why Does Dalit Literature Matter?* S.Sreenivasan describes the importance of the authenticity of the experience in Dalit Literature. He says that the Dalit experience with its grinding poverty, illiteracy, economic exploitation, caste based social taboos and continuous denial of human rights is something only Dalits can know from inside because they are immediate sufferers Sreenivasan says that; "Those who are outside the fold of this experience can imagine, sympathize or write about but they cannot feel barb of humiliation to what Dalits are accustomed to"(42). He further calls Dalit literature "insider's report of Dalit experiences, memoir, recollections, rebellion, rendered in a forthright imaginative, often predominantly colloquial style" (43). Obviously Dalits are distinct, their experience is distinct, and their sense and sensibility are distinct. That's why the literature they have produced cannot be same with the Non Dalit literature. Dalits pains and pathos are not reflected in the main stream literature as a result they came in literature with their own brand "Dalit literature."

The mainstream critics accuse that Dalit literature lacks in literary merit from the viewpoint of universal criteria. They assert that Dalit writers are divisive and sectarian that use abusive and disrespectful language to assess Hindu divinity. They also doubt literary ability in Dalit writers. But Dalit writers lived so painful and struggling life that they use aggressive language to put forth their bitter experiences and the language as they lived a neglected life. Sharankumar Limbale says that:

Unlike classical literature, Dalit literature needs to be studied from

Sociological perspective if we look for classics in Dalit literature today, we

find any. This literature deals with social problems, social order and social movement. And today instead of teaching our youth classics, it is more important to teach them what a social movement is, what the social order is, and what our social problems are. (146)

Related to this factor there lays another equally important one – it's about the participation of women in Dalit writings. Because in the ever broadening area of Dalit literature it is observed that male poets dominate the scenario while only a few female poets find their place in. In an attempt to address the probable reasons behind the shortage in Dalit women poets, the first obvious point that comes to the fore is the omnipresent patriarchy which is almost congenital to Indian society since the Vedic ages. There's no need to seek further beyond the colossal epics which present and represent the legitimized infallibility of men's authority on social and religious norms. Though a few names of some erudite women float to the surface, but their mention is limited within school level curriculum.

The articulation of their experiences came to be known as "Stri Dalit Sahitya" in Marathi. The lives of women in Dalit female poetry are hellish as they are subjected to unspeakable violence. A large number of critics examined Dalit female poetry from different angles. Of all these critics, Norman Khouri is that sort of critic who charges female complacency for the subordination of women too. Khouri praises the poets' power to portray all the characters' virtue of accepting life calmly in the midst of chaos and uncertainty. Norma makes the following observation with respect to this aspect of the novel:

Dalit female poetry weaves the timeline of the females with ease, never confusing the reader or leaving loose ends. They make the most of the time they spend together and suffer miserably when females' condition forces them apart and is eventually addicted to alcoholism as a result, she meets disaster in her marriage. (76)

According to Khouri, the important aspect of the poetry is the level of endurance developed by the characters. Characters are not lost in the free-floating world of fancy and fantasy generated by creeping effects of modernization. On the contrary, they are integrated to the ground reality of the present. Inwardly all the characters are dissatisfied with the growing distance between their hellish condition and promise of freedom.

The reality of Dalit women's life is too hideously shocking, beyond the capacity of fantasy or imagination. Their tragedy is universal, trampling them down and disfiguring their humanity. Their sufferings are quite different from upper caste women which are reflected in the poems too. They do not seek poetic beauty. Similes, metaphors and symbols are not important. Thus analysis of Dalit poetry mirrors the pathetic life of the ostracized in the name of caste. It is observed that poets and authors of Dalit literature have used the power of language to express their feeling of being beleaguered. Dalit poetry is a weapon for the Dalit poets against untouchability and has become an academic stance of the poets that aim to change the fate of the suppressed through their writing. Dalit poets will write about these feelings and experiences unless and until it will get vanished from the Indian mentality.

The above selected poems also expose that Dalits have their own "voice", consciousness, agency and notion of resistance. Mainly, their poems are their voice through which they are expressing their real situation

This thesis is divided in three chapters. In the first chapter, the researcher introduces the topic, elaborates the hypothesis, and quotes different critics' views regarding to an anthology. In the second chapter, the researcher makes a thorough analysis of the Dalit poetry by applying the theory of subaltern studies. The last chapter contains the conclusive ending of the research.

II. Dalit Women in *An Anthology of Dalit Literature*

An Anthology of Dalit Literature is a collection of Dalit's poem edited by Mulk Raj Anand and Eleanor Zelliot. The editors of the poetry claim "this volume of poetry is full of outrage"(19). My argument in this study is that this volume of poetry contains the poem where Dalit women are subordinated by patriarchy, so called upper caste society as well Hindu religion. In order to prove my point I have in this chapter taken into account the Dalit poem titled "Request" by Anuradha Gaurav, "I Don't Get Angry" by Waman Kardak, "Mother" by Waman Nimbalkar, "Slave" by Hira Bansode and again "Mother" but by Jyoti Lanjewar. In these poems, Dalit women are the real subaltern since they are in the bottom of the society.

Dalits are regarded as the lower class and caste. They do not have any access to state power. They are dominated, marginalized, victimized in the Indian societies and simply excluded from the history. No written history talks about the suffering of them. Their contributions are simply ignored by dominant groups thinking that are worthless. Within Dalit also Dalit women are one of the largest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world: they make up more than two percent of the world's total population. They are discriminated against three times over: they are poor; they are women, and they are Dalits. Although both Dalit men and women suffer under the same traditional taboos, Dalit women are confronted with these more often. Certain kinds of violence are traditionally reserved for Dalit women. These include: extreme verbal abuse and sexual epithets, being paraded naked, dismemberment, being forced to drink urine and eat faces, branding, pulling out of teeth, tongue and nails, and violence including murder after proclaiming witchcraft. Dalit women are also threatened by rape as part of collective violence by the higher castes, but sexual assault and rape of Dalit women and girls occur within their own communities too. In spite of its severity and frequency, most cases of violence against Dalit women are not registered. The lack of law enforcement leaves many Dalit women unable to approach the legal system

to seek redress. As the women are often unaware of the laws, their ignorance is easily exploited by their opponents, the police and the judiciary. Even when cases are registered, the lack of appropriate investigation, or the judge's own caste and gender hinders in further investigation. The deprivation of Dalit women from the every sector of the society makes them subaltern.

Subaltern is a British word for someone of inferior rank. The term is made of two Latin words: 'sub' and 'alter' meaning under and other respectively. Subaltern Studies focuses on the issues like how the knowledge of history was created and how its creation can be decolonized. It formally emerged in 1982 under the banner *Subaltern Studies: Writing Asian History and Society*. The term has been used in Subaltern Studies by Ranjit Guha. He includes rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants and upper- middle peasants into the category of subaltern classes. He states that subaltern study will study:

The general attributes of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age gender and office or in any other way. Subaltern studies group sketched out its wide ranging concern both with visible "history, politics, economics, and sociology of Subalternity and with the occluded attitude, ideologies and belief system in short, the culture information that condition. (Guha vii)

The Subaltern is a person or a group of people that have been excluded from society. They do not have a voice, and are lost in the world due to assimilation and colonialism. In other words, "Subaltern" is a term applied to those who exist at the bottom of a hierarchical power system without any means of improving their social condition. The present text also strongly raises the voice for the subaltern women to come forward because they are the subaltern of the subaltern.

Ambedkar, an architect of the Indian constitution as well as Dalit intellect, was a great supporter of women's liberation. He blamed the Varna system, which has not only subjugated Dalits but also women. He questioned *Manusmriti*, the law book (Dharm-Shastra) of Brahminic Hinduism and attributed to Manu, the legendary first man and law giver. It prescribes the Dharma of each Hindu, stating the obligations attached to his or her social class and stage of life. It was hostile to the interest of lower caste people and women. It prohibited re-marriage of widows. He felt that the book was solely responsible for the downfall of Hindu women. He encouraged the Dalits to embrace Buddhism to liberate their own selves from Hindu subjugation. Hence he fought for the right to choose one's faith. After embracing Buddhism, Ambedkar writes, "Unfortunately for me I was born a Hindu Untouchable... I solemnly assure you I will not die as a Hindu"(24). He makes it very clear in his article titled "The rise and fall of Hindu woman" that the root causes of suffering for women in India are these so called Hindu religious books (Thind, Agarwal). Books like the *Manusmriti* divide people into a stratified caste system and promote inequality between men and women (Thind; Agarwal). According to it women have no right to education, independence, or wealth (n.pag). It justifies the treatment of Dalit women as a sex object which can be seen in the following verse. "A Brahman, Kshatriya, or Vaishya Man can sexually exploit any Shudra woman". (IX.25)

The Laws of the *Manusmriti* and other Vedic scriptures have a devastating effect on the life of Dalit women where they are never treated as human. They close all economic, political, social, educational, and personal channels through which Dalit women could be uplifted. Even today, in modern times, we see the severe oppression and exploitation of Dalit women.

It is required to have a development of Dalit feminist theory and to define the state of being through Dalit female language. Thus, a new word was coined, *Dalit womanism*(22) to understand Dalit woman's life in a better manner and try to transform them. The term

Womanism(23) was coined by Alice Walker in 1893. Womanism defined as a consciousness, incorporates ‘racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic and political considerations’ whereas Feminism places priority on women. The Womanism of the Dalits will be entirely based on the lives, experiences, and consciousness of Dalit women. Thus, Dalit women are slowly attempting to speak out their traumatic experiences as well as theorizing their pain, their anger in their autobiographical writings.

The Dalit woman is a Dalit amongst Dalit. She has suffered and still suffering. She should walk through the burning desert of casteism in search of their true identity.

MrsBansode says that it is due to casteism that Dalit women are being dishonored and molested. Unlike Dalit men, only a few Dalit women have written their narratives of pain. Most of them have been written in regional languages and they have hardly been translated into English. The position of Dalit women is as marginalized in Dalit literature as they are in their community. The contribution of Dalit women writers to Dalit Literature is significant.

Bama in an interview says:

All women in the world are second class citizens. For Dalit women, the problem is grave. Their Dalit identity gives them a different set of problems. They experience a total lack of social status; they are not even considered dignified human beings. My stories are based on these aspects of Dalit culture. The hard labor they have to do all their lives. Other problems are the same for all women. The Dalits particular caste ... more agony and hard labor can be attributed to them. Dalit women have to put up with a triple oppression, based on class, caste, and gender. They die in order to live.

(Limbale 116)

In the selected poems, Dalit's mentality seems submissive to the authority. It is not necessary that they always rebel and resist against hegemonic domination rather they bow

down before the authority. Pointing to the mentality of subaltern, GauthanBhadra writes: defiance is not the only characteristic of the behavior of subaltern classes, submissiveness to authority in one context is as frequent as defiance in another" (The Mentality of Subalternity: Knatanama or Rajdharna 65). So "defiance" and "submissiveness" are the two elements that constitute subaltern mentality. In reality, "submissiveness" to authority is not the will of Dalits to accept the authority rather they are forced to do so. Dalits have internalized the hegemony and have followed as a good slave. They accept untouchability as the work of god and become silence. They obey the tradition, ritual and never question the discriminatory structure of society. Such tendency has made their life extremely vulnerable.

Gopal Guru in his article *Dalit Women Talk Differently* argues that in order to understand Dalit women's needed to talk differently it was necessary to delineate both the internal and the external factors that had a bearing on her constitution. According to Guru, Dalit women justified the case for talking differently on the basis of both external factors (non-Dalit forces homogenizing the issue of Dalit women) and internal factors (patriarchal domination within the Dalits). There was a strong feeling among Dalit women that upper caste educated activists could not represent their grievances in their entirety as they were not the ones who actually went through the trauma of being a woman and moreover a Dalit woman. There was a gulf between upper caste women and Dalit women which was not easy to cross.

When we look at the struggles of the Dalit women's movement we find a clear similarity with the movement led by black American women. Both of them were in a more or less similar situation where either their interest was represented by others or they only had a token appearance in other Rights movements. Like Dalit women, black women were doubly oppressed, because they were women and because they were black. Though they had played an equal role in the movement for liberation from slavery they never got a similar status as men even after slavery was abolished. Elements of patriarchy had a strong hold on the minds

of black males and they demanded a secondary and subservient position for women. The movement which started against racial discrimination gradually started serving only the interests of black men. It is generally assumed that since white women initiated every movement against male domination, black women had no interest in liberation. But this is not the complete truth as it is quite evident that they were no less aware of sexist oppression. They suffered more than any other group of females. Scholars have tried to put rather more emphasis on their struggle against racism and not enough on their participation in the women's movement. In this way we can see that Indian Dalit women suffered a fate similar to that of their black counterparts. They had little influence while struggling for their rights and rightful social position.

The poem "Request" by Anuradha Gaurav is a choric communication made to the people of our country from a typical Dalit standpoint. It's a combination of Dalit traditions and their eventual courses. The poem unfurls from the custom of devoting children to the service of different gods and goddesses. The children, especially girls, end up in prostitution, become more at service of men than that of gods. In a self-condemning attitude, the poet denigrates her whole race to beasts, devoid of sensibility, depending entirely on circumstances – "We know what's going wrong/But what we can do?" They can only see what's happening, can never make anything happen. The realization is at work behind the following specimens of acknowledgment;

Our ancestors did the same thing

We are doing today

Our children will inherit that same thing. (Anand&Zelliot, 81)

It's a helpless passivity that flows through heredity. She cracks one example of divine injustice – Shambak was killed by virtuosity personified, Rama, for listening to the Vedas. But no remonstrance took place; no voice was raised against that supremely 'righteous' king

'Our eyes were shut then, too'. When Shambak was killed then, Dalits request to the so called upper castes people not to flow tears for them. They also beg joining two hands to upper caste people not to be at least distressed for them. The poet further writes:

Oh we do plead with you

don't let those tears flow for us

Oh, hands clasped, we beg of you

don't be the least distressed on our behalf. (Anand&Zelliot 81)

The subalterns by definition are groups who have had their voices silenced; they can speak through their actions as a way to protest against mainstream development and create their own visions for development. Subaltern groups are creating social movements which contest and disassemble western claims to power. These groups use local knowledge and struggle to create new spaces of opposition and alternative futures. This also includes females who have been silenced to voice themselves by the male dominated society. Initially, the term, derived from the work of the Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci, entered postcolonial studies through the work of the Subaltern Studies Group, a collection of South Asian historians interested in exploring the role of non-elite actors in South Asian history. The term began to be used as a reference to colonized people in the South Asian subcontinent.

Dalit women have been misrepresented in Indian literature and Indian English literature. Most of the upper caste male writers are biased towards Dalit women. They are portrayed as the victims of the lust of the higher caste men and never as rebels to fight against the injustices perpetuated upon them. Even in the writings of the progressive writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Premchand and so on- Dalit women are either molested or raped by the upper caste men. By depicting such pictures, writers gained sympathy for the victims but such routinely kind of treatment is not enough. They have completely ignored the fact that Dalit women can also resist and fight back like any other victim of social oppression to guard

their dignity. Thus, in these selected poems a Dalit woman is never a fighter but always a victim.

Antonio Gramsci, who first uses the term subaltern in his *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, provides us a vivid idea about the subaltern consciousness. He views that subalterns only have some form of understanding of the word, that is, but "no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity", they have "one contradictory consciousness" which is composed of two aspects: one autonomous or original and other borrowed. For him,

He has two theoretical consciousness (or one contradictory consciousness):

One which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he had inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. (333)

The explicit consciousness which they inherit from the past is the result of the ideological control of ruling class and the assent of the subaltern class. Here, law, education, media and religion play a pivotal role to achieve the ideological control over subaltern class by ruling class. These socializing agencies "promote and legitimize the ideas of ruling class to the point where such values are accepted uncritically and unconsciously as normal" (Slattery 122).

Therefore, this explicit consciousness reveals the submissive mentality of subalterns. Pushpa Raj Acharya stated "though the contradictory consciousness holds a social group together, it weakens their action, decision, and choice and finally leads to moral and political passivity".

(82)

In her scholarly commentary *A literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's 'Standadayini'*, Spivak argues how women are denied their subjectivity, their voice. Whether the woman is looked "from above" as merely a sexual object or "from below" as a Goddess,

She is reduced into the object of male's desire. The hegemonic males refuse to perceive women what they desire the latter to be. The gaze from is only the male's strategy to dissimulate the oppression he inflicts on his female counterpart through his gaze from above. Spivak remarks: "Through a programmed confounding of the two kinds of gaze. The goddess can be used to dissimulate woman's oppression" (129). So by representing as goddesses can be patriarchal society has tried to hide the injustice and oppression it has inflicted upon woman. As long as such hegemonic representation remains, the voice of women will perish under the great expectation created by that self-representation. Spivak further says: "As long as there is this hegemonic cultural self- representation of India as a goddess mother, (dissimulating the possibility that this mother is a slave), she will collapse under the burden of the immense expectation from that such a self-representation permits" (96). Spivak asserts that the women from a subaltern class and the problem of representation are rather noticeable in the representation of the women in various texts of the elite writer. Spivak consistently draws our attention to the problem of representation, as it is the privileged position of the intellectual scholars that let them serve as the spokesperson of the marginalized women. In other word, the representation, as it is the privileged women. In other word, the representation of the Subaltern is a kind of representation meditated through the perspective of the elite. Therefore, the representation fails to become the true voice of the oppressed women, which means that the marginalized women cannot speak.

The title of the poem "I Don't Get Angry" by WamanKardak itself indicates the state of Dalit where they don't get angry despite the inhumane behavior towards them. Instead of protesting against the caste discrimination, they are internalizing the domination, suppression of upper caste Hindu society from centuries. So the poet says "I don't get angry". In another stanza, the poetsays "When my Bhim was alive, they used to tremble. King Bhim went away, cowardice came". (5)

The reference of the great leader of Dalit, Ambedkar has been brought and "they" refers to the so called upper caste people. During the time of Bhim, high castes people used to tremble because he used to protest against their domination. He further says "KingBhim went away, cowardice came, But today I have diminished the Bhim in me"(8). Symbolically it means after the demise of Ambedkar again Dalits are extremely exploited. They are often the victim of domestic violation, humiliation etc. So they are forced to accept the hegemony of upper caste people.

In the later of the poem, the poet expresses the barbaric discrimination towards their mother, sisters and daughters. The suffering discrimination of Dalits women are severe than Dalit men. Dalit male has to suffer only from untouchability whereas Dalit women have to suffer thrice discrimination- caste, class and gender. The poet says;

They strip naked my mothers, my sisters
 I don't get angry, I don't get angry.
 Today I see my own honourdishonoured
 My own daughter's virtue is looted in public
 My eyes look on, my body shakes. (Anand&Zelliot 93)

In the above stanzas, the poet is not angry despite his mothers, sisters and daughters are looted in public places. He further says that "My body shakes" but doesn't protest against such inhuman act of upper caste. He has accepted hegemony of the so called upper caste. One of Gramsci's ideas was the concept of "hegemony," or ideological domination. When one ideology, or world view, dominates, it suppresses or stamps out, often cruelly, any other ways of explaining reality. Actually, hegemony can contain a variety of ideologies. Some are artificial -- theoretical explanations created by academics or political activists or philosophers. Other ideologies are "organic," which means they come from the common people's lived experience. These consist of a culture's way of seeing and believing, and the

institutions that uphold these beliefs, like religion, education, family, and the media. Through these beliefs and institutions, society endorses the ethical beliefs and manners which "the powers that be" agree are true, or right, or logical, or moral. The institutions and beliefs that the dominant culture supports are so powerful, and get hold of people when they are so young, that alternative ways of envisioning reality are very hard to imagine. This is how hegemony is created and maintained. Gramsci defines Hegemony as;

Spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group: this consent is "historically caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (12)

According to Gramsci, hegemony locks up a society even more tightly because of the way ideas are transmitted by language. The words we use to speak and write have been constructed by social interactions through history and shaped by the dominant ideology of the times. Thus they are loaded with cultural meanings that condition us to think in particular ways, and to not be able to think very well in other ways.

Although Dalit women are considered as highly untouchable but they are molested by upper caste male. They are taken as the object to satisfy their sexual need. The cruelty of patriarchy is seen after the rape i.e. either a Dalit girl or a women is threatened to be silence or she is murdered. So the poet says "Today I see my own honourdishonour" (13) because his mother, sisters are made naked and daughter is raped. But the state ruled by high caste overlooks the incident. They have no one to get justice in the state so they are compelled to be silent. The extreme helplessness is seen when a father sees his own daughter looted in public but he cannot do anything. The cruel behavior towards the daughter makes his body shake. If he revolts then he is either severely beaten or murdered. So a helpless father thinks

to be silent and curses his fate rather than the criminal. The poet again says "Every day the axe falls on my people"(18) which points out the daily discrimination of Dalit people but there is no one to hear their voice. In the last part of the poem, the poet gives the historical reference of Eighteenth century rule of the Brahman prime minister Peshwa of Maharashtra. He points out that, "A new Peshwa has come, grinding me underfoot, I don't get angry, I don't get angry" (24). During his time, Dalits had to face huge brutality regarding their caste. But the state took no action against the sexual violence towards Dalit and since they were unable to protest so the poet says "I Don't Get Angry".

The power play of patriarchy in Indian society is visible in every aspect of life. Ranging from female foeticide, discrimination of girl children, dowry related deaths, rapes and murders are only a glimpse of the gender based violence in the country. R.S. Khare clearly argued that Dalit women bear not only the personal and social dishonor but as well as the physical safety. Within the 'home', Dalit women often suffered from verbal and physical abuse at the hands of their fathers and brothers, raped by their father-in-law, or brother-in-law, forcefully subjugated to fulfill the pleasures of their husbands, domestic and sexual violence. They simultaneously dishonored outside in public realm forced, unpaid in the economic sphere and often compounded by sexual harassment and a real risk to physical life. Gopal Guru in "*Theoretical Brahmin and Empirical Shudra*" said: "This exclusion of Dalit women from the mainstream women's movement is not such a bad thing after all: it has caused them to start building their own praxis, identity, and agency". (145)

The man seized the reins in the house also, the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of a man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children. Keeping a strong bond with the typicality of post-colonial writing practices, each of the Dalit poems frame reaction against the Hindu culture and custom in an essential woman voice. There are caste issues

working everywhere in them. But they present an intra-cultural critique too. The pile of superstition and pseudo-religious activities has blackened their mind and vision.

The poem "Mother" by Waman Nimbalkar shows the extreme poverty of Dalit and the sexual exploitation of Dalit women. The suffering of Dalit begins from the sunset as indicated by "Just as the day sank down". Then, the harsh life of Dalit is seen. Due to the extreme poverty, the fire is lit inside the house but there is no food to cook. But at the same time the food prepared in elsewhere would hit their nose as indicated in the poem "from somewhere the smell of lentils, of vegetables, would hit our noses. In our stomachs all was darkness. And a stream of tears would flow from my eyes" (5-6). It is an unimaginable poverty of Dalit women. They are left behind to bear the responsibility of the family. This further adds to the existing burden that Dalit women are trying to cope with. More and more female-headed households emerge and most of them are Dalit women. Such situations push the women into further situations of impoverishment, making them more and more vulnerable to all forms of discriminations and violations.

The scenario changes when a mother enters into the hut. She shifts the burden of her work from her head. Due to the continuous hard work the mother is physically weak this has been described with the "dark dark slender body" (10). Her work is just collecting the sticks in the wood. Further the poet says that "And if she didn't sell the wood, all of us slept hungry". (13)

A study conducted came up with some shocking facts about the work of Dalit women. What is horrifying is that Dalit women work more than bullocks and men. Bullocks and men work in a hectare in a year for 1064 hours and 1202, respectively, while women work for more than 3485 hours. The caste and patriarchal norms legitimize the poor economic conditions of Dalit women. She has to work to survive. She is powerless and has neither access nor control over resources. In the third stanza, the poet describes the rape of mother by

the vampires of the society as followed; "Mother came, foot wrapped, blood flowing down. A huge black snake had bitten her, two women said. It showed its hood, struck, then slowly went away" (15-17). According to the eye witness i.e. two women "A huge black snake had bitten her" (16). Here, a huge black snake "refers to the so called upper caste patriarchy. After biting the mother, it crawled away safely without any fear of law. Blood is flown from her body and she is in the critical situation but instead of taking her in the hospital she is taken to vaidyas where he treats her with Mantras. This exposes the extreme poverty, superstition of Dalit. The mantras of Vaidyas could not heal the worse condition of mother as one day she died ending her pathetic life that moment has been represented with this expression, "Day went, and as it went, life went from her body". (20)

The first distinct feature that Dalit women's poetry showcases is the delineation of women labor, especially labor by a mother. The ever fixed existence of a woman or a mother in the society has always been dominated by man. Engels in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and State* has drawn a chronological illustration on what the title suggests and at one juncture points out that though the function of inheritance owed itself solely to the maternal lineage but due to the huge increase of property and wealth multiplied the importance of the father who eventually overthrows the lineage of the mother. Engels wrote;

The overthrow of mother right was the *world-historic defeat of the female Sex*. The man seized the reins in the house also, the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of a man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children. (3)

Dalit women and girls are more vulnerable of sexual violence because of their position at the bottom of class-caste-and-gender hierarchies. The basic differences between other identity group of women and Dalit women lies on the ground of caste based discrimination and untouchability which Dalit women are compelled to endure in the societies. In

comparison to other identity group of women, Dalit women have been forced to live in most vulnerable conditions. Such a vulnerable position at the ladder of class-caste-and-gender hierarchies further exposes them to sufferings "from a triple burden of being female, poor, and excluded group" (Acharya et al, 2007). The skewed and unescorted space of Dalit women between different layers of discriminatory social functions often drives them to vulnerability of sexual violence. The national and international human rights conventions are hardly in place to alleviate them their inhumane sufferings due to commoditization of their bodies as sexual entertainment means. The functionality criminal justice system is rarely heard and realized by Dalit women survivors of sexual violence. The society has not been defensible in the cases of Dalit women survivors of sexual violence as the most members in the society assume a Dalit female survivor of sexual violence a "slut" and they ignore to believe that the survivor has been raped and hers human rights are violated. The reserved social attitudes against Dalit women that identify them to sexual commodities exacerbate their situation and harass them on pursuing legal recourse.

Dalit women are thrice discriminated, treated as untouchables and as outcastes, due to their caste, face gender discrimination being women and finally economic impoverishment due to unequal wage disparity, with low or underpaid labor. According to the Hindu caste hierarchy, there are four castes namely the Brahmins (priestly caste), the Kshatriya (warriors), the Vaishyas (traders) and the Shudras (menial task workers). Below this four tier caste ladder is another rung, which are called the untouchables. Among the untouchables, the status of women is further eroded and closely linked to the concept of purity. This is what the rigid, fundamentalist Hindu promotes through continuation of caste system, imposing the Brahminical values to maintain the caste system'

Dalit women endure both endemic sexual violence and caste discrimination due to sociocultural milieu dictated by poverty, patriarchy and caste system. They suffer "a triple

burden of being female, poor, and excluded group” (29). Only an intersectional analysis of their situation via the lens of caste-class-gender dynamics can note that they endure sexual violence both in the general community and in the family (Irudayams.j. et al, 2006). Dalit women suffer an additional layer of violence on the basis of gender-caste-andclass based discrimination both by people of higher castes and within their own communities.

Besides these, Jon Beasley- Murray and Albert Moreiras in their essay, *Subaltern and Affect* views that, "Subalternity is a situation of relative inferiority within social order, structured according to the principle of hegemony, which defines and calibrates that relation of inferiority" (1). Therefore, Subaltern Studies deals with inferiority and domination structure of every global society.

Moreover, Spivak argues that subaltern's also cannot have the power to resist because their "so called resistance is merely a ventriloquizing by the author" (Acharya 79). Here, she tries to unveil "the irony that the social-historical analysis which is most intent on retrieving the voices of such politically and historically "silenced" groups succeeds, by the very practice of that analysis and the deployment of privileged knowledge, conclusively by to silence them". (Boehmer 353)

Subalterns, Spivak opines even if they speak, their voice cannot create any political effect and they are not heard. It means that any voice which does not have any effect in community or nation and which is not heard by the concerned authorities, itself does not become voice or speech. Therefore, Spivak suggests that any attempts from outside to represent subaltern will result in dependence upon other intellectuals to "speak for" the subalterns rather than encouraging them to represent and speak for themselves. This also helps to stop their movement towards upper social structure making subaltern always subaltern. By speaking and representing oneself, they will efface their subordinate position in society. Sanjeev Upreti explaining Spivak's ideas about subaltern's speaking remarks;

Subalterns are deprived from the access of the public mean of expressions like newspaper, radio, television through which they can express their voice. Since they cannot represent themselves, they are thrown outside the elite historiography. Therefore, it is the responsibility of intellectual to speak for them and explore their life philosophy. (My trans. 16)

Spivak in her most controversial and celebrated essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* asserts that the Subaltern classes cannot represent themselves. For they have no adequate means and strategies to do so. The elite intellectual tend to undertake the responsibility of representing the subaltern classes. In such a case, the elite intellectual as a subject of investigation tends to be filtered through his/her (elite's intellectual's) perspective. Consequently, there cannot be a representation of Subaltern class. Furthermore, the elite representative emerges as the master to Subaltern people. In other words, there is every chance that the elite intellectual overshadow the Subaltern people whom s/he represents.

The poem "Slave" by Hira Bansode is full of ironies, which mirrors those found everywhere in Indian society, especially in its treatment to women. Half of the poem has plenty of anaphora intended to create a recurrence about the spot it wants to turn our gaze at. The entire 'where' (s) mean our country. At once the Dalit poets' attitude to our country is revealed. Hira Bansode invests this stance in a little varied purpose. She enters the world of women presenting contrasting images in succession and a refrain. The first stanza outlines the Indian ritual of embellishing houses with fresh mango leaves to complement occasions of auspice. 'Little flaming oil lamps' are also symbols of traditional Hindu decoration of households. It also instigates in our mind the occasions of offering 'puja' to goddesses. But the next line in the stanza lashes the ideas of worship. It's truly a huge irony where female deities are offered puja with devotion – 'In that country a woman is still a slave'. The stanza is studded with antithetic phrases and its conspicuous outcome is its successful tracing out of

a fundamental hypocrisy existing beneath the surface sacredness. In this poem the character of the Sita of Hindu mythology is described who has to face the "fire to prove her fidelity"(4).How the females are made subalterns becomes evident from the following lines:

In a country a woman is still alive
 Where a woman's identity fades like nature's blossom
 Where delicate jewels of emotion are trampled under a heel
 Where the free birds of dreams are scorned
 In a country a woman is still a slave. (Anand&Zelliot 31)

Thus it is evident how the females are dominated and relatively marginalized in the world of patriarchal domination. Dalit poetry, constructed upon Hindu tradition of India, bears link with the country's epics and mythologies. The second stanza showcases three legendary women, two from the great epics and the other from mythology. At this juncture, the poem sheds its apparent 'Dalit' label and universalizes the quandary of women in all ages in the hand of patriarchy and its different persecutory agents like infidelity, voluptuousness and polygamy. The poet's venture meets success in its statement. Sita, Ahilya and Draupadi are incarnations of women treated most inhumanly, sometimes even by the best of apostolic figures.

MrsBansode devotes only three lines to expose their dire states, each having one for her. The women had to undergo the nastiest situation ever in their lives either with a view to satisfying or as a result of discontent of a few stalwarts of masculine hegemony. Sita, as she was kidnapped by Ravana and kept in his custody for some days, the all-virtuous Rama asked her to undergo a fire-test to check whether his wife had had any scrap of infidelity in herself. The incident of Ahilya seems more obnoxious and arbitrary in its perspective.

Women are confined within the roles determined by Hindu religion. Her youth is dried up with the traditional activities like serving the husband and the family. She is never

aware about her identity. In case if she searches her identity she is downtrodden by patriarchy and she has to suppress her feelings. So Bansode compares such women with "stunted tree" which is unable to grow properly. She further says that "she remains in the shadow of someone else's light"(17). Here, "someone" refers to patriarchy which is making her puppet. According to *Manusmriti*, "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence" (3). At last she concludes the poem by saying "To be born a woman is unjust". The extract is enough to know the life Dalit women live.

The subaltern as female, as Spivak argues in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* cannot be heard or read, "even if her Subalternity is sought to be transcended at the mythical level" (104). So they are necessarily misrepresented. Many writers, with a help of dramatization of myth and exaggeration, have attempted to depict the women as Subaltern class that can speak on its own. A female historian of the Subaltern must raise the question of women as a structural rather than marginal issue in each of the many different types and cultures that Partha Chatterje invokes in *More on Modes of Power and the Peasantry*. This kind of representation is not rooted in the socio-cultural reality. Instead, it tends to give false impression about the represented Subaltern class: women. The matter of fact that the writer, as a privileged elites, manipulates the Subaltern group he/she represents. Therefore, the representation, which depicts the women as the class that can speak itself, is nothing but sheer manipulation of Subaltern women at the hands of the elite writers. This kind of representation brings the elite writer to the limelight at the case of represented Subaltern women.

Jyoti Lanjewar in her well-known poem, "Mother" describes a mother who got involved in all kinds of labors such as road repairing, construction and an employee of guaranteed daily wages. She even worked as a laborer to construct the dam. Water, a source

of life, was denied to the Dalits but she participated in the construction work of dam which would provide water to the society but not for Dalits. She aptly said, "Burning the soles of your feet in the harsh summer sun to build the dam at the lake". (7)

Ambedkar pointed out the feature of caste system which is based on, "an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt" (26). He is the perennial source of inspiration to Dalits for their struggle against the Brahmanic hegemonic structure and their strife for social justice. Ambedkar's advice included injunctions to educate their children and remove from them any inferiority complex; not to have too many children and to let every girl who marries claim to be her husband's friend and equal and to refuse to be his slave, as reported by DhananjayKeer. Dalit women follow the path laid down by Dr. Ambedkar. She urges her children, "Study, become an Ambedkar and let the basket of labor, fall from my hand"(34). She realized that education only has the ameliorating power of their poverty. It is an instrument which would strengthen their fight against inequality which was denied to them from the time immemorial. She also envisions the state of being united for his cause, so she said, " Live in unity, fight for Babasaheb". (77)

Dalit women are subjected not only because of caste and class but due to gender also. Indian women were supposed to worship husband as God. He is the incarnation of god upon this earth however inefficient he could be. In case of Dalit family, usually the husband is addicted to drinking which happens to be cause of Dalit women's physical and economic exploitation. The Mother in the poem is not ready to accept such an inefficient and drunkard husband and even she went to the extreme of even expelling him out of the house, who had forgotten his responsibility towards the family.

Dalit woman is not tied down to her filial responsibility and she is not either denying it. Though she was busy in doing her menial work, she always carried her child along with her wherever she goes. She offered 'a sweaty kiss 'to the child despite being engaged in her

work. She remained half-fed and seemed to be more concerned about quenching the hunger of her children. She rejected the tradition that offered her the 'leftover food'. She preferred to remain half-hungry than to sacrifice her self-esteem and self-dignity. She did not believe in fate but had complete faith in her own strength. She did not save money for future or to build her house. She was happier to see her children happy whenever she offered them some money out of the pennies that she earned. She puts five-paisa coin in her child's hand saying, "Go eat candy". (32)

In India, the mother is venerated for the sacrifice of her children for the sake of the country. But the Dalit mother did not repent for the death of her only child who was martyred for the name of Babasaheb. She was referring here the historical incident of changing the name of the Marathwada University of Aurangabad in Maharashtra. Many Dalits sacrificed their lives to carve their name in the history and some even went to jail for the same cause. Instead of lamenting the death of her only child, she said, "You died for Bhima, your death means something" (67). She went to extreme of saying that if she would have two or three sons, she would have been more fortunate to fight again. She also described the inhuman and demonic behavior of the police, the state agent to oppress the powerless with their power of violence.

The poem accounts the contribution of Dalit women in the fight for the liberation from the orthodox tradition. It encapsulated the feminine spirit of the Dalit Movement. The contribution of the Dalit women is either undermined or ignored. The poem ends with the death of the Mother, dreaming of Bhimrajya encompassing liberty, equality, fraternity and social justice. The poet says, "Live in unity...Fight for Baba ... don't forget him..." and with your very last breath, "Jai Bhim"(76 -78). She believed and practiced whatever Dr. Ambedkar preached and she never became a victim to sanskritization through imitating Brahmins. She

never prayed to God throughout her life and not even on her deathbed. The poet says, "I never saw you, praying with beads, for a brand new silk sari". (1)

Dalit poems played an important role in the growth of Dalit literature and social movement as well. Like other forms of Dalit literature, Dalit poetry is also marked with revolt against the social system. Dalit poetry throws away the bondage of mainstream literary tradition and proves the distinctness of Dalit sensitivity. Dalit poetry began in the 1960s with the anthologies *EsaGaMi Brahma* (1962) and *Maze Vidhyapitha* (1966) by Narayan Surve. Although the poem of Surve does not reflect the inspiration and thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar, it moves around the workers and Dalit life and the man is at the centre of his poem. Namdeo Dhasal's *Golpitha* (1972) poem is marked with an overflow of revolting Dalit mind against an injustice for year. P. Ajay Kumar, scholar critic on Dalit studies opines that: "Dalit Poetry vibrantly expresses the real situation of Dalits. They refuse to soar high in the wings of imagination. They add to the growth and development of Dalit literature as a whole". (21)

Ambedkar's influence on Dalit poets and their poetry is quite penetrating. His teachings have sharpened their sensitivities, made them outward looking articulate and assertive in their expression. The spirit of protest and militancy against the caste-hidden structures was inculcated by Ambedkar Dalit writers consider Chokha Mela as their earliest poets. Keshav Mishra has included in his collection of Dalit poetry, a poem entitled "*NahiLadhlyavinMukti*" (There is no liberation without struggle). The prominent Dalit poets are: Namdev Dhasal, Daya Pawar, J.V Pawar, Arjun Dangle, etc. In recent years female Dalit poets like Jyoti Lanjewar, Mina Gajbhiye, Prof. Malti Ingale, Pradhnya Pawar, Pratibha Ahire, Kavita Mokhankar etc have made a distinct imprint on the Dalit poetry. All of them are indebted to Ambedkar for their poetic sensitivities and consciousness.

The poems have dominant position in Dalit literature in present era. A number of emerging Dalit poets write on different issues aggressively related to Dalit life. In his book *Baljihirahane Ateet Aljihirahane Bartaman* (Traumatic Past Stagnant Present) Tara Lal Shrestha writes that "Most of the Dalit poems internalize hegemony or directly subvert hegemony" (My trans. 228). Like the suffocation of Dalits in modern age, specifically in globalization era, disloyal educated Dalits with Ambedkarian thought and mission and rambling Dalit social and political movement. The practice of writing spread largely among Dalit activists in many parts of India and the result is what we see today – Dalit literature is not something that only speaks of revolution and demolition of age old inequality pressed on them; it offers some distinct variations in its subaltern nature by means of continuously attempting to recreate the past. It would be unjust if we classify Dalit literature only as a mere documentation of the contemporary society. Rather, this canon is multi layered, heterogeneous by character and variedly oriented as the author nurture different ideological premises.

In an attempt to address the probable reasons behind the shortage in Dalit women poets, the first obvious point that comes to the fore is the omnipresent patriarchy which is almost congenital to Indian society since the Vedic ages. There's no need to seek further beyond the colossal epics which present and represent the legitimized infallibility of men's authority on social and religious norms. Though there are a few names of some erudite women float to the surface, but their mention is limited within school level curriculum. We are all aware of the marginalization of the 'weaker' sex that took place in every historical age no matter who the ruler is. This repression against gender got sanctified and became perpetual by the formidable organs of religion. Therefore while answering the question there come further questions. Is the lack of female poets due to the apparent politicized outlook which the women generally have an aversion against? Or is there any deficiency in feminine

enthusiasm while responding to the call of protest and change? Or is it because of the prevalent patriarchy in the lower castes that remains indifferent, just like its upper caste counterpart, about the participation of women?

Before laying down some straight forward answer for the above questions, it is necessary to illustrate one or two fundamental characteristics of poems written by Dalit women. There are, of course, some similarities with the other streams of female literary practices but alongside a few dissimilarities too. Keeping a strong bond with the typicality of post-colonial writing practices each of the Dalit poems frames reaction against the Hindu culture and custom in an essential woman voice. There are caste issues working everywhere in them. But they present an intra cultural critique too. The pile of superstition and pseudo religious activities has blackened their mind and vision.

Analysis of poetry mirrors the pathetic life of the ostracized in name of caste. It is observed that poets and authors of Dalit literature have used the power of language to express their feeling of being beleaguered. Dalit poetry thus became an academic stance of the poets that aim to change the fate of the suppressed through their writing.

Caste determines the identity of an Indian. Caste has created the binary of two antagonistic groups of Brahmin and non-Brahmin. Brahmin established their hegemony in the social, economic, political, intellectual, cultural and literary fields. Dalits were denied the right of being 'human'. The upper caste people have always exploited and suppressed the lower caste people are zeroed in on the principles that are contradictory to religion of Brahmins, Kshatriyas and other. They always consider themselves superior and special.

The Brahmins have established the theories that the caste system is God-made and not Man-made. In that system Brahmin is considered superior and Shudras are taken as untouchable. Here Osho writes "The idea of specialness, of being extra ordinary, superior is nothing but the game of the ego which creates all kinds of arrogance" (17). Because of the

feeling of high caste, Dalits are considered outcastes, downtrodden, polluted, and marginal and are exploited by the higher castes since centuries. Ambedkar considered that caste is a system of graded inequality in which castes are arranged according to an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt. This indicates the upper caste held power and high status, on the contrary the lower castes have no power, no status and considered as dirty and polluting. This offered a counter view on the caste system by focusing on the experiential dimension of caste based oppression experienced by Dalits and the same is articulated in Dalit literature.

Subaltern continues to be a strong inspiration for the contemporary Dalit women writers. Individual identity is central to almost all Dalit feminist writing. They challenge the traditional values and call upon all Dalit women to recognize their inherent powers and lead an authentic life. They even raise query regarding social organizations, Dalit male writers and activists who discard Dalit women in every field and complain that Dalit men activists talk about humanity but are not humane towards their wives. Subaltern has deep concern for and commitment towards humanity; and it raises its voice against any kind of narrowness, violence, vengeance on any Dalit women and liberation of entire community.

In Hindu society, particularly in South Asian societies, belonging to the sphere of Hinduism turns out to be a means of idealizing themselves and suppressing the lower caste people. People belonging to Hindu religion were supposed to be the next to God in terms of practicing Vedas in their lives and attaining salvation. Surprisingly, on the other hand, people belong to lowest or untouchable castes were not allowed to touch holy Vedas as well as practitioners of those Vedas like Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Such orthodoxy act of Brahmins and Kshatriyas, sowed the seeds of human degradation, humiliation and suppression.

Dalits are largely marginalized in the society of India. The source of their power is millennia long exploitation of Dalits in India. Officially, India gained independence in 1947,

so did the Dalit, in theory. The ground reality is different. Untouchability was declared unconstitutional in India on paper but the people of that caste were never freed of the stigma in practice. They continued being the unpurchased slaves of the upper castes because of the monolithic social structure of India. The courses of the history of subjugation and exploitation ran on smoothly as ever.

The nature of the crime against Dalit women is always different. It is almost always associated with verbal abuse and these abuses are laced with casteist tones. Most common abuses in India are formed with either the mother or sister in the frame. Further Dalit women have been subjected to rape, molestation, kidnapping, abduction, homicide, physical and mental torture, immoral traffic and sexual abuse. The National Crime Records Bureau of India records reveal that, "More than four Dalit women are raped every day in India" (7). Incapable of sharing their emotions, they enclosed themselves in their own fears and distress. The lives of rural women were less dramatically impacted as they generally lived and worked within secure kin environments. If these women travelled to a nearby town, the same urban restrictions would have applied to them. No doubt, women as per the edict of law were to remain at a distance from strange men.

This research rests on Subaltern Studies for the theoretical modality. Although Subaltern studies cover a wide range of postcolonial ideas, I have been specific on the aspect of Dalit woman as subaltern and the interconnection with other theoretical insights particularly in the Indian subcontinent. Though it is easy to associate Subalternity with the lowest socio-economic classes, social castes, and peasantry, social expectations of women allow for the presence of Subalternity in all classes. Theorists of subaltern studies have noted that gendered Subalternity is particularly complex, as often, the restraints of gender transcend class, allowing Subalternity to exist outside of the lowest socio-economic sections of society.

To, conclude, *An Anthology of Dalit literature* reveals the experiences of untouchability by Dalits. It also shows how Dalit women face triple form of discrimination i.e. on the basis of class, caste and gender. Unrelieved suffering is the reality of the Dalit experience. Though the Indian Constitution has abolished untouchability through law but its presence can be seen in almost every walks of Indian life and psyche. Thus Dalit women are extreme Subaltern. Dalit Poetry is a weapon for the Dalit poets where they express their pains against discrimination. Dalit poets will write about these feelings and experiences unless and until it will get vanished from the Indian mentality.

III. Conclusion: Dalit women internalizing Hegemony

The selected poems from *An Anthology of Dalit Literature* are the clear manifestation of Dalit women being Subaltern particularly and Dalit community in general. Dalit women are on the bottom of the hierarchical society. From this hierarchy, it is the Dalit or untouchable characters that are robbed of their social as well as religious rights and no surprisingly women are highly victimized. Due to the continuous domination, explicit consciousness has developed among them and toleration of suppression is seen.

Dalit women of South Asia are compelled to live the life of Subaltern because of the prejudiced and repressive mechanisms constructed by the dominant higher class of the society. The mainstream upper class always tries to suppress them. They also express their sufferings in the form of poems, songs etc. Hence, they are speaking through their poems against the social and economic spirit of resistance and agency, which are inherent features of their poems. Their poems reveal that they are the victim of untouchability, poverty and deprived from house, land, food, well earning occupation and the prestigious position in Society.

Dalits are in no state to protest. They are not even ready to think of it. They have accepted their fate in all worst situations. Their conditioned mentality never lets them think beyond their conventionality. The most brutal and harsh reality gets exposed here in this point concerning women's molestation. The upper castes don't touch these Dalits as they are considered as untouchables but the Dalit women are not only touched for sexual satisfaction but repeatedly raped and abused for the sake of pleasure. This is the worst form of exploitation that women had to face at the hands of the higher castes. Instead of protesting against multiple forms of discrimination Dalit women are silent in the poems. This consciousness or common sense is their life philosophy which they have obtained from the real life experience that is filled with exploitation, marginalization and victimization. The

selected poems manifest that Dalit women are the immediate sufferer of the norms of patriarchal Hindu society. Thus, Dalit poems internalize the hegemonic structures constructed by the mainstream upper class by expressing their subaltern life.

Internalizing hegemony is one aspect but the resistance against the elite domination and ideology is another more essential and more dominant aspect. The complete hegemony is never possible because there always remains a tendency to revolt against it. In this regard, Martin Slattery, clarifying Gramscian idea about the temporariness of hegemony expresses, "Hegemony can never be complete that struggles for ideological control will always exist among ruling class as well as among the proletariat. The total indoctrination is never possible, even in a totalitarian state" (Slattery 122). So, they are always in opposition to elite domination and marginalization.

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