

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Caste is a form of social hierarchy deeply ingrained in Indian society for centuries. It is a complex term marked by certain characteristic features like endogamy, similar occupation, regional segregation, and prohibition of social and personal ties. People from one caste have different forms of culture, ideals, worship rules and rituals. Division of labour is good as it helps provide a systematic structure of society.

The most insidious aspect of caste is that it is used to justify the marginalisation and oppression of certain groups. While it may have had some functional purpose in the past, such as dividing labour and organising society, it has given rise to many injustices and inequalities. Theoretically, caste is based on occupation and social organisation, but in practice, it has become a dangerous form of discrimination, particularly against Dalits and other marginalised communities.

As Ambedkar says in one of his speeches,

Caste system is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of Labourers.

Civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society is division of society accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into airtight compartments. The caste system is not merely a division of labourers which is quite different from division of labour-it is a hierarchy in which the division of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers. (qtd. in *The Logical Indian*)

One must understand that caste-based discrimination is a violation of fundamental human rights. It prevents individuals from achieving their full potential and leaves them

impoverished and excluded. The eradication of caste-based discrimination will result in social equality and justice. However, it is not easy and requires a strenuous effort from all communities of society and government, civil society organisations, and individuals to heal the harms of centuries of oppression and inequality.

Every individual has a unique role to play, and these roles are interconnected and vital to the functioning of society. No role is superior or inferior to another, and everyone has something valuable to contribute. Like every part of nature, despite their divergence, serving a unique function to ensure the entire health and growth, every member of society plays a crucial role in maintaining the health and well-being of society. Whether it is through providing essential services like farming or cleaning or through protecting their community through military service, every individual's contribution becomes imperative.

As Aristotle said in his *Politics*, “Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a God” (6). Humans are interconnected. Through collaboration and cooperation, one can achieve more than what an individual can do. It is essential to recognise and celebrate the unique contributions of everyone in the community and work towards creating a society that values and supports all individuals equally.

Every religion, community or race has its own concept of genesis— some from the sun, some from the moon and some from mythical forces. The formation of the world in Hinduism has its base in *Rigveda*, which has influences of *Purusha Sukta*. It says that *Purusha* is the creator, and the universe, nature, and animals are created from it. When human beings are created, people who are born out of his mouth are called Brahmins, his arms are Rajayyas, thighs are Vaishyas and humans born from his legs are

Sudras. *Manusmriti* came into existence later, and *Purusha* became *Brahma*. Though their idea of the formation of the earth and human beings differ from each other, they categorise human beings into four divisions.

Indian society has been divided into four classes in ancient times. The division was made based on one's occupation. Ancient text *Manusmriti*, which is an important text of the dharmasastras of Hinduism calls these divisions as 'varnas'. This system points out that humans are born from the various parts of Brahma, the creator God in Hinduism. The first of the varnas are Brahmins, who are Priests, Scholars and teachers (born from Brahma's head). The second are Kshatrias, who are rulers and warriors (born from Brahma's shoulders). The third of the varnas are Vaishyas, who are Agriculturalists and Merchants (born from Brahma's thighs). The last of the varnas are Sudras—labourers and service providers (born from Brahma's feet). A particular group of people are not included in any of these divisions, and they are called Panchamas. Panchama means the fifth varna. In the present Indian context, the fourth and fifth varnas overlap as people of these varnas do the same occupation.

An article titled "Dr.B.R.Ambedkar views on Abolition of Caste System in India" points out the three theories that form the basis of division of human beings: Religious, Biological and Socio-historical. The religious theory contains the same idea given in *Manusmriti*. The biological theory, conversely, remarks that all the living organisms in the world are created based on three essential qualities (sattva, rajas and tamas) in different proportions.

Sattva attributes includes wisdom, intelligence, honesty, goodness, and other positive qualities. Rajas attributes includes ve[a]lour, passion, pride and other passionate qualities. Tamas attributes includes dullness, stupidity, Lack of creativity and other negative qualities. According to these attributes Brahmans

[have] inherent Sattva qualities. Kshatriyas and Vaishyas [have] inherent Rajas qualities and Sudras [have] inherent Tamas qualities. (Sabir)

This theory is debatable because according to science, human beings can be divided into three types based on their body's qualities –Vata, Pitta, and Kapha, which help find the appropriate medicines for diseases. There can be similarities in the physical features and genetics of people belonging to the same community. Nevertheless, it is purely the result of the passing of genetic factors over several generations and closer associations like endogamy. Modern scientific research has shown that there is more genetic diversity within the so-called racial or ethnic groups than between them. However, the biological theory says that people who inherit such qualities belong to a community.

The reality could be that the dominant associate themselves with powerful qualities and the oppressed and poor with hateful qualities. These concepts of race and caste have been used to justify the oppression and exclusion of marginalised groups.

The socio-historical theory says that varna system was created because of the Aryan invasion. The actual inhabitants of India are Dravidians, who are natives like Negrito, Mongoloid, and Austroloid. The Aryans penetrated the system, disregarded the local beliefs and controlled the entire system. They conquered the north and drove the Dravidians and other natives to the jungles and the southern parts. Furthermore, the Aryans then divided themselves into three groups. Nevertheless, the hierarchy changes here –Rajayanas (kings and warriors called Kshatriya), Brahmas (priests) and Vaishyas (tradesmen, farmers).

According to all the theories, there are only three divisions. Sabir quotes Iravati Krave's views regarding the division: "the four rank system was creation of ruling class which originally had a three rank system in which whatever the differences of rank all people had right to certain rituals and sacraments from birth to death."

According to Ambedkar, the Sudras were not a varna but a community of the solar race. There was a continuous feud between the Sudra kings and the Brahmins. As a result of the enmity, the Brahmins refused to perform the Upanayana ceremony for the Sudras. Due to the denial of the Upanayana, the Sudras, who were equal to Kshatriyas, became socially degraded. (Who Were the Shudras?)

Taking into consideration all these divisions, there are a few questions which still need to be answered. Are Sudras and Panchamas the same? If not, who are the Panchamas in the present context? Are both Panchamas and Sudras untouchables? The stigmatisation of groups other than the three superior varnas is apparent in the caste system. Varna is a broad division from which many castes are formed. While the concept of the soul may be a matter of spiritual or philosophical discourse, the practice of discrimination and exclusion based on caste is a social and political issue that impacts people's lives.

Manusmriti is considered as the base of the formation of the caste system. Primarily, this type of social segregation is unfair. Respecting and appreciating the diversity of religious and cultural beliefs is essential. However, the basic requirement of such beliefs should be promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and respect among different communities. However, Manu's ideas are filled with hostility towards a particular community. He supports Brahmins, keeps them at the top, and advises the others to work under them, accepting their supremacy. Sudras are denigrated to the lowest level.

According to Manu, the Brahmins become the chief of all living beings. Even the king does not have power over the Brahmins. He says, "Let every man, according to his ability, give wealth to Brāhmins, detached from the world and learned in Scripture; such a giver shall attain Heaven after this life." (qtd. in Sastri 14). Any harmful or opposing action against Brahmins would be punished by thrusting a long hot iron rod into the

mouth, cutting the limbs or burning to death, whereas a cantankerous Brahmin would not be punished for any of his crimes.

According to Manu, Sudras are created to work for the other varnas, and can be possessed as slaves. As the Brahmins wrote important ancient texts, they defended the privilege of their forefathers. Ambedkar, in his *Who Were the Shudras?* says, “O that literature is the production of his forefathers. His duty makes him to defend it even at the cost of truth.” The highest who wrote the rules made it profitable to them. Ambedkar, in his speech, “Annihilation of Caste,” says, “Virtue has become caste-ridden, and morality has become, caste bound. . . . A Brahmin will follow a leader only if he is a Brahmin, a Kayastha if he is a Kayastha and so on”, to describe the flock mentality of people. (qtd. in *The Logical Indian*)

The state of Sudras in India is very dehumanising. Many Sudras still work in traditionally low-paying and stigmatised occupations, often lacking political representation and access to resources and opportunities. In rural areas, even ordinary activities like wearing slippers, covering the upper body, and using a common road or well are social deviance for untouchables. They are ‘ritually exiled.’ Untouchability is the most dehumanising practice against the lower castes.

This is the state till today. Yashica Dutt in her Author’s Note of *Coming out as Dalit* describes how caste is working today, “the invisible arm that turns the gears in nearly every system in our country. It’s been working silently for so long that we have stopped noticing it, even though it exists all around us” (ix). The touch of Sudras becomes polluting, but they are used as slaves. Animals are treated with humanity and love, but the people with voices are made voiceless. Om Prakash Valmiki in his *Joothan* says, “They were simply things for use. Their utility lasted until the work is done. Use them and throw them away” (1).

The word caste is derived from the Portuguese word “casta”, used by Garcia de Orta, which means breed. When the caste system came into existence, it divided people according to their jobs. If it was a mere class division, then there are possibilities for one person from a particular class to enter into another class by changing his occupation as a middle-class man becomes rich. There was no practice of untouchability or purity then. It evolved into a system where people are considered masses and forced to be in a given identity from birth to death. Ambedkar in his *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, says that there are no scientific reasons behind the formation of caste and questions, “Why is that an occupational group turned into an occupational caste?” (21).

In the beginning, people were divided into classes based on their occupations. Ambedkar’s remarks in his book *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* could be considered here: “At some time in the history of the Hindus, the priestly class detached itself from the rest of the body of people and through a closed-door policy became a caste by itself” (22). They prohibited others from entering into their group. The other classes with the “infection of imitation” enclosed their groups and formed castes. When there were situations of contact between two such groups, a new sub-caste was formed. They considered themselves superior and others inferior. They established their power over others. Darlong quotes Ghurye’s view of caste, “Caste is a Brāhmanic child of the Indo- Āryan culture, cradled in the land of the Ganges and thence transformed to other parts of India by Brāhmin prospectors”.

The characteristics of caste include endogamy, limitation in social relationships with others, purity, similar occupation, unique lifestyle in food, clothing, customs and rituals, separate territories of living like streets, common well, temple, graveyard, and contempt or superiority over other groups. Perumal Murugan, in his article, “The Limits of

Freedom Now Are Exactly as They Were in the Past”, says about the freedom given by caste system:

We have adopted a framework where each community can set up places of worship as needed, strictly within the space allotted to their caste. That is the limit of our freedom. . . . To this day, there are no public spaces in our villages: only separate temples, separate taps for drinking water and separate cremation grounds. . . . there are separate settlements for each caste – barely any land is allotted to the landless castes. . . . A caste group will clean only the area where they live, along with the temples and streets in it. They don’t enter areas inhabited by another caste group. . . . Even houses are given on rent only after inquiring about the prospective tenant’s caste. Segregation was practised in the dining halls of some restaurants, with a section reserved for ‘Brahmins only’. . . . the implicit understanding that certain caste groups cannot own and run shops or eateries persists.

Members of a group usually have some hatred towards the higher castes and contempt towards the lower ones. Among all these characteristics, endogamy is the prominent feature that keeps caste alive. People of a particular caste are not allowed to marry outside the group to preserve the purity of the caste. Anyone who fails to abide by the laid down rules is often excluded from the group.

When caste and oppression are concerned, it need not concern only the Brahmins. The oppression continues on the ladder. Even a Sudra suppressed by the immediate upper caste oppresses the next one lower to him. It never ends as the higher suppresses the lower, and the lower the lowest. The greed over power and the addiction to exhorting power over others become the base of the problem. The interpretation and implementation of the caste system varied over time and across regions in India. The caste system is used as a means to justify and perpetuate discrimination, inequality, and oppression against

those deemed to be of lower caste or outside the caste system. Anyone who does not come under the three varnas is marginalised. They are identified as lower castes or untouchables, or Dalits.

The caste system is not a practice only in India. This social stratification based on birth identity exists in various countries and cultures beyond India, and different names and practices are used to refer to this system. However, the state of the oppressed is the same. Caste-like structures based on social status exist in many countries, including Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Tibet, Iran and African countries. In some cases, these systems are influenced by India's caste system, while in others, they are developed independently. This discrimination in European nations outside of Asia exists because of the diaspora populations. In Nepal, the caste system is similar to that of India.

In Japan, there has traditionally been a rigid social hierarchy based on birth status; individuals are placed in different social classes based on their family name. The outcastes of Japan are called Burakumins. They are believed to be the descendants of pre-Meiji castes and are related to debasement. They work with leather, execution, slaughter-house and tanners and prostitutes. Even after the abolition of the caste system in Japan, they are still marginalised. In the division, *Hinin* (non-human) are beggars, prison officers and restroom attendants. Sastri in the book , *A Glimpse into Tamil Culture* quotes the views of L.S.S.O' Malley which is relevant in this context:

. . . early social organization of Japan which recognized four categories of people viz.(1) the court nobles who claimed descent from deities or emperors (2) the military class (3) the Heiminor common people who were divided into cultivators, artisans and traders and (4) a pariah class, engaged in despised occupations such as

leather works who lived in separate villages and could neither intermarry nor eat with the higher classes. (13-14)

The social discrimination similar to the caste system is racial discrimination. Both forms of discrimination can lead to social exclusion, loss of opportunities, and hereditary continuation, making it challenging for individuals or communities to break the cycle of marginalisation, leading to inequalities. Discrimination based on race or caste contributes to societal divisions and impedes social cohesiveness.

Racial discrimination usually stems from physical or biological characteristics like skin colour, facial features, ethnicity, and country of descent. For instance, African Americans living in the United States or Europe, and their descendants, experience racial discrimination due to their skin colour. Similarly, anyone who is displaced due to migration, as a refugee, or forcefully displaced for work like a slave, faces racial discrimination. According to *Human Rights Watch*, “racism is both a cause and a product of forced displacement, and an obstacle to its solution.” The most prevalent reason for racial discrimination is the person’s skin colour. African Americans are always targeted like the lower castes in India.

The word ‘Dalit’ is derived from the Marathi word ‘dala’, which means ‘of the soil or the earth’. This can be understood as something that is deep-rooted in the earth, as found in the Editor’s Note of Karukku(v). In India, Scheduled castes and Tribes come under the category of Dalits. In Tamil, they are referred to by the terms ‘Adi Dravidar’ and ‘Palangudiyinar’ meaning ‘the forefathers of the Dravidians.’ The translation can be considered lacking in something because, in English, those people are called Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as they are included in the Schedule of the Constitution of India. The primary meaning is respectful, whereas the translation segregates them.

Arjun Dangle best describes the feeling of being a Dalit in his *Poisoned Bread*: “Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experience of joys and sorrows and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of the society. It matures with sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science thus finally ending as revolutionary” (267).

The web of caste controls the life of Dalits. Whenever they try to come out, they are beaten to the bone, abused in the name of their caste and thrown inside again. They are not given the right to expression which makes their problems go unnoticed. The higher castes always drive the Dalits to the margin, not allowing them to come to the centre. They do not understand that a centre cannot exist without margins. Dalits, the people in the margin, are forced to do menial jobs like scavenging, disposing of human waste, and rites and rituals associated with death. When left unnoticed and lacking proper support, Dalit children commit crimes to get some money. They form criminal gangs, commit murders, get involved in smuggling and robbery.

When one comes out, gets educated, and goes to a higher position, the empowered, most of the time, do not wish to go inside the web again to empower their fellowmen. They do not even want to be identified with the roots they belong to. Dalits have a more enriched cultural heritage and historical subjectivity, which is often ignored. Dalit revolutionaries (Dalits themselves and other revolutionaries from other castes) fight hard to bring them to light. However, some caste Hindus want to oppress people because of their caste. Jangam in his book *Dalits and the Making of Modern India* quotes Pakayaji's idea on the mindset of conservative Hindus:

Some caste Hindus who were influenced by Western liberal ideas advocated the abolition of untouchability both on humanitarian grounds and as a political necessity to present a single unified front. . . . On the other hand, conservative

Hindus untouched by the arguments advanced by caste Hindu reformers and Dalit intellectuals, justified the practice of caste inequality and untouchability on the basis of Hindu religious scriptures and pseudo-scientific theories. Conservatives also urged caste Hindus to use violence against untouchables and to continue to deprive them of material means in order ‘to show them their place in the margins’.

(8)

The castes included in the Dalit category vary according to the region or district. For instance, a community called ‘Boyar’ are categorised as the most backward class in Tamil Nadu, whereas it is included in the Scheduled Castes category in Karnataka. Anand in *Untouchable* describes the situation of Dalits thus: “Chandals and sweepers should live outside the village, should use earthen pots instead of utensils, should have dogs and donkeys as their property. . . . Their lending and borrowing should be confined to their own community. One should offer them food through another person in broken pots. They should not move in the villages and towns during the night” (74).

In order to create equality in the caste system, reformatory education should be given. C S Lakshmi, in her Translator’s Preface (Marked Bodies, Marked Minds) of *Black Coffee in a Coconut Shell: Caste as Lived Experience* says, “We realised that dealing with caste and its ways of marking bodies needs more than assertions and denials; it needs confrontation and overcoming” (ix). Marriages between different castes should be supported, and the most effective way to change the oppression and create equality is the change in the mindset of the people.

Higher castes should think about the sufferings of the lower from a humanistic point of view. Om Prakash Valmiki, in *Joothan* comments, “If the people who call the caste system an ideal social arrangement had to live in this environment for a day or two, they would change their mind. . . . Although the doors of the government schools had

begun to open for untouchables, the mentality of the ordinary people had not changed much” (1).

The suppression causes self-hatred and self-doubt in the oppressed. They tend to underestimate themselves. The political leaders and the revolutionaries help bring out their plight and give them identity. The identity others provide sometimes gives the oppressed a feeling of low self-esteem. Ambedkar got converted to Buddhism because of its philosophy of equality. But, in present society, due to a lack of knowledge about Ambedkar, he is often misinterpreted as the caste leader.

History shows the trauma of the oppressed. However, more than history, literature portrays the real sufferings of the marginalised. Language is the most important communication tool for human beings, and literature escalates the purpose of language to the next level. From the beginning till now, the fundamental purposes of literature have been to: express oneself, educate the masses, explore humanity, and provide entertainment and aesthetic pleasure. The basis of literature is culture, which varies according to the nationality, race, customs, and traditions of people, so the purpose of literature changes according to the country and its historical background.

India, remarkable for its unity in diversity is a reservoir of artistic writings like scriptures, myths, and epics. Indian Literature dates back to 1500 BC, and all the literary works were written in Indian languages like Tamil, Sanskrit, Urdu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Hindi, each language having its uniqueness. Sangam Tamil literature and Classical Sanskrit literature are considered to be the foremost in the history of Indian literature. Literature in other languages came into vogue in the 11th century.

The birth of Indian literature in English can be traced back to 1700s. *Travels by Dean Mahomed* (1794), a travel narrative is the first book in English written by an Indian, and *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is the first novel in English.

Though colonial influences are found in the writings, the themes were completely Indian. Indian literature in English attained maturity under the care of luminaries like Bhabani Bhattacharya, G.V.Desani, Kushwant Singh, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Aurobindo. With the arrival of modern writers like Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, and Anita Desai, Indian literature gained recognition in the world scenario.

Tagore's *Gitanjali*, Mulk Raj Anand's *The Untouchable*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, R.K.Narayan's *The English Teacher*, Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* are considered milestones in the history of Indian English literature. Culture, the spirit of nationalism, freedom, gender issues, discrimination, and environmental concerns are the most prominent themes in Indian literature.

The practices of untouchability, marginalisation and social inequality are prevalent in India and Southern Asia. Dalit literature came into existence as a sub-field in Indian literature. Modern Dalit literature started only in the 1930s. At times, Dalit writings are ignored by the mainstream. The writers began expressing the situation of Dalits in their regional languages. Dalit Literature began in Marathi and spread to Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and others.

Translation helped in giving them universal exposure. Dalit texts got translated from Indian regional languages into other languages. It became an important form of literary expression for the Dalits. It also helped render the unknown lives of people to the world and gave a universal identity to the writer. Unlike other literatures, Dalit literature gained importance late because the Dalits were denied education. It gained prominence

when writers started translating literary works into English. Baburao Bagul's *When I Concealed my Caste* was appreciated as the 'epic of dalits.'

There is a misconception that there is no joy or art in Dalit literature. In fact, Dalit literature is rich in expressions of joy and hope, as it brings out the pain and struggle. It is based on Art for life's sake. It does not exaggerate or undermine anything. It is based on realism and authenticity, depicting life in the purest form as the members of the Dalit community experience it. It accurately portrays the day-to-day realities of those who have been oppressed for centuries. It reveals the experiences of Dalits and the unique challenges they face, often presenting narratives of resilience, courage, and hope.

Dalit literature gives voice to those who have long been silenced. It emphasizes the importance of individuals and communities working together for emancipation rather than relying on external aid. Dalit literature highlights the need for a society based on the merits of people, where they are judged based on their deeds and behaviour and not their wealth or power. Dr. Beena Agarwal and Dr. Neeta in "Contextualizing Dalit Consciousness in Indian English Literature" define Dalit literature as, "a manifestation of cultural conflict of the socially, economically and culturally deprived groups of society. It is not a literature of caste but of a specific consciousness that deprive innocent individuals from their basic rights of self survival, self preservation and self expression".

The major aspect of Dalit literature is that it lets one see the world in the eyes of a Dalit as Raj Gowthaman says, "Dalit literature describes the world differently, from a Dalit perspective. Therefore it should outrage and even repel the guardians of caste and class. It should provoke them into asking if this is indeed literature" (98). It stresses the need for equality and social justice, where every individual has the opportunity to flourish and reach his true potential. Overall, Dalit literature is a powerful tool for social change,

challenging existing structures of oppression and paving the way for a more just and equitable society.

Dalit literature is similar to the other subaltern literatures like African-American and Feminist literature. The theme of Marginalised literature is oppression, societal status, steps for empowerment, and hope for a better future. Dalit literature has so many similarities with African-American literature. African-American literature should not be considered a sub-field of American literature. It is written by the Africans living in America. Their themes are similar to the theme of Dalit literature – their life in America, the discrimination and their longing for their past. But the Dalits do not have anything positive to be nostalgic about. So, Dalits are more suppressed than the African Americans.

Most Africans living in America are the descendants of the slaves who were brought from the African countries from 1619 onwards. They were brought to be sold as slaves to do farming by the white settlers in America. Through slave trade, slaves were bought by the masters and they continued to be slaves till their death or if the master gave them independence. The slaves were tormented in all inhuman ways possible like electrocution. African women were raped, their children killed, and the unborn children in the womb of their mothers were bought as slaves along with their mothers.

Dalits, on the other hand, became slaves in their native country. Manu, in his *Manusmriti* says, “Śūdras must be reduced to slavery either–by purchase or without purchase, because they are created by God for the sake of serving others” (qtd. in Sastri 13). One who holds power determines the purpose of God’s creation. So, is the condition of blacks. Dalit literature came out as the response to the ages of suppression.

Sharan Kumar Limbale in his “Dalit Literary Movement” defines Dalit Literature as:

Dalit literature is form of agitation. It centers the common man who has been oppressed for thousands of years. . . . One who takes birth in one’s caste should

live in one's caste, drink and eat in his caste, marry within his caste and die within his caste. This is the case of tyranny. Dalit literature wants to destroy this inhuman caste system, which enslaved not only Dalits but also our democratic country. Our nation is politically free but socially it is still in slavery. Dalit literature is a struggle for total revolution, and it is a declaration of human rights. (qtd. in Chauhan 14)

Dalit and African literature started as folk literature. African literature as an independent field of literature grew with writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiongo. Some of the famous Dalit writers are, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, Om Prakash Valmiki, Sharan Kumar Limbale, and Bama.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, and his works provided a powerful critique of the caste system and other social divisions in India. Anand is deeply committed to exposing the realities of rural and urban life in India, and his writing is marked by a rare empathy and understanding for those who have been marginalised and oppressed. In *Untouchable*, Anand uses the character of Bakha to explore the experiences of untouchables in India, exposing the ugliness of casteism and the hardships faced by those at the bottom rungs of society. Bakha's father's words, "They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt" (70) mark the deepest pain lingering in the hearts of the untouchables. He let the Indian society view the world through the eyes of the young man, Bakha. Anand's other works *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, and *The Sword and the Sickle*, continued his focus on social divisions and inequalities in India. His works are powerful reminders of the need for social justice and equality in India and the world.

Dalit literature in Tamil originated in the 1990s. It had a late start compared to the other languages. It is still in the developing stage. In the 1960s and 70s only a handful of writers mentioned the lives of the Dalits, but there was no Dalit consciousness or revolution. *Pazhayana Kazhidhalum* (1989) by Sivakami is regarded as the first Dalit novel in Tamil, and it was later translated into English as *The Grip of Change*. Many other writers emerged and explored the life and experiences of the Dalits and, through their expressions, worked for the enlightenment and empowerment of Dalits.

In contrast to the literature on monarchs, and dominant social classes, Dalit literature had the vulnerable as its subject. Initially, oppression and patriarchy were the main themes of Tamil Dalit literature. With the passage of time, it started focusing on various issues like liberation, education, political equality, and social identity. Besides writers, many revolutionaries like Periyar, Kakkan, Iyothee Thass, Rettamalai Srinivasan, and Immanuel Sekaran toiled tirelessly for the advancement of Dalits. Notable Dalit writings in Tamil include Bama's *Karukku*, Sivakami's *The Taming of Women*, Imayam's *Beasts of Burden*, Cho Dharman's *Sool*, Poomani's *Vekkai*, and Perumal Murugan's *Seasons of the Palm and Pyre*.

Bama, also known as Faustina Mary Fatima Rani, is a Dalit writer who has become well-known for her works *Karukku* and *Sangati*. Bama's writing, notably her autobiography, *Karukku*, is a powerful expression of her firsthand experiences as a Dalit woman in India. In her novel, Bama provides a lucid description of her village's socio-economic and political conditions and her own experiences in Christian institutions, where she faced discrimination and prejudice due to her caste. Apart from that, Bama has written a number of works like *Kisumbukaran* and *Thathavin Erumai*. Through her writing, Bama challenges the patriarchal and casteist structures within the Catholic Church and society at large.

Bama's works are revolutionary in breaking away from conventional modes of writing and using the dialect of her native village. Her novels offer a raw and unvarnished portrait of the lives of Dalits, highlighting the struggles and challenges faced by the marginalised community. Bama's writing is particularly significant because it challenges the dominant narrative of India, which often erases the experiences of Dalits and other marginalised communities. In her Author's Preface to the novel, she says: "Although the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (New Testament) described the Word of God as a two edged sword, it no longer stirs the hardened hearts of the many who have sought their happiness by enslaving and disempowering others" (xiii), to express the ugly reality of the caste system.

Imayam is one of the regional writers in Tamil Nadu who focuses on the marginalised. He is noted for refusing to be called a Dalit writer or a feminist writer. Associated with the Dravidian movement, which emphasises equal rights for the Dravidians, he does not like the idea of caste with literature as literature by a Brahmin or other communities is not denoted by the name of the community and so literature by Dalits should not be given such identity. According to him, giving the identity of 'dalit' to the oppressed is also marginalisation. His works focus on the life of oppressed people in the northern coastal districts of Tamil Nadu. As Perumal Murugan's works portray the entire Kongu region with the ordinary men and women as his protagonists, Imayam brings the life of his people before the readers. His famous works are *Beasts of Burden*, *Arumugam*, *Pethavan: The Begetter*, *Selladha Panam* and *Savu Soru*.

Imayam's masterpiece *Beasts of Burden* is praised as "There is no novel that equals this one in the last 100 years of Tamil writing" by Sundara Ramasamy, a famous Indian writer. The novel describes the marginalised lives of the washermen community, their suffering and the need for accepting changes.

Poomani is also a writer of the marginalised, and his works revolve around the southern districts of Tamil Nadu (around Madurai). His works, like other regional writers' are mirrors of the environment and the community mindset of people. Poomani, who belongs to a family of marginal farmers, took up the cause of the oppressed (farmers, toddy tappers, washermen) in his area. His novel *Piragu* which is translated as *And Then* is considered one of the pioneering novels in subaltern literature. His other works include *Agnaadi*, *Vekkai*, *Komma* and *Varappugal*.

Perumal Murugan, one of the regional writers in Tamil from Namakkal is famous for his works, having the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu as their setting. He was born in 1966 in Tiruchengode as the youngest child of the couple Perumal and Perumayi. Murugan, who was raised in a farming community, has always been an avid reader since childhood. His father ran a soda shop in a theatre outside the village. Murugan is a keen observer; his early childhood memories with family and friends had a substantial impact on his writings. He completed his Bachelor's Degree in Tamil in Erode and Master's in Coimbatore. He did his doctoral thesis on the works of R. Shanmugasundaram.

Murugan has been greatly interested in reading and writing since his childhood. He feels that it was writing which helped him to face many problems in life. Poomari, in the thesis titled *Perumal Murugan Padaippugalil Vazhviyar Sindhanaigal* quotes Murugan's experience: "When the flow of my childhood suddenly changed, I was subjected to a turbulent mood and I could not bear its intensity. I saw relationships shattering and how it unveiled the real faces of human beings. Hence, I faced severe trauma in my adolescence, and it was writing which gave me solace" (11)

Murugan is a literary chronicler. He began his writing career in his college days by writing poems and short stories for a journal called *Manavosai*. He has contributed as a writer and as a member of the editorial team of journals like *Kudhirai Veeran*

Payanam and *Kaalachuvadu*. He started a journal called *Veru Veru*, but it stopped with only one issue. He also writes under the pen names ‘Ilamurugu’, ‘Manjayyan’, and ‘Ezhil.’ Murugan has to his credit twelve novels, five collections of short stories and poetry, and ten works of non-fiction. Murugan has also compiled poetry, short stories and essays. Ten of his novels, a significant part of his short stories and poetry, are translated into English.

His novels *Seasons of the Palm*, *Current Show*, *Pyre*, *One Part Woman*, *Poonachi: Or The Story of a Black Goat*, *Rising Heat*, *Estuary*, *Resolve*, *Trial by Silence*, *A Lonely Harvest*, and short story collections *The Goat Thief*, *Four Strokes of Luck*, and Poetry Collection, *Songs of a Coward: Poems of Exile* and Essay Compilation, *Black Coffee in a Coconut Shell: Caste as Lived Experience* are translated into English. His other works in Tamil include, the novels, *Aalandapatchi* and *Neduneram*, short-story collections *Tiruchengodu*, *Pee Kadhaigal*, *Neer Vilayattu*, *Veppennai Kalayam* and collections of poems *Nigal Uravu*, *Komugi Nadhikarai* *Koozhangal*, *Neer Midhakkum Kangal and Velli*, *Sani*, *Budhan*, *Nyayiru*, *Vyalan*, *Sevvai*, and essays *Mayir dhaan Prachanaya*, *Ketta Vaarthai Pesuvom*, *Thuyaramum* *Thuyara Nimithamum*, *Karithaal Theriyavillaya Thambi*, *Padhipugal Marupadhipugal*, *Vaankuruviiyin Koodu*, *Manadhil Nindra Maanavargal*, *Nilal Mutrathu* *Ninaivugal* and *Sagaayam thandha Sagaayam*.

Murugan’s debut novel *Eru Veyil (Rising Heat)* is spun around the theme of urbanisation when the ancestral lands of people are taken away for building housing colonies and the consequences that led to their economic and social instability . It is set in the 1980s in a rural village in Tamil Nadu. The novel focuses on the problems and emotional trauma undergone by a family due to urbanisation. In her Translator’s Note of the novel, Janani Kannan says about similar situations she has witnessed in real life: However, starting in the late eighties, the children of the labourers began to leave the

village for the closest city or for Chennai, seeking other opportunities. By the turn of the twentieth century, the dearth for help in the farms was tangible. Many farmers in the neighbouring villages were forced to sell their land to the housing developers. (xi-xii)

The story is told in the third person as Selvan experiences the trauma of urbanisation, the breaking of bonds and casteist discrimination. The feeling of oneness and the bond of affection are replaced by greed, selfishness and jealousy spoiling their relationships. The pain the family members undergo, is similar to that of the refugees living in other countries. The land held them together as one whole community, and when they leave their place, everything falls apart.

His second novel, *Nizhal Mutram (Current Show)* translated by V.Geetha is described by *The Hindu* as “Skims the murky world of dispossessed youth while sporting a spare, swift style”. The novel features Sathi, a young soda seller in a theatre in a semi-urban area. Found among beggars on roadside and brought to the theatre by Natesan, Sathi creates an unbreakable bond with Natesan. Along with three other boys, they work all day, suffer the hatred and oppression of the higher caste masters, and take relief in marijuana and drugs. After verbal, physical, mental and sexual abuses, Sathi is forced to take a tough decision of leaving the theatre. The novel unfolds the life of subalterns. “Murugan’s keen eye and crackling prose plumb the dark underbelly of small-town existence, bringing Sathi’s world and entanglements thrillingly into life”.

Seasons of the Palm translated from *Koolamatari* in Tamil by V.Geetha is a portrayal of the practice of agricultural servitude present in the rural villages of India. The novel, split into three parts – “Dust”, “Fine Mud”, and “Dry Earth” – deals with the life and struggles of the lower caste children Shorty, Tallfellow, Stumpleg, Stonedeaf and Belly, who are bound to farms. Working under abusive landlords, the children find freedom in the grazing fields, solace in wells and happiness with friends. Called as his

masterpiece, the novel is shortlisted for the Kiriyama Prize in 2005. *The Hindu* describes Shorty's life and the novel as,

He struggles to keep a fragile happiness, but endless work and a stubborn hunger gnaw away at his spirited innocence. And before long, Shorty must confront the unyielding reality of his situation. Poignant and powerful, *Seasons of the Palm* is merciless in its portrayal of the daily humiliations of untouchability, but is also lyrical in its evocation of the grace with which the oppressed come to terms with their dark fate.

His next novel *Kanganam* is translated as *Resolve* by Aniruddhan Vasudevan is a social commentary on the impact of female infanticide in the villages in the Kongu region. Set in the end of 1980s the main character Marimuthu, a bachelor in his thirties, is in search of a prospective bride. The right to land ownership increased sex-selective abortions and murder of female children. Female children are considered as economic and social burdens because of dowry and inheritance. The novel also picturises the delicate threads of caste, agricultural ownership, marriage brokers and relationships.

Pookuzhi translated as *Pyre* by Aniruddhan Vasudevan is a touching novel that brings out one of the most inhuman casteist practices in Tamil Nadu – honour killing. The novel gave Murugan international acclaim as it became the first novel in Tamil to be longlisted for the Booker Prize. The novel describes the love of Kumaresan and Saroja, both being from different castes, have to face the realities of casteist oppression in a rural village. The cruelty of caste system and the association of Kumaresan's mother with caste ends up in the murder of Saroja. The novel is praised by the International Booker Prize Judges as, "An intercaste couple elopes, setting in motion a story of terrifying the foreboding. Perumal Murugan is a great anatomist of power and, in particular, of the deep,

deforming rot of caste hatred and violence. With flashes of fable, his novel tells a story specific and universal: how flammable are fear and the distrust of others”.

Poonachi Alladhu Oru Vellattin Kadhai is translated as *Poonachi: Or The Story of a Black Goat*. The novel is a moving tale of a goat gifted to an old couple by a giant. The goat starts her life as a weak child amidst healthy and robust goats, ram and kids. Trying to save her life from many threats, she meets her love Poovan. Fate has something different for her. She is forced to mate with an old ram and begets seven kids. She becomes weak because of feeding. She happens to meet Poovan again and becomes pregnant, but Poovan is sacrificed for a village god. Her health deteriorates in the upcoming pregnancies, and drought increases her suffering. Her death is described by Murugan as ‘she became a stone idol.’ The novel also portrays the life of farmers in the pre independence era.

The next novel, *Kazhimugam* is translated as *Estuary* by Nandhini Krishnan. Perumal Murugan’s works typically set in countryside and semi-urban areas are filled with lively fields, cattle and agriculture. *Estuary*, his first novel with an urban setting is a political and social allegory which satirizes the government, its rules, system and the society which is controlled by the modern technology and media. The novel is described as, “a razor-sharp parody of everything from e-commerce to the fitness industry, art appreciation to political manipulation, cram schools to social networks.”

Estuary is a form of reader’s journey into the soul of Kumarasurar, a middle aged government employee. He undergoes psychological trauma due to his lack of comprehension of his son’s mindset. Being of another generation, Kumarasurar is befuddled of his son Meghas’ adolescent mindset and viewpoint and astonished at Meghas’ knowledge of modern technology. To aggravate his confusion, Meghas asks for a costly mobile phone when he is sent to college. There are three prominent themes that run

throughout the novel: Political satire on government and the education system, addiction to media and technology, and the delicate relationship between a father and son. There are many other themes like obsession over fitness and beauty industries, the wrecked world bereft of love, importance of human relationships, and redemption through nature.

Murugan's works serve as the 'cultural map of Tamil Nadu.' His novel *Pookuzhi* translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan as *Pyre* was longlisted for the 2023 Booker Prize. This is the first time a regional novel in India has been longlisted for the Booker Prize. *Seasons of the Palm* was shortlisted for the Kiriyaama Prize in 2005 and is praised as a 'tour de force' (masterpiece) by N. Kalyan Raman. Murugan has researched on Kongu folklore, and deities of the region; but his creation of a dictionary of words, phrases, and idioms of Kongu belt is his greatest accomplishment and contribution.

Murugan is honoured with ILF Samanvay Bhasha Samman award by the India Habitat Centre for his excellent contribution to Indian Literature. The Tamil Nadu government also has bestowed many awards on him. He has also received awards from various organisations like: Katha Virudhu, Vilakku Virudhu, Canada Ilakiyathotta Virudhu, Amudhan Adigal Virudhu, Manal Veedu Virudhu, and Devamagal Virudhu. *The Hindu* praises him as "A great literary chronicler . . . at the height of his creative Powers", and *The Guardian* refers to him as, "The Tamil Irvine Welsh."

Murugan's works provided a vent to the untold miseries of thousands of untouchables in the clutches of patriarchy and social hegemony. As a writer and representative of the Kongu society, Murugan accurately portrays the land. He does not stop with just the geographic description and the pride of the area. He goes to the next level of mirroring the life of the privileged as well as the underdogs. Considering the need

for humanity and the way writer Perumal Murugan works avidly for a casteless society, his seven novels are explored in the present study.

The present study “From Restlessness to Reassuring Humanism in the Select Novels of Perumal Murugan” is divided into five chapters including Introduction and Conclusion. The main chapters are, Chapter II: Cruelty in the Form of Caste, Chapter III: Empowered Versus Subdued Women, Chapter IV: Establishing Good Rapport for Life Enhancement

The novels selected for the study are the translated versions of the original novels written in Tamil namely, *Koolamatari* (2000) translated by V.Geetha as *Seasons of the Palm* (2004), *Nizhalmutram* (1993) translated by V.Geetha as *Current Show* (2004), *Pookuzhi* (2013) translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan as *Pyre* (2016), *Poonachi Alladhu oru Vellatin Kadhai* (2016) translated by N. Kalyan Raman as *Poonachi: Or The Story of a Black Goat* (2017), *Eru Veyil* (1991) translated by Janani Kannan as *Rising Heat* (2019), *Kazhimugam* (2018) translated by Nandini Krishnan as *Estuary* (2020), *Kanganam* (2008) translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan as *Resolve* (2021).

Review of Literature:

The Review of literature includes sources on the origin of caste, the birth of Dalit Literature, Regional writers, and others which help in the understanding the geographical, cultural and the social structure of Kongu region. Other novels, short stories and essays of Murugan also serve as the base of the study. The novels of Dalit writers and writers dealing with Dalits are also used to compare the state of untouchables in other areas.

K.S.Ramaswamy Sastri’s “A Glimpse into Tamil Culture” which is a part of *The Tamils: The People, their History and Culture* is an analytical study on *Manusmriti* and

the origin and development of caste system in India and specially Tamil Nadu. The book provides a deeper understanding of the caste system in Tamil Nadu. Dr. Ambedkar's *Who Were the Shudras?* and *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* are the foundational books on the creation of universe, the beginning of social divisions, brahminical literature, origin of caste, its characteristics and development of caste in modern India.

Nirmal Selvamony's research project, *Tinai Studies* elaborates the primary divisions in Tamil culture which is based on the division of land called thinai. It shows how the division of 'kudis' changed into 'jati'. Akila Muthukumar's "Casteism and the making of Modern Tamil Nadu: The Story of Social Stratification & A Call to Action." describes the origin of caste in Tamil Nadu on the basis of *Tholkappiyam*. She compares the divisions of Manu and those of Tholkapiyar and other classic pieces of Tamil Literature. Dhanajeyan in *Vilimbunilai Makkal Vazhakarugal: Inavarayiyal Aaivu*. [*Prosecutions of the Marginalized: An Ethnographic Study*] is a study on the culture of the marginalised communities of Tamil Nadu, their language, art forms and ethnography.

Ko.Ma. Ramalingam Chettiyar's *Kongu Nattu Varalaru* serves as the basis of the history of Kongunadu, the rulers, transitions and the geographical boundaries based on references from Classical Tamil Literature and History. The book is a detailed research on the Kongu region from the date of its origin till the 20th century. C.R. Elangovan's article "Kongu region's contribution to Tamil literature - an overview" shows the literary contribution of the Kongu writers like Shanmugasundaram and Perumal Murugan's contribution to Regional Literature.

Similarly Meenakshi Sundaram's articles "Writers, Who Penned Kongu's Fragrance" and "Remembering a Kongu Woman Widowed in her Childhood" on Kongu Literature and Child widows respectively give a view of the Kongu Literature and the sufferings of women in the region. Kolappan's "Kongu region, a hotbed of Casteism?" shows the oppressive side of the Kongu region. The article shows how Kongu region has the equal level of caste oppression as the southern states by commenting on the murder of Gokulraj and the ban on Perumal Murugan.

The article "Slavery and agricultural bondage in South India in the nineteenth century" by Benedicte Hjejle is a detailed research on the Bonded Labourer System in India. His research traces out bondage in other countries, in India and the sufferings of the bonded labourers. S.Vadivukkarasi's blog, "Thanjavur Vattara Navalgalil Pannai Adimai Vazhviyal" and the blog titled "Senaithalaivar Varalaru" educates the readers about the history of agricultural servitude in Tamil Nadu and its development through the ages. Similarly, The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976 provides the legal aspects of the system and the need of change in the social constructions of India.

Bailey Betik's blog "Subaltern Studies" describes the varied subaltern concepts in the colonial context and the usage of the term subalternity based on the nationality and Leon De Kock's interview With Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak provides the basis of subaltern theory, the misunderstandings on the oppressed and the subalterns. The analysis titled, "Heidegger and today's 'everydayness'" by Bert Oliver gives three important points stressed by the latter through philosophy. The first thing is that Heidegger approaches the ontological structure of humans by pointing out that humans inescapably find themselves thrown into the world, without rhyme or reason. The next idea of Heidegger is that human beings consider themselves as a project, and think that they can find a way of life which is

satisfactory and secure. Nevertheless, most of the time, only a few become successful in their journey. Heidegger's last idea is that humans are prone to fall back into the conventional ways of the world again.

The novels, *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand and *Karukku* by Bama are on the casteist stigmatisations and the social structure of India. Murugan's other works including short stories, poetry, essays and thought pieces also give importance to the social, and cultural life of the Kongu region.

Murugan's short story collections, *The Goat Thief* and *Four Strokes of Luck* provide a better understanding of the Kongu region and Murugan's view on the life of people. The stories "Seemmatti the Buffalo", "Pork Roast", "Beloved Face", "The Well", "Musical Chairs", "Shit" are some important pieces in the collection. "Shit" is the portrayal of the degradation of manual scavengers and "Pork Roast" describes the death of a farmhand to save his master in spite of the discrimination. "Beloved Face" features the life a woman and the trauma she faces because of her dark skin. "Seemmatti the Buffalo" and "The Well" emphasises the bond of Murugan's characters with nature and animals. His other short stories also deal with the caste system and the life of common people in the region.

Murugan's poetry collection, *Songs of a Coward: Poems in Exile* shows the pain and trauma experienced by Murugan because of his exile. He shows his anger and regrets for the trust he had for his people. He calls himself a rat in a hole caught and how people see him as a monster with horns. He tries to escape the reality and go back to his writing but is struck in the past and present. His essay collection *Black Coffee in a Coconut Shell: Caste as a Lived Experience* translated by C.S. Lakshmi is a collection of his people's experience on caste. In the collection, "Of What Use?" by Ranjan is important as it

highlights the presence of caste in educational institutions. Every essay is on a different dimension of caste of people belonging to different communities.

Murugan's other novels *One Part Woman*, *A Lonely Harvest*, *Trial by Silence*, *Alandapatchi*, *Neduneram* and his book *Amma* are also based on the daily lives of his people and his experiences in Kongu society. *One Part Woman* and its sequels are on the after effects of a childless couple and both the novels, *Alandapatchi* and *Neduneram* focus on the caste discrimination, inter-caste love and social identity.

Poomari's thesis titled *Perumal Murugan Padaippugalil Vazhviyar Sindhanaigal* is a sociological research conducted on selected novels of Perumal Murugan. The articles on Murugan in *Kalachuvadu* titled. "Perumal Muruganin Kannadikkoodam: Vanmurayin Kadhaiyadagalum Nilaitangum Bimbangalum"[*"The Glass Gallery of Perumal Murugan: narratives and Lingering Images of Violence"*] Louis Gomas describes the caste system and the state of the oppressed in the novels *Seasons of the Palm*, *Current Show*, *Pyre* and *Poonachi*.

Thesis Statement:

Marginalisation in terms of caste, class, gender, and race is inhuman as it deprives people of their rights. This can be stopped when people realise their rights and set right their relationship with others, thus creating a better environment to live.

Objectives:

- To understand marginalisation and Dalit consciousness.
- To bring out the problems of the suppressed to light.
- To examine the status of women characters portrayed in the novels.
- To emphasise the need for maintaining relationship with fellow human beings and nature

Research Methodology:

A few concepts of Subaltern theory is used in Chapter II and Chapter III, Social Identity theory and a few concepts related to it, Humanism and Schultz nature connectedness is used in Chapter IV. MLA Handbook 8th Edition is used for Documentation.

Chapter I: Introduction gives an overview of the origin of the concept of untouchability, Dalit literature, and writers contributing to Dalit literature in Tamil. The notion of untouchability is believed to have come from *Manusmriti* and Purusha Sukta. Manu, with the varna system divides human beings based on their origin from Brahma into four varnas. One group of people who are excluded from the varna system are referred to as ‘panchamas’ and are regarded as untouchables. Though the division was meant to be based on work, it came to stay as a division of people. The hierarchy was conceived as propaganda, and any idea or action disturbing the structure was deemed to be a terrific sin.

The untouchables are denied their rights, and have attempted all possible ways to come out of their inferred identity. With literature as a tool, they shed light on their culture, ancestry, and struggle. The Dalit revolutionaries worked tirelessly for their advancement. With their support, the misconceptions about the community started to decrease, and others who remained ignorant of the other side of society became aware of the social injustice. This type of suppression is common in other countries too. There are certain similarities in the caste system of almost all the countries.

Madara Chennaiah, a cobbler and saint who lived in the eleventh century and Dohara Kakkaiah are considered the foremost Dalit writers. Modern Dalit literature originated in Marathi in the 1960s with the establishment of Dalit Panthers, a revolutionary organisation founded by Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, J.V.Pawar, and

Raja Dhale to work for the upliftment of Dalits. Dalit literature is generally seen as literature by Dalits; but it encompasses any piece of writing dealing with the particular community. Arjun Dangle, in his *Poisoned Bread*, points out the fifth resolution taken in the first conference of Dalit writers in 1958 regarding this: “The literature written by the Dalits and that written by others about the Dalits in Marathi be accepted as a separate entity known as Dalit Literature” (xxviii). This helped many others to express themselves through their writings.

Dalit literature is culture and location specific like Aboriginal literature. It is an expression of the lives of the Dalits, the oppression they undergo, the social alienation they are forced into, and ways for their empowerment. Dalit literature exposes them to the world, taking them out of the darkness. This motivated writers from other parts of the country to express their experiences in other regional languages like Tamil, Malayalam, and Hindi.

From ancient folklore to modern writings, the concerns of Dalit writers have been to voice out their sufferings and to point out the ways of liberation. Suraj Yengde in his article “Twelve books that form part of the arsenal of Dalit writing” says, “One of the solid arsenals produced by the Dalit community, apart from its resolute commitment to love, forgive and fight, is the articulation, through literature, of human emotion, and writing about bodies and sexuality, compelling rage and justifiable challenges to authority.” The introductory chapter also includes a Review of Literature and Murugan’s place among the writers.

Chapter II: Cruelty in the Form of Caste deals with the practice of marginalisation in Tamil Nadu. Though marginalisation exists everywhere in India and other countries, the severity of the oppression varies according to the location. Cleaning of human excretion and depriving people of their education are more common in North India, and bonded

labour is common in South India. Hailing from an agricultural family, Murugan concentrates on the underprivileged, like poor farmers, goatherds, farmhands, and field workers in the Kongu belt in his works.

The region comprises some districts in the Western part of the state namely, Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Erode, Salem, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Namakkal, Karur, some parts of Trichy and The Nilgris. His writings are primarily focused on Namakkal.

Most of his works are set in rural areas with the ambience of green fields, barren, uncultivated lands, wells, and expansive pastures, which serve as the backdrop. The land becomes an observer, companion, and philosopher of people. Agriculture and cattle rearing are the main sources of income for these people. Murugan's protagonists, who live their lives in the pastures and fields, are unaware of what is happening outside.

The significant issue prevalent in the area is Agricultural servitude – lower caste individuals bonded to a specific landlord in exchange for an annual monetary payment that may or may not include food. The landlords of high caste suppress the labourers in whatever ways they can. They use them from dawn to dusk with all kinds of jobs like cleaning, caring for cattle and working in fields, robbing them of their rights, voice for equality, and the privilege of leading even an ordinary life. The novel *Seasons of the Palm* is a very realistic portrayal of the living conditions of children who are bonded in landlords' farms.

Honour killing is a curse of the region. Men and women who marry out of caste are brutally murdered and people belonging to lower castes are commonly victimised. Saroja, the lower caste woman is murdered by her mother-in-law for marrying her son in the novel *Pyre*. With the help of her relatives, the mother-in-law sets fire to the bush where Saroja is hiding, without any compassion for the pregnant girl.

The concept of 'purity' is deeply ingrained in the region of Murugan. Beyond these, the misuse of lower castes is the most pervasive problem in almost all societies. The untouchables lacking access to education and family support must work hard to make both ends meet. Taking advantage of their situation, the higher classes exploit them. In *Current Show*, the boys in the theatre lack support from their families. The owner uses them to attack his neighbour as he does not have to pay more. The boys become scapegoats. The theatre operator uses the boy Sathi to satisfy his sexual desires.

Murugan has personally experienced the uglier face of caste. When he was a child, he had friends from lower caste visiting his house. The chapter brings to light the sufferings of the lower caste people and the cruel treatment meted out to them. Murugan says in an interview to *Deccan Chronicle*, "People from all walks of life used to come often to our house. This had given me an impression that my mother was not a casteist. But when I married out of my caste, she refused to come out of the house for months." The chapter brings to light the sufferings of the lower caste people and the cruel treatment meted out to them.

Chapter III: Empowered Versus Subdued Women analyses the women characters of Perumal Murugan. Murugan emphasises the role played by the female characters in all his works. His women can be classified into two types: Empowered Women and Subdued Women. He shows 'women of land' as the deciding force, independent, strong-willed and empowered. In many of Murugan's households, there are single mothers, who, besides fulfilling their responsibilities at home, work hard in the fields like their male counterparts. Kali's mother and Ponna in *One Part Woman*, Kumaresan's mother in *Pyre*, Marimuthu's grandmother in *Resolve*, though widows, are remarkable women characters of Murugan.

Widows are traumatised and treated inhumanly. However, they gain strength from the land and prove their mettle by showing their revolutionary nature. Poonachi, though a

goat, is considered a representative of the women of the region. She brings joy and hope to the lives of the people around her and dies for her family.

Murugan also depicts women who are oppressed because of their caste and gender. Kongu society is gender biased. Male children are viewed as inheritors, whereas female children are considered unnecessary burdens. Female infanticide is widespread in the area. In the novel *Resolve*, Marimuthu shows the effect of female infanticide and sex-selective abortions. He remains a bachelor in his thirties because of the lack of women in his community.

Saroja of *Pyre*, Belly and Stumpleg of *Seasons of the Palm*, Ramayi of *Rising Heat* are subdued women. They are from the lower caste and suffer due to their caste and gender. The landlords of the farm where Belly and Stumpleg work abuse them. Ramayi of *Rising Heat* is forced into prostitution because of urbanisation and her imbecile husband. The chapter describes the status of women in the Kongu Society.

Chapter IV: Establishing Good Rapport for Life Enhancement throws light on the universal fact that humanity is the only way to cure the society infected with diseases like caste discrimination. Murugan's works not only depict the filth, suffering, and repression of his society but also display how admirable and encouraging relationships contribute to the betterment of society.

Seasons of the Palm depicts a supportive relationship between the worker and his Master, where Shorty's Master assumes a paternal role. Though he shows his casteist pride at times, he teaches Shorty the cultivation of palm, lets him befriend his son Selvan, and corrects him when he makes mistakes by being patient or punishing him. In turn, Shorty helps his son Selvan during challenging times.

Murugan also highlights the relationship between parents and children that helps the children succeed. He beautifully captures the relationship between the son and his

father in *Estuary*. Numerous instances of friendship have developed, despite caste and economic disparities. The friendship between Raman and Marimuthu in *Resolve*, the friendship between Kumaresan and Soda Bhai, and the friendship among children in *Seasons of the Palm* and *Current Show* are examples. Murugan shows how the connection and love between Saroja and Kumaresan in *Pyre* and Marimuthu and his lower caste wife in *Resolve* help break down the caste wall.

The most meaningful bond Murugan describes is the unbreakable connection rural folks have with nature which gives them the fortitude to face life's challenges. They derive their sustenance from the land, which nourishes and binds them, fostering harmony and imparting the lessons of life. Murugan's works contain symbolic references to nature using symbols like goats, wells, and palm trees. All his symbols are juxtaposed. Palm trees represent the mental strength to resist and endure adversity. They are used to convey both loneliness and unity. Wells provide consolation and solace, while goats are benevolent and revolutionary.

The bonds that Murugan exhibits are remarkable in that they are comparable to those that enabled him to recover and live again. He was able to deal with the issues that arose after his inter-caste marriage and resurrect himself after the exile due to the controversy that ensued with the publication of *One Part Woman*. In his poetry collection *Songs of a Coward*, he expresses the trauma he has undergone during his exile and the process of his convalescing with the support of his friends and family. As per the philosophy of Humanism, Murugan's characters strive hard to claim their rights, progress in their lives, and try to make the world a better place to live in with the bonds they create. The Chapter focuses on how the power of love helps people transcend the obstacles in their life.

Chapter V: Summation sums up the important points of the three main chapters and reiterates the need for connection and communication in human life. In his native land, Murugan serves as the voice of the oppressed, providing a clear picture of the Kongu society from all perspectives – geographical, social, religious and even rural politics. The characters of Murugan live in darkness, away from the fantasies of the world. His novels echo their continuous cry for freedom, equality and love.

From Tallfellow of *Seasons of the Palm* to Sathi of *Current Show*, despite the differences in their place, work, and situations, they come together in their longing for human compassion and the quest for freedom. Murugan says, “We must resist anything that divides us” (Nair). He wants people to be in harmony overcoming the discriminations of caste and gender so that better relationships can be established, bringing about the desired transformation.