

Unmasking Subalternity in *The Blue-necked God* and *Karukku*

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Submitted by

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DECLARATION

I Jalendra Phukon, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "**Unmasking Subalternity in *The Blue-necked God and Karukku***" is the record of my own analyses and investigations. I have completed my M. Phil dissertation under the supervision of Professor Irshad Gulam Ahmed of the Department of English, Sikkim University, Gangtok. This dissertation or any part of this dissertation has not been submitted to any University/Institute for the purpose of any degree, diploma or qualification.

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "*Unmasking Subalternity in The Blue-necked God and Karukku*" submitted to Sikkim University for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in the Department of English embodies the result bona fide research work carried out by **Jalendra Phukon** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association and Fellowship.

All the assistance and help during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

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Dedicate to my Mother

Mothila Phukan

“No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow.”

-----Alice Walker

“You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation; you cannot build up a morality. Anything you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole”. ----- Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

“Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression”. ----- Nelson Mandela

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Understanding Subalternity

The word "subaltern" has different layers of meaning. "Subalternity" is a term that refers to the oppression of people living in third world countries. In other words "subalterns" are those people who do not have basic recognition in a developing country. In a developing nation, there are various groups of people in the social structure who are divided according to their class and caste hierarchies. In such a structure the lowest or the oppressed groups under the ruling groups may be defined as "subalterns". The subalterns are exploited in many ways viz. socially, politically, economically, culturally, racially, etc. In postcolonial studies and critical theory, the term "subaltern" encompasses those people who are socially, politically, and geographically outside the hierarchy of power of a state. The term subaltern has become a standard way to designate the colonial subject that has been constructed by European discourse and internalized by colonial peoples who employ this discourse (Abrams. 307). A subaltern is a person with a low ranking in a social, political, or other hierarchy. It can also mean someone who has been marginalised and neglected.

The outbreak of Second World War and the formation of UNO in 1945 brought a drastic change in the history of colonised countries. Many powerful nationalist movements took place which had shaken down the coloniser's long rule. After the end of the long colonial rule, the third world countries emerged as new republic nations. Though these countries attained freedom from the colonisers, their

societies multiplied into various fractions based on class, caste, and race. The colonisers had been ruling in these countries for centuries through the "divide and rule" policy by breaking the societies into fragments. They had continued to rule in these colonies by dividing the populations in the name of caste, religion, colour, class, and gender. These policies continued to make a vast impact on the marginal groups in the newly independent nations. Though these nations display themselves as republic nations, a large segment of the population has been under oppression for decades in the hands of upper-class populations. The colonisers had declared the independence of these countries, yet in other sense, they transferred their power and control to the elitist class groups. These upper-class groups continued to exercise control over the minorities after the declaration of independence. The elitist class started exploiting the lower class in different ways. In India, the elitist classes have been dominating the mass population in the name of class, caste, and religion. This system of domination over the lower classes by elitist class enlarged the subaltern class and their subalternity. As discussed in the essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, by Spivak, the following are the elitist groups.

1. Dominant foreign groups.
2. Dominant indigenous groups on the all-India level.
3. Dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels.
4. The terms "people" and "subaltern classes" have been used as synonymous throughout this note. The social groups and elements included in this category represent *the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the "elite".*(Guha)

These elitist groups have been continuously dominating the subaltern subjects for ages. Moreover, the subalternity of Indian subaltern subjects has always been catalysed by the age-old traditional and cultural norms. People of many religious beliefs reside in a large country like India. The people within those religions are furthermore split up on caste and class basis. These dissimilarities and divisions within the populations have been playing an irrefutable role in the project of the subaltern class by the elites. The lower caste groups are dominated by the upper caste groups and the lower class groups are dominated by higher class groups. On the other hand, patriarchy and gender issues are yet other important factors in the existence of subalternity. The women subjects within the subalterns are more suppressed in society. The domination and misrepresentation of women in society are reflected in a significant manner in literary texts. During the colonial period though the colonisers had taken many steps to protect women from native patriarchal society, they had their own agenda as they wanted to emerge as champions of the cause of the women as victims. As in her influential essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states that the paradox of representation of voiceless, "white men saving brown women from brown men" versus Indian nativists who say that "the women actually wanted to die". Spivak brought attention to the readers; "the problem of representation" of third world women by western scholarship. Spivak turns against the notions of western poststructuralist thinkers such as Foucault and Gilles Deleuze who have challenged that human individual are 'sovereign subjects' with autonomous agency over their consciousness. Similarly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in her essay, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, warns and exposes the production of a singular category of 'Third world' women in Western feminism which damagingly creates the 'discursive homogenisation and

systematisation of the oppression of women in the third world'. She is critical of Western feminism because they try to put "the third world women" in the category of western women.

1.2: Defining Subalternity

The term "subaltern" in general means someone who is in a lower position in social, political or any other structure. In other words, they are those populations who are not represented among others in the hierarchy. They are oppressed and marginalised by the groups who are superior to them in some way or other. The word "subaltern" originated from the Latin word "sub-alternus" which means 'sub' meaning 'below' and 'alternus' meaning 'all-others'. Different thinkers have defined it differently. The word has been used by theorists and thinkers in different senses according to the subjects they have taken. Following are a few definitions discussed below:-

1. **Subaltern:** Any officer in the British army who is lower in the rank than a captain.

(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary by A.S. Hornby defines "subaltern" as officers in the British army whose positions are lower than a captain. It refers to any officer who works under the captain who is inferior in rank or status and follows the order given to him by a British army captain may be categorised as a subaltern.

2. **Subaltern:** The people of the underclass in a society on whom the dominant power puts forth its hegemonic power and impact. (Antonio Gramsci)

Antonio Gramsci in his article *Notes on Italian History* which published later as a part of his popular book *Prison Notebooks* refers subalterns to those people that include peasants, workers and other groups who have been denied access to hegemonic power. He means to any person or group of inferior rank whether of race, class, ethnicity, religion, and gender.

3. **Subaltern:** The demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'. (Ranajit Guha)

In the book called "*On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India*", *Subaltern Studies*. OUP, 1982, Ranajit Guha has defined subalterns as all those populations who do not come under the class of elitists. He refers to all those groups within the total population who are not elites or of upper-class groups.

4. **Subaltern:** Subjects belong to third world countries. It is impossible for them to speak up as they are divided by gender, class, caste, region, religion and other narratives. These divisions do not allow them to stand up in unity. (Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak)

Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak introduces the question of gender and sexual difference in her renowned work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* According to her, she points to those people who belong to third world countries. These people are divided in terms of gender, caste, class, region, religion and other narratives. These fragmentations make them weaker and do not allow speaking for themselves. Hence, Spivak concludes that Subaltern cannot speak for them.

5. **Subaltern:** Oppressed, racial minorities whose social presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group. (Homi K. Bhabha)

Famous post-colonial thinker Homi K. Bhabha has used the word subaltern in terms of social power relations. He defines subaltern to the oppressed social groups who are racial minorities in the social presence.

6. **Subaltern:** The composite culture of resistance to and acceptance of domination and hierarchy. (Dipesh Chakravorty)

Dipesh Chakravorty defines subalterns as those groups who try to resist themselves from the hegemonic power but finally, they have to accept domination. This acceptance of domination by these groups has become their composite culture.

1.3: Theorising Subalternity

In Critical theory or Postcolonial Studies, the "subaltern" theory is a principle to understand the people of lower status groups who are deprived of their identity and position in society. This theory attempts to throw light into the history of the colonial period and deconstructs the history of those marginal populations. In this critical tradition, literature is analysed in terms of issues like race, gender, class, religions, etc. "Subaltern Studies began its impressive career in England at the end of the 1970s, when conversations on subaltern themes among a small group of English and Indian historians led to a proposal to launch a new journal in India" (Ludden, 2002). Before this group, Italian Marxist theoretician Antonio Gramsci had used the term "subaltern" in the 1920s for the first time leaving outside the non-military sense. In general, the dictionary meaning of "subaltern" is a junior army officer in the British

army but here he turned the meaning outside it. Gramsci had used this meaning in his Marxist-Communist theory. In the 1970s, the English and Indian historians started writing on various issues relating to the history of peasants and downtrodden people in India. Later, the members of this group were influenced by the new perspectives of Erik Stokes on the history of India and South Asia. Ranajit Guha in the early 1980s published the 'manifest' *Subaltern Studies I* and his key monograph *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (1983). Subaltern Studies quickly became a movement in historical research (Ludden, 2002) aiming to redeem 'suppressed voices' by challenging 'authoritative voices' (Azad, 2014). For this reason, they are also called subalternists. They attempted to rediscover lost historical narratives on subaltern populations by uncovering the deep layers of hegemony embodied at multiple dimensions. This group of scholars in Britain started to relocate the past of colonial and postcolonial societies of India and South Asia with various perspectives. These scholars who continued to study the subaltern subjects of India and South Asian countries later came to be called as Subaltern studies group (SSG). Some of the important pioneers of Subaltern Studies are Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak, Partha Chatterjee, Gyan Pandey, Gautam Bhadra, David Hadriman, Shahid Amin, etc. With the passage of time these scholars continued to develop and discover many new aspects and ideas on the subaltern subjects. Many theories, ideas, and concepts have been initiated by these members within the group. The meaning of the term "subaltern" split up according to their study and interest of the subject. These scholars carried forward their study to different dimensions of Indian and South Asian postcolonial studies. The following are the few ideas and concepts which they had introduced according to their interest in studies.

Although Antonio Gramsci was not in the group of Subaltern Studies, long back in the 1920s he had first used the term 'subaltern' referring to the Italian peasants and workers marginalised by the Fascist party. In his book *Prison Notebooks*, he denoted subalterns to those people that include peasants, workers and other groups who have been denied access to hegemonic power.

Gramsci used 'subaltern social groups' as a cipher or camouflage for 'proletariat' in order to evade prison censors, who may have revoked his authorization to write in his prison cell if his work appeared overtly Marxist or controversial to Fascist authorities (Green). Antonio Gramsci, in general, tried to identify and put forward the politics and activity of marginalised population groups in Italian history in constructing the concept of 'subaltern social groups'. In analyses of specific historical contexts, Gramsci refers to slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races, the popolani (common people) and popolo (people) of the medieval communes, the proletariat, and the bourgeoisie prior to the Risorgimento as subaltern groups (Green). In his idea of subalternity, Gramsci not only limits to class relations but considers all those subjects of domination, exclusion and other marginalities in different ways. Due to this complex interrelation among the notion of subalterns and some other ideologies, Gramsci never mentioned a last word but presented a fragmentary account of subalterns. Green (2002) further highlights the dynamic notion of Gramscian subalterns. He (2002) states that, in *Notebook 1* (1929-30), Gramsci called noncommissioned/junior military troops subalterns (p.1). In *Notebook 3* and *4*, he used the word subaltern to identify the lower class people of a society. In *Notebook 25*, he further clarified this notion by calling slaves, labourers, peasants and women subalterns (Green, 2002, p. 2-3). Hence, Gramsci propounded multiple meanings of subalterns according to the subjects with autonomy.

Ranajit Guha is one of the pioneer members of the Subaltern Studies Group, he started developing Gramscian theories with special reference to South Asian subalterns. Guha's subalterns are suppressed people due to several demographic factors including class, caste, culture, and religion (Ludden, 2002). His most influential text written on subaltern historical scholarship is *Elementary Aspects of Peasants Insurgency in Colonial India*. In this text, he presented the history of peasants' insurrection in colonial India. Ranajit Guha in his study tried to highlight the peasants' history of colonial India. Guha further claimed that the history of peasants has always been neglected by the elitist historians. He brought into use the word 'elite' or 'elite class' and contrasted with the word 'subaltern'. These elite groups have always exploited the peasants for their political and economic benefit. So Guha's idea and theory of subalternity is something that exists outside the class of elite or elitism. Guha puts forward the aim of Subaltern Studies in *Subaltern Studies I* as:

The aim of subaltern studies is to promote a systematic and informed discussion of subaltern themes in the field of South Asian Studies, and thus help to rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work in this particular area, (i) His further argument is that the Subaltern Studies is the study of "the history, politics, economics, and sociology of subalternity ... in short, the culture informing the condition" (SS: 48).

Thus, Guha strongly proposed his intension to recover and reread the colonial history of peasants' revolts and insurgencies. He attempts to reinterpret and represent the subalterns as subjects of colonial history which were for a long time neglected and denied in history.

Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak is another popular figure in the Subaltern Studies Group. As a critic and member of Subaltern Studies Group, she primarily centered on women and gender issues of the colonial and post-colonial periods. She is very much critical of the elite based school of study. Spivak criticises subaltern school of studies because of the failure and negligence done in identifying the women and gender issues. *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, is Spivak's groundbreaking essay through which she upholds a new subject in the Subaltern scholarship. Spivak deconstructs in her essay to examine, 'how truth is constructed' and to deploy the assertions of one intellectual and political position to 'interrupt or bring into crisis another'. Through her essay, Spivak pointed out several weaknesses of western critics in the method of representing the third world subaltern subjects. Spivak states in her essay,

"Neither Deleuze nor Foucault seems aware that the intellectual within socialised capital, brandishing concrete experience, can help consolidate the international division of labour" (Spivak).

Foucault's subject of discourse has always been the subject of knowledge and Derrida's is only interested in the subject of the west. On the other hand, Marx's scholarship was based on class consciousness only whereas Deleuze talks about the oppressed working class. Hence she is very critical of the western critics for shortcomings and invisibility of women subjects in the third world. Spivak mentions in her study that the black or brown poor rural women as 'voiceless' and double colonised referring to Bhuvanewari Bhadhuri's suicide case. Spivak considers that subaltern is a gendered issue and therefore needs to be studied with the help of feminist theory. Spivak relates the concept of the subaltern to the marginalised poor women of third world countries (Tibile, 2012). She further states the shortcomings of traditional feminism as an ineffective discipline for raising the situations of poor third

world women. She introduced the concepts of class, caste, and culture with regard to subaltern women (Morton, 2003). Spivak raises a rhetorical question, "can the subaltern speak?, with or without the intervention of well-intentioned intellectuals" and her blunt answer is "no". She sums up that subalterns are always subalterns and they cannot speak. Being a Marxist feminist deconstructionist, Spivak applied the strategy of deconstruction to unveil the truth to recover marginal subjects against the grain of central discourses (Vinayak, 2000).

1.4: Subalternity in Indian Society

It is well said by someone that "India is a rich country where poor people live". Similarly, the subalternity in Indian society is invisible in the surface level. But, when we go into the depth of the society we could discover many layers of subalternity. The subalternity of Indian society is prevailed with many issues like caste, community, class, religion, tradition, gender, politics, history, migration, economy, etc.

1.4.1: Politics of Power in Indian Society

In the history of India, the politics of power has been an apparent subject. From the last several centuries, the politics of power have played roles in numerous ways to control the mass subjects. The higher classes Brahmins have always attempted to bring their rule over the other peoples. The Brahmins continued to implement the Caste-Varna system in Indian society which may be simply called the Brahmin-Raj system. Under this system, the old Vedic rules were implemented to rule society. The Brahmin class is supposed to be at the topmost level in this system followed by Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra class. When the Colonisers came to India, they

observed the weaknesses of the Caste-Varna system. Similarly, they started making policies to bring the people under their control. This policy popularly came to be called "Divide and Rule Policy".

As discussed by M. N. Srinivas in his article, *Caste in Modern India*, Professor Ghurye writes that before the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the Bengal Army was composed largely of Brahmins and Rajputs and that soldiers belonging to these castes took a leading part in the Mutiny. The British Commission, after recording evidence from high British officials who had served in India, recommended that "the native Indian Army should be composed of different nationalities and castes and as a general rule mixed promiscuously through each regiment." Professor Ghurye thinks that the Mutiny drove British rulers away and that the safety of British dominion in India was very closely connected with keeping the Indian people divided into the lines of caste. He quotes the opinions of contemporary Britons like Sir Lepel Griffin and James Kerr, who knew that caste divided the Indian people into small groups and obstructed the emergence of nationalist sentiment. Towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the maxim of "Divide and Rule" began to be openly preached by historians and journalists (Ghurye, pp. 175-176).

The upper-class people have always tried to misuse the power for their privileges. They have always attempted to suppress the minorities by using the politics of power. During the freedom struggle, Gandhi and Ambedkar were in the clash while attending at the Second Round Table Conference. Ambedkar wanted to raise a claim for separate electorates for Untouchables but Gandhi was against it. Both of them claimed to be the real representatives of Untouchables. Gandhi refused to acknowledge that Ambedkar had the right to represent Untouchables (Roy, 108). After a year, when the British government granted separate electorates for the

Untouchables, Gandhi criticised it. He had started fasting inside the jail to show his opposition towards the grant provided to the Untouchables. The gist of it was that the caste Hindus wanted the power to close the door on Untouchables, but on no account could Untouchables be given the power to close the door on themselves. The masters knew that choice was power (Roy, 109). Finally, Ambedkar had to sign the Poona Pact which changed separate electorate status into reserved seat status in general constituencies. After independence, India remained divided in the name of various groups' opposition. Among the various groups within Indian society that are in opposition to one another can be classified as Hindu-Muslim, Hindi-non-Hindi, Sunni-Shia, tribal-non-tribal, caste-harijan, male-female, urban-rural, agricultural-industrial, employed-unemployed, Worker-capitalist, landless labourer-rich peasant, sharecropper-landlord (Lieten 313). Hence, the power of the upper class has always been used as politics to dominate the depressed class.

In a male-dominated society, women are always considered as a secondary subject. The colonial period had been a huge disaster for them. Though some changes have taken place in the post-colonial period, but still they are under many types of suppressions. During the colonial period, the colonisers made various policies to control women. Similarly, as mentioned above they set forward many religious rules to subvert women in society. The Caste-Varna system played a major role in diminishing the unity of Indians while the rules implemented on women helped the colonisers to suppress every woman in each family in India. The Britishers played many types of politics through their power to control India. The "Doctrine of Lapse" was such a policy of the colonisers. It was a policy to annex all the Indian states under their rule. This policy was implemented by Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor-General of India, under the English East India Company. Under this policy, if the

ruler of any princely state died without a natural heir, his adopted son would not be recognised as his successor by the British and that native state lapsed to the British dominion. By the application of this policy, several Indian states were brought under the British rule (www.info.history). This policy of annexation was applied in Jhansi. Rani Lakshmi Bai fought bravely with the Britishers but finally, Jhansi was annexed after her defeat. In the history of India, there were no proper social reform movements for women. It took place either by colonial intervention into Indian tradition or the challenges of revivalist nationalists to the colonial power. But these reforms had been under the command of male power which idealised men. These movements raised the issues of widows, oppression, purdah, education, etc but these happened under the concerns of the upper class or colonial politics. Similarly, the abolition of the Sati system was a colonial politics for own recognition. During the freedom movement, Gandhiji believed in women's participation and power. He stressed more in capacity of self-sacrifice and suffering rather than women's protection and interests. He associated 'femininity' with spiritual and moral courage, the heroines he chose for women to emulate were Sita and Draupadi rather than, Rani of Jhansi (Menon, 9). Today in free India, though various women's rights are being guaranteed by the government, women have not been able to set up themselves. Women are frequently seen victimised by a male in society. The patriarchal politics always suppress women to support the male tendency in a family. In the laws on rape and marriage, women's rights to property, custody, and guardianship of children, the Indian state shows itself to be the protector of patriarchal values (Menon, 16). At home, at the workplace, at the office, at public and private places, everywhere there is a chance of their exploitation through male politics. Thus, women are exploited in the hands of men in

various ways. From a family to the national level, various male-centered politics are being played to dominate women under the hands of men.

1.4.2: Subalternity in Indian Literature

Literature is very rightly called "the mirror of society". It plays a major role in reflecting on the issues and conditions of society. India is occupied with a vast geographical landmass which is divided into many states. It is a country with a diverse class, race, religion, and ethnicity. Each state has been created based on some similarities within the population groups. On the other hand, every state has some differences to the other concerning its culture and ethnicity. Moreover, the history of cultural development of each religion is dissimilar within the country. In such a phenomenon literature has been an able source to portray the development and decline of society. The subalternity in Indian literature is reflected with full of caste, class and religious elements. Furthermore, it is mirrored with gendered issues directed by patriarchy. The evolution of the bourgeois class supported by old traditional orthodoxy during the colonial rule expanded the subaltern subjects. The wretchedness of the caste system has been generally depicted in Indian works of literature. Class conflicts and exploitation of poor classes have also been the issues of subalternity in Indian literatures. Literary luminaries like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Vijay Tendulkar, R.K Narayanan had played a significant role in presenting the subalternity of victimised subjects through their writings. Literary creations like *Untouchable* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* depict the bitter realities of the caste system in India. Tendulkar in his play, *Silence! The Court is in Session* reflects the inner truth of Indian subaltern women. Arundhati Roy in her well-known novel *The God of Small Things* raises the issues of subalternity based on a class and gendered society. She explores the limitations of women in a patriarchal society. Life writing like *Joothan*

by Om Prakash Valmiki depicts the social reality of Dalit lives. It explores the painful journey of Valmiki from his childhood to old age in a caste-centered society. Mahasweta Devi in her writings like *Breast Givers*, *Rudali*, *Dhowli*, *Darupadi*, etc had presented the subalternity of Indian Women. Thus, the struggle and cry of subaltern subjects are apparent in Indian literature.

1.5: Authors and Works

Indira Goswami is one of the most popular names in Assamese literature. She is also known by her pen name Mamoni Raisom Goswami. Referring to the depth of her writings, she can also be considered one of the pioneers of Assamese modernist literature. Her subjects of writings touch various areas like widowhood and women, suffering and exploitation, tradition and rituals, etc. Predominantly, portrayal of women suffering has been a recurrent topic in her works. As a celebrated writer she had been conferred with many prestigious awards like Sahitya Akademi Award (1983) the Jnanpith Award (2001) and Principal Prince Claus Laureate (2008). Many of her popular works like *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, *The Blue-necked God*, *Pages Stained With Blood* and *The Man from Chinnamasta* have been translated into English. During her lifetime, she had also attempted to bring social change through the role as a mediator. Indira Goswami through her works has made a great contribution to the Indian literature which includes autobiographies, novels, and short stories. In her novel, *The Blue-necked God*, Goswami boldly describes the plight of women, especially the widows, and hopes to bring about change in society. The main focus is on the sufferings of these widows in the Hindu community. They face financial astringency coupled with mental and physical exploitation. The woman

protagonist in the autobiography is unable to free herself from a male-centered society. In this text, the lives of widows are portrayed as neglected and abandoned under a few conservative customs and bound within a limit.

Bama Faustina Soosairaj belongs to India's Southern state of Tamil Nadu. She is a Dalit feminist and novelist who writes in Tamil language. Bama is most popularly known for reflecting the Dalit feminist sensitivity in her novels. Bama became popular with the publications of her two seminal works i.e. *Karukku* (1992) and *Sangati* (1994). Both of these works are autobiographical in nature which portray the hardship and sufferings of Dalit Christians. Apart from that she has written many other literary works like *Vanmam* (2002), *Kusumbukaran* (1996) and *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003). She is a responsible writer of the age who writes to bring change in the society. She reflects the existential predicament of the Dalit women and the protagonist's struggle against patriarchy as she has depicted in her narrative *Karukku*. Bama assumes herself to be a bird whose wings have been clipped, yet she desires to live a meaningful life. She feels that for the better survival of women, empowerment of women is necessary and it is possible only by eradicating inequality and untouchability, by empowering them through education and employment and by taking pride in their identity. The plight of Dalit women in the Indian society as depicted in *karakku* is sad and labeled with considerable gloom. They are oppressed on the basis of class, gender as well as caste. *Karukku* focuses on two main aspects namely caste and religion which caused great pain in the heart of Bama. Her fictional landscape is seared with the violence on Dalit women, wife-beating, sexual harassment, loneliness, women abandoned by their husbands, ignorance, marginalisation, and denial of freedom at home and, ultimately, the succumbing of the entire Dalit community to the economic exploitation of the upper castes.

The sufferings of women have always been extremely sensitive and crucial topics across literatures. The texts *The Blue-necked God* and *Karukku* adequately portray some aspects of their manifold sufferings. India has many castes like Brahmin, Kshatryia, Vashya, Sudra, etc, and the existence of caste system often compels women to follow strict codes of conduct. These codes of conduct are patriarchal and are mostly drawn from religious institutions that have historically tried to undermine women. For example, in *The Blue-necked God* and *Karukku* the authors depict various layers of oppression of women. These layers of oppression are caused by the existence of the patriarchal caste system. In the selected texts it is found that women are suppressed irrespective of their caste-based positions. All of them are subjected to subjugation induced by the patriarchal system and caste-based hierarchy. So based on the select texts it is seen that women might belong to any religion or caste but they often have to undergo various discriminations and atrocities. In many of the communities, women are treated as second class citizens, even today in certain societies women are rarely allowed to hold the dominant position in a societal structure. In the select novels under discussion it can be clearly seen that under Brahmin women generally have to follow the strict patriarchal rules directed by the male members of the family whereas in a Dalit society the women have to follow the patriarchal rules along with the discrimination which they have to face for coming from the so-called lower stratum of the society. Thus in the select text, the Dalit women have to bear several layers of oppression unlike the women from the upper class.

1.6: Research Problem

The narratives of Goswami and Bama portray the victimisation of women by means of various societal rules which are continued throughout their lives. As portrayed in the texts, Indian societies are divided into class and caste divisions. The lower the so-called class and caste, the more is their degree of suffering. There are scores of problems in our societies which have been reflected in the select texts. The male-centered vision cannot adequately perceive the predicament of women. The society very cunningly imposes certain rules and conditions on girls, women, and widows. This dissertation has attempted to study the problems of class, caste, and religious issues, as women are discriminated, exploited and oppressed at their own home and society. Moreover, the problematic religious codes laid on women are back-breaking, oppressive and superstitious. Undivided India was ruled by the colonial power for more than two centuries and strived to bring changes for uplifting women but, like Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak states in her well-known essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, that it was only their own interest in the issue for mastering themselves among the people of India. The two different societies (Hindu and Dalit) in India reflect different issues of inequalities, discrimination and suppression in terms of conservative rules, religion, class, caste, origin etc. The select writings of Goswami and Bama i.e. *The Blue-necked God* (1976) and *Karukku* (1992) are critically acclaimed pieces of literature which are at the same time decidedly controversial for its thematic exploration of topics highly sensitive in post-colonial India, such as gendered and caste differences, exploitation, power dynamics, rape, discrimination, religious codes etc. These are the various problems and issues which are encountered by the women in the writings of select authors.

1.7: Research Hypothesis

Women characters in the writings of Goswami and Bama are the subjects of Subalternity. The characters are suppressed and dominated in a specific manner that echoes their subaltern cry. Goswami represents the sufferings of women in Hindu society and Bama reflects the plight of Dalit women.

1.8: Aims and Objectives

This dissertation is a textual examination of the two texts by Goswami and Bama to see and show the manner in which they lend audibility to the unheard voices of these women from the fringes of the society. In order to locate their subaltern position, it has been taken into account that the traditional and colonial apparatus which were used as instrument to subjugate women are on the line of caste, class and religion. This dissertation has attempted to look into some of the narratives (resistive texts) which could be considered as potent tool to address underprivileged positioning of women as delineated in the select texts. Largely, the dissertation argues how to dismantle the subversive establishment by transforming so called 'the idea of real' into political and social consciousness.

The following are the specific aims and objectives of the research:

1. To foreground the voices of subaltern women in the select texts.
2. To relocate the excluded other in texts.
3. To identify the marginalised position of women in the selected works of these writers.

4. To study the traditional and colonial exploitation of women in the chosen texts.
5. To identify the caste, class and religious issues reflected in the texts.
6. To identify Centre and Margin dialectic prevalent in the societies as depicted in the selected texts.

1.9: Research Questions

This research has attempted to answer the following questions related to the research.

1. How do these two texts question the various social customs?
2. What are the barriers that are imposed upon a girl, a Dalit or a widow in these works?
3. How do women come to designate as subaltern?
4. How do the subaltern women raise their voice in the chosen texts?
5. What is the economic stand up of subaltern women in the selected texts?
6. How do the two texts address the issue of prolonged subjugation of women in the society?

1.10: Literature Review

The topic which has been selected to undertake for the proposed research has not been so far extensively explored. There seems to have been very few attempts on the part of some of the research scholars and academics to deal with the works which have

been chosen for this research, the treatment of the subject is also very general critical evaluation. And they have dealt with the novelists and their works with different issues separately. The two significant writings i.e. *The Blue-necked God* (1976) and *Karukku* (1992) have not been brought together for the above-given perspective and nobody has even tried to find a link between them and identify the common thread that binds them together. Herein lies the research gap which needs to be bridged by creating a proper perspective on the texts in question.

The texts which have been taken for the research are from two different areas of study. *The Blue-necked God* (1976) and *Karukku* (1992) have been taken from the discipline of Literatures from Translation. *The Blue-necked God* has been translated from Assamese into English by Gayatri Bhattacharyya in 2013 and *Karukku* has been translated from Tamil into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom in 2000. The text *Karukku* is purely autobiographical, whereas *The Blue-necked God* is a semi-autobiographical text based on Goswami's experience in Brindavan.

Researchers, as well as a large volume of literature on writings of Goswami and Bama, have been made over the years about various issues and topics. However, no study has been made so far regarding the issue like *Unmasking Subalternity in The Blue-necked God and Karukku*. An effort has been made to review some of the important works relating to the works of Goswami and Bama.

Chakraborty, Shekhar in his research paper "*Widowhood: A Social Harassment Reflected in Goswami's, Datal Hatir Uye Khua Howda*" (Sept 2015) focuses on the issues of widowhood in India where women have to follow strict family rules. He describes the harassment imposed upon a woman in the name of widowhood.

Thriveni, M.L in her research paper "*Myth and Religion in Indira Goswami's The Blue-necked God*" (Jan 2018) depicts the frustration of women because of the traditional faith of the people in myth and religion. The women meaninglessly have to follow the traditional rules where as men enjoy all the pleasures. These faiths are man-made and it has nothing to do with our lives if we think rationally.

Choudhury, Hrishikesh in his thesis entitled "*Voice of the subaltern in the selected novels of Mamani Raisom Goswami*" (2016) reflects the voices of subaltern characters in her novel. In the study, he has attempted to find out the different kinds of subalterns in the novels of Mamani Raisom Goswami.

Winnie, Sheena Sarah in her research paper "*Articulating Silence: A Study of Bama's Karukku*" (Dec 2014) focuses on universalising the struggles and sufferings of the community. She displays the degree of struggles and sufferings of the community as a whole to bring into the eyes of the world. She articulates the silence of the Dalit community.

Saran, Neeti Agarwal in her research paper "*Situating Dalit Consciousness with Special Reference to Bama Faustina's Karukku and Sangati*" (Oct 2016) has attempted to express the Dalit feeble condition as well as their consciousness and double oppression of females. She reflects the consciousness of the Dalit women trying to find a space in the said texts.

Wankhede, M.S in his article "*A Study of Bama's Karukku in the Light of Subalterneity*" (Mar 2017) analyses the realistic picture of caste and gender discrimination with reference to *Karukku*. He focuses on caste and gender differences which leads them to marginality in society. He highlights on the subaltern condition of Dalit society characterised by discrimination.

Though many research works have been done on these two select texts but those works are not related to this research.

1.11: Methods

The present study is an attempt to study the inequality and oppressive condition of women in postcolonial societies in the select writings of Goswami and Bama. The proposed study comes under analytical type of research or qualitative research. It has been prepared with the help of primary and secondary sources. There has been a proper analysis of primary and secondary sources to reach the final conclusion. The theoretical approach and relevant perspective have also been applied to the texts.

1.12: Research Significance

The project might be of national and international importance. The findings of the study will benefit the society by knowing the eye opening issues of women. Readers will come to know about the backgrounds and miserable condition of Hindu and Dalit women in India with reference to the writings of Goswami and Bama. The representations of the colonial and post-colonial women situations in India in texts like *The Blue-necked God* (1976) and *Karukku* (1992) will be familiar to the readers of Postcolonial feminist literature. Moreover, the sufferings and poor condition of women in India in both the pre-colonial and post-colonial eras will be interpreted and represented with reference to the select texts.

1.13: Chapter Plan

The dissertation is divided into five chapters and the chapter division is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction.

This chapter focuses on the background of Postcolonial Literature. It has provided a general idea about Postcolonial Feminism and Subaltern Studies. Moreover, it has introduced the writers and their texts which have been selected for the research area. Goswami and Bama are two great feminist writers from two different corners of India whose writings deal with the issues of subaltern women. The present chapter introduces and makes us familiar with the subalternity of Indian women in two different societies. It has provided a clear picture of women and their issues in separate classes.

Chapter 2: The Practice of Caste System and Religious Rules as portrayed in *The Blue-necked God and Karukku*.

This chapter discusses the various types of religious practices that women follow rigidly in respective religions. It analyses and interprets the caste system prevailing in India which does not allow certain groups to live a proper life as given in the texts. They are cut off from the main sections of society where they are barred from education and other important needs of life. The religious background of two different religions and the ill effects of its practices have been reflected through various angles.

Chapter 3: Pushing women into the class of subaltern and others.

The third chapter is on the basis of patriarchal rules in which women have to go through the rules made by the male members of a family or society. In that case, women are compelled to go through the tough roads made for them, they are segregated, separated and become as 'other'. Because of strict customs prevailing, they cannot speak of their own and finally become subalterns. It becomes a crisis for them which keeps them aside to speak in the form of subaltern. In this chapter many issues of women portrayed in the select texts are highlighted. But, it is reflected in terms of class, caste and religion. The suffering and exploitation of women in post-colonial era in India have been analysed with proper lens of subaltern context. Women are always financially dependent on the male members of the family. Class difference is another major issue in third world countries; in this chapter, the issues of poor class and their treatment by the upper class are highlighted.

Chapter 4: Relocating the Women's Voices.

In this chapter, the voice of subaltern women is put forward through analysis and interpretation of the texts. There are many rebellious women in the texts that speak for their rights and want to overthrow the rules and religious beliefs. The voice of women protagonists is highlighted in this chapter. Moreover, it is analysed against two different backgrounds separately according to the two select texts.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion.

The concluding chapter of the dissertation is drawn absolutely on the basis of thorough study of the select writings of Goswami and Bama. All the concepts and ideas have been summarised as discussed in the above chapters. Women have been facing many challenges and exploitations from ages which are analysed according to the outcome discussed in the above chapters. Victimization of women has been a common phenomenon in the third world countries where women are always treated as only next to men. This chapter has also summarised the voices of subaltern women from many backgrounds based on the study of the previous chapters. It has thrown light on the weaknesses of women who are bound to many social customs.

Chapter 2: The Practice of Caste System and Religious Rules as portrayed in *The Blue-necked God* and *Karukku*.

2.1. Introduction

As popularly known, Caste-System is an age-old system prevailing in India. It is an ideology of separating the mass populations into sections based on their birth and occupation. The select texts, *The Blue-necked God* and *Karukku* influentially portray the abnormality of caste-system. In another way, it can be understood in terms of class hierarchy in a social structure according to their work and religion. The word 'caste' is originated from the Portuguese word 'caste' meaning 'breed', 'tribe' or 'race'. Caste is an elaborate, complex and cohesive social system that combines elements of endogamy, occupation, culture, social class, tribal affiliation and political power (Anu.1). The incidents in the select texts are very much related to the term 'caste'. There is no exact period known about the origin of caste or caste system but it is generally believed that it originated more than two to three thousand years ago. In a Hindu Caste-System, populations are divided into four major castes, namely Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Shudra. The select texts are mainly about occurrences in two castes. *The Blue-necked God* is mainly about the sufferings of women in Brahmin caste whereas *Karukku* presents the stories of Shudra or Dalit women.

In the text *Karukku*, though caste is not portrayed similar as it is mentioned in the Vedas, but still many similarities exist. Owing to the passage of time, many turns have taken place in the lives of Shudras. The mention of caste is found in the Vedas, which are considered one of the earliest works of human civilisation. The description of three major castes namely Brahma, Kshatra, and Visha are found in the Rig Veda.

In the later hymns of the same book, there is the mention of the fourth caste called shudra. The fifth class is Untouchables which is sometimes considered lower than the Shudras and sometimes as those groups, who are lowest in order within the shudra caste. *Karukku* is mainly about the lives of people belonging to this caste called Shudras or Untouchables. Each caste has its occupation according to birth and belief. Similarly, the text, *Karukku*, reflects on the occupation of the Dalits which is related to their birth. According to the Hindu religious texts, it is widely believed that these castes originated from the body of God Brahma, who is believed as the creator of the world in the Hindu religion. The Shudras and the Untouchables are lowest in the line of the caste-system. They are believed to have been born from the bottom of Brahma's feet. Therefore, their work is related to menial jobs like labourers, sweepers, cleaners, etc. Bama has significantly depicted the lives of Dalits from various perspectives. But, in the Post-colonial period, they have no longer remained Hindus, colonial forces have subjugated them under the Christian religion. The social position of a person is ranked according to their hereditary caste where he was born, not by his qualifications or status of wealth. They start positioning themselves high or low based on their castes. The status of a person remains unchanged from the time of birth until the time of death. In the select novel, the Dalit characters are victimised by the upper castes people. They are pushed to the peripheral levels of society. In his autobiography *Joothan*, Om Prakash Valmiki mentions that, "One can somehow get past poverty and deprivation, but it is impossible to get past caste" (21).

As generally known, religious rules or laws are the strict rules followed by the people within a religion. It is a kind of belief practiced in religion. The text, *The Blue-necked God* basically represents the issues of religion and traditional rules. These rules include many moral and ethical codes taught by age-old religious traditions.

Most of these rules have been introduced from the ancient Vedic texts and *Manusmriti*. In the select novel, Indira Goswami fuses the old Hindu traditions prevalent in society. There are certain rules mentioned to be followed by males and females. Moreover, there are separate rules laid for a husband, wife, widow, son, daughter, in-law, etc. Hindu law, in modern scholarship, also refers to the legal theory, jurisprudence and philosophical reflections on the nature of law discovered in ancient and medieval era Indian texts (*Donald Davis Jr (August 2006), "A Realist View of Hindu Law". Ratio Juris. 19 (3): 287–313*). The select text, *The Blue-necked God* is mainly about the Hindu widows and women. The ancient term for Hindu religious laws is 'Dharma'. In simple meaning, it can be understood as 'the act of doing the right' or 'the right path of life'. One follows his dharma only if he practices religious laws according to the prevalent traditions. There are certain kinds of beliefs like salvation, rebirth, karma, sati, bramhacharaya, purity, and pollution, etc in the Hindu religion. Widowhood is one such belief which is very poignantly presented in the select novel. Having faith to attain completeness by practicing those beliefs, widows follow the strict rules prevalent in the religious tradition. Furthermore, these beliefs do not allow people of different castes to live together similarly. Such beliefs create several prohibitions and provisions within the people of upper and lower castes. The characters in the novel go through various layers of suffering in practicing religious rules. They are suppressed and exploited by these religious institutions. Ironically, in search of God and salvation, they follow numerous orthodoxies.

2.2. Caste-System and Religious Laws: Causes and Consequences

Caste-System is well known in India and it is the root cause of inequality in Indian society. At present, there are many causes which help in keeping the caste system alive. The causes and consequences of the caste system are well depicted in the text *Karukku*. Having a stereotypical thought in upper castes people over the lower castes population is a common phenomenon in society. It is one of the most significant reasons for the existence of caste differences. In such a phenomenon, though a group of people work or live together they keep on segregating their fellow members in the name of caste superiority. This phenomenon has been observed and it is recurrent in *Karukku*. The characters start making groups by choosing their sub-caste or tribe people. This kind of groupings further results in disunity among the fellow members. The select novel reflects on the groupings of the upper caste students while leaving the Dalit students to remain aside. Caste endogamy or marriage within the same caste group is another important factor that leads to casteism. Such kinds of practice in a society make people more caste centered. People living in such type of society believe that marrying another caste person may bring danger to their genetics. This could endanger future generations.

In the present century, globalisation and migration of people may also be considered one of the causes in the formation of caste-based societies. People migrate from one place to another in search of work and start searching for people belonging to their caste seeking security and help. Such helpings bring a sense of caste-based mentality into their minds. In the text, it has been observed that Bama is victimised by the senior nuns. At first, she is appointed to teach in a village school, but then again she is transferred to Jammu. The Provincial and the senior nuns manage to keep someone from their community in place of Bama. They preferred to take care of nuns

belonging to their own community rather than Bama. Modern means of transportation and communication also help in developing caste feelings among the people of similar castes. Because of improvements in transportation and communication people of similar castes living in different geographical locations can unite through meetings and organisations. Moreover, it allows them to attend in their ceremonial and caste-based functions. Such possibilities promote the sense of caste unity by breaking geographical barriers.

Lack of education is one of the major issues of caste sensitivity. A man without knowledge remains narrow-minded. People cannot develop a secular mindset without getting proper education which brings caste-based ideology into their thoughts. The scarcity of educational institutions is well depicted in *Karukku*. Most of the rural places in India are in lack of proper schools for imparting quality education. Though the governments have taken many steps to educate the people, they have failed to bring changes in the opinions of men. In the novel, *The Blue-necked God*, Dr. Roychoudhary is a literate man but he is not a well-educated man. Religious dogmas and blind beliefs have always been important parts of life in Indian society. Most of the people in India do believe in such practices. Due to irrationality and blind faith they keep on practicing their caste-based traditional rituals. These types of rituals strengthen the faith in one's religion by neglecting other religions with a sense of inferiority. People of higher castes groups maintain a kind of distance from the lower castes people in their day to day life. Dr. Roychoudhary and his wife have a sense of otherness towards the Christian guy. A kind of physical and psychological space is always maintained by the upper castes people. Such spaces restrict these people to work together or live together in the walk of everyday life. Hence, caste identity is

maintained everywhere in the form of religious culture. These eventually separate the populations in the name of caste type groups.

The consequences of caste-system are very dismal in India. From the very period of its origin, it has always brought pain and agony into humanity. In every age of history, it has left some dark shadows creating mischief in human society. The select texts in studies reflect some similar impacts of the caste-system. Through caste-system only certain sections of people are benefited from society. The majority of groups are bound to remain insecure and dependent on upper castes people. From a very lower caste person to an upper caste person, it affects everyone from an individual to larger society as a whole. This system brings dehumanising results in the lives of the people in a nation. The novel *Karukku* projects on such dehumanising consequences in Dalit societies. Caste-based ideology institutes inequality among the populations in society. Further, it largely fails in providing justice and equality concerning every caste groups. Institutions and organisations based on castes have always been a threat to social order. Such institutions propagate caste-based unity and bring disharmony within a state. In the select text, Bama portrays the caste-based discriminations in the social and educational institutions. Groupings of people in this process have alarmed a threat in the maintenance of peace and harmony. Caste-system compels people to stay within the boundary of own culture. Such a system restricts people to develop a multi-cultural society. In the selected text, it has been noticed that people of upper castes do not visit the lower castes villages. They do not even participate in the social and traditional events. It develops an orthodox and conservative mindset in a person from the very beginning of childhood.

Caste-based society has created tensions among the populations. This system separates society into many small sections. Because of these divisions of people into

segments, it results in continuous disputes among the communities. The spread of regular conflicts create differences in their opinions. Such disputes are very often seen in the select text of Bama. Differences among the communities lead to tensions and clashes which further stand as a barrier in national growth. It is rightly said that democracy is 'by the people' and 'for the people'. But, a nation where caste system prevails, democracy would not function well for the welfare of people. In the text *Karukku*, Bama mentions how the police officials are offered with food and wine to torture the poor Dalits. Castiest ideology of a party brings political fragmentation and makes the government unprogressive. The disunity within the political parties gives birth to too many small and regional parties. Communal violence has become an important tool used in elections. It is very horribly depicted in *Karukku*. Corruption is yet another consequence of the caste system. A government formed with the majority of leaders from the same caste gives preferences to own caste. Directly or indirectly such a government body fails in providing equal status to all. In various appointments and service positions, caste-based preferences play a major consideration rather than merit and capabilities. In the select novel, Bama is exploited by the upper caste authorities on several occasions for their interests. Caste-based society has always created a threat to the minor castes in a state. These minor castes with weaker economical background become subject of dominance in the hands of upper castes.

It will be an injustice to say that caste-system and religious laws have only affected the lower classes. In many ways, this system has also affected the upper caste people according to time and conditions. Since, there are various religious rules laid down within the upper castes. In the text *The Blue-necked God*, Goswami has well portrayed the consequences of religious rules in the upper castes societies. Such strict laws and rules have always been a matter of tension among the upper-class people. By

reading the religious and historical texts it can be easily assumed that prevailing rules were initiated by male members. Hence, most of the rules were made in the interest of men. The women in the select texts suffer from various types of social and religious rules. Neglecting women's interest aside in the early period had been the most tragic flaw in the history of human civilisation. Women of any caste, either it may be from an upper or lower caste, have to follow the rules made by men. The caste system in India is intertwined with full of such religious and patriarchal rules. In the select novel, Goswami mainly depicts the religious laws enforced on Hindu widows. These laws have been playing a crucial role in the domination of women in the hands of men. As depicted in *Karukku*, women belonging from lower castes are discriminated through the laws of untouchability and pollution. On the other hand, Goswami's select text, *The Blue-necked God* represents the segregation of upper castes women at their homes through patriarchal rules. They are being targeted in the name of purity and loyalty. Almost all the laws are found to have a pro-patriarchal nature. As a result, women in all walks of life remain like puppets under the commands of men. There are many laws laid for women in the Hindu caste-system. But in contrast to those laws, not a single law has been introduced for men with respect to women. Many traditional ceremonies are being performed by women in the name of their husbands. A ritual like Vatt Savitri¹ is very popular among upper castes women displaying their loyalty towards husbands. Karwachaut² is yet another ritual performed by women wishing long life for their husbands. Such rituals have always resulted in gender inequality in society. In the select texts, it has been noticed that the notions of purity and impurity have pushed women towards extreme torture. Further analysis of Goswami's texts brings us to notice how a woman is considered impure when she willingly marries

¹ A Hindu ritual observed by women to show loyalty towards their husbands

² A Hindu ritual performed by women wishing long life to their husbands

with some other caste person. She is no longer allowed to revisit her parental home. Today, it is horrible to hear about Sati-System in history books. Though it is not practiced at present, widows of today are bound with the laws of living simple lives. In *The Blue-necked God*, Indira Goswami has attempted to portray all those agonies of widowhood. They are suggested to wear white clothes and ignore ornaments and vermillion. Moreover, widows are considered impure and restricted from a second marriage. Such irrational laws have created aloofness in their lives. In contrast to that flexibility for polygamy and illicit relationships is open for males in this patriarchal society.

2.3. Caste and Religion in Indian Fiction.

Writers from different backgrounds have tried to represent caste and religion in the form of literature. Some of the writers have represented caste while some have focused on the class issues. Religion has also been one of the crucial topics reflected in Indian literature. Firstly, the literature of Dalits or 'Dalit Literature' occupies a significant place that reflects caste and religion. It is a direct encounter with subjects like caste, class, and religion. Moreover, it is literature about the pain and suffering of Dalits from ages under the hands of the upper castes. Autobiographical writings such as *Joothan* by Om Prakash Valmiki and *The Weave of My Life* by Urmila Pawar portray the stories of painful sufferings. These writings reflect the caste and religious issues of lower castes communities. There are many other influential Dalit writers like Datta Bhagat, Daya Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal, Sharan Kumar Limbale, etc who have represented the atrocities on lower castes communities under the suppression of upper castes. Secondly, mainstream Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K.

Narayanan had portrayed the realities of lower castes societies. Though they are not directly grouped under the class of Dalit writers, their writings have very painstakingly reflected the issues relating to the Caste-System. Anand's novels *Untouchable* and *Coolie* depict the dark reality of the Indian Caste-System. Similarly, the novels of Narayanan raise the issues of caste in Hindu traditions. Rao's novel *Kanthapura* reflects the oppression of lower castes people by the privileged Brahmin castes in rural India. Arundhati Roy is a living writer who has depicted the caste relations and social discrimination in Indian societies. Her novel *The God of Small Things* turns the Indian Caste-System upside down. Apart from these writers, many other regional writers had written on the caste and religious issues of India.

2.4. Authors' Depiction of Caste and Religion in the Texts.

As Henry James had rightly said, "A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life". Both of the select authors have efficiently portrayed the reality of societies where they had struggled to stand themselves. Indira Goswami, from her very childhood observed the upper caste orthodox culture. The centuries-old Satra tradition³ was very familiar to her as she belonged to the upper Brahmin caste family. Segregating the lower caste people and belief in pollution had been a regular practice in the house of gossains and gossainis⁴. Furthermore, the sexual exploitation of women is depicted significantly. Women are considered no more than a sexual object in society. The pathetic condition of widows has been an influential theme in her literary works. They are seen as ill omen in a society. Goswami portrays the sexual exploitation of widows and tries to break away from the tradition of irrational

³ Tradition of priestly class society in Assam

⁴ Priests and Priestesses in the Satras(temples) in Assam

and unnecessary rules forcefully imposed on widows. After her husband's accidental death she became a widow at the age of twenty-four. She had to go through many upper-caste societal rules and became a tragic sufferer. She painfully expresses the tragedy of widows in Brindavan. Goswami had stayed in Brindavan for two years observing the sufferings of the radhesyamis⁵ and portrays her own life relating to them.

On the other hand, Bama has exposed the hardship and exploitation of Dalits in her texts. She rewrites her past and shapes it into a revolution against the oppressors. Bama attempts to bring a kind of Dalit consciousness among the readers. The word 'karukku' is a pun having double meanings. It refers to palmyra leaves which have serrated edges on both sides as double-edged swords. Secondly, in Tamil 'karu' means embryo or seed which signifies freshness or newness. Hence, in a way, she reflects the sufferings of a Dalit woman and raises her voice against the caste-centered society. On the other side, she creates awareness in society and proposes a new start in the lives of Dalits with equal rights and opportunities. She expresses the sad and grim realities of her life right from the very infant age. The exposition of her struggle for education and establishment is very significant in this novel. In every walk of her difficult life, she dares to stand boldly to tackle the circumstances. From her childhood to school life, from higher studies to becoming a nun, and finally selection in a service, everywhere, all her life she has always been exploited. But her boldness and will power made her stand tall among the others to advocate for their rights.

⁵ Women living in the Brindavan with religious beliefs

2.5. Beliefs and Religious Practices in Hindu Society as Portrayed in *The Blue-necked God*.

It is very easy to think or tell someone's story, but the sufferer knows what one had gone through her life. During her lifetime Indira Goswami had to go through many hard societal rules. On the other hand, whatever she had observed and painful to widows or women, she had attempted to fuse those experiences in her writings. The first and foremost thing that has been reflected in the novel is orthodoxy. The conservative rules which have no significance at all are being imposed forcefully on women. In the novel when the main protagonist became a widow after her husband's sudden death, her parents decide to take her to Brindavan. People generally believe that Brindavan is a holy place where women and widows can attain salvation. Thousands of widows and elderly women from different parts of India come to stay here in the name of God. There is a religious belief that God Krishna and his beloved Radha had once lived in Brindavan. They had once romanced in this holy place and his spiritual presence is still felt there in Brindavan. Since, after their husbands' deaths, they decide to pass the rest of their lives in search of God. They believe that dying in Braj would bring salvation to their souls after death. God Krishna will bless with his supreme power to their departed souls. The widows living in the Braj are called radhesiyas. Worshiping in temples, during festivals, begging and visiting the babas become their daily routine. "Anupama thought that his coming to Braj at a particular time was a rare opportunity—perhaps he might be able to bring peace and comfort to the tormented heart of her daughter" (Bhattacharaya,25). Following superstitious belief becomes a part of their everyday life. Saudamini's mother Anupama thinks that her daughter is going on the wrong track. Since Saudamini has started loving a Christian boy after a few years of her husband's death. This relationship of Saudamini created tension among her parents. As they belong to an

upper-caste Brahmin family, a second marriage is restricted to a widow. Moreover, the boy belonged to the Christian community which is not acceptable in their society. Hence, to bring Saudamini into the right track they planned to meet the popular priests in the Braj.

Women after their husbands' deaths are bound to follow religious and traditional rules. The text reflects on various rules laid for widows. Widows are supposed to wear simple and white dresses. They are restricted from wearing colourful dresses. If they dare to wear fashionable dresses they are criticised and declared guilty of disrespecting their dead husbands. In the text, Charanbehari notices Saudamini at her first visit to Braj, "he noticed that she was not wearing sindur, the mark of a married woman, in the parting in her hair. There was no mangal sutra around her neck, nor was she wearing any toe rings, other signs to show that she was married" (Bhattacharaya,7). The cruel society has laid many unacceptable rules to exploit the helpless women. They are restricted from wearing any ornaments. The mangal sutra⁶ can no longer be put in the neck after the loss of one's beloved husband. Even the wearing of red colour vermilion is considered an unlawful act in the eyes of society. These religious and traditional rules make the lives of women a living hell. In her autobiography, *An Unfinished Autobiography*, Goswami narrates her story of sufferings after her husband's death. She also narrates how the patriarchal and religious rules imposed on her widowed aunt turned her life into a tragedy. A woman in a society lost all her dignity after she loses her husband. She is only considered and compared with a misfortune. In the select text, women in the Braj are considered no more than a commodity. They are devalued and treated as soulless living bodies. The radheshymas in the Braj are supposed to wear very simple dresses.

⁶ A necklace given to the wife by her husband during their marriage

Moreover, the white colour dress is mostly considered suitable for them. Since they somehow managed to get a couple of meals a day, they cannot think of buying clothes. Collecting and begging clothes from the temples and on the festival occasions are the only choices.

Living a simple life has become a socio-religious law in society. Such practices have much more affected the lives of radheshymas. As reflected in the text, widows living either in the Brindavan or in some other places, they have been practicing this tradition of living a simple life. There is an accepted superstition in the society that if a widow lives a luxurious life then she is seen as an immoral woman. Generally, remarriage of widows is restricted in the upper caste, rather they are suggested to live a celibate life. Similarly, Saudamini falls into this traditional trap after her husband's death. The parents of Saudamini think that living a simple life in the Braj would be a better choice for her. It will bring changes in her life to face the realities. The future of Saudamini ends here, she has nothing more to achieve in life except worshipping the name of rahdesyama every day. Like her, thousands of women choose to live a foolish life. Sex and marital life are considered a sin for these women. Saudamini falls in love with a Christian boy and she could have married him to start a new life. But as tradition restricts, her parents do not allow her to start a new married life.

In the text, Sashiprova is another young widow who decides to help a priest in everyday worship. She stays with a priest named Alamgarhi in the name of Jugal upaasana⁷ or worshipping together. There is a traditional belief that worshipping God together will bring salvation to them. Those who do not get the opportunity to have a partner to do this practice, they start worshipping alone or in a group. Some of these

⁷ Worshipping God together by a couple to attain salvation

widows frequently visit the temples and Babas. Every day, they believe that something miraculous would happen in some ways. They pray before the babas to tell something good which is going to happen in their future days. But like each day, every coming day passes on and nothing worthy happens to them. In the texts, Anupama says to a baba pointing towards Saudamini, "Master, I want nothing for myself. But this girl, Master, please take responsibility for this girl. Destiny has placed this responsibility on my shoulders. But I am afraid that I may not be able to guide her along the right path. I am desperately afraid!" (Bhattacharaya, 32). The radhesyamas are supposed to live in khupris⁸ and pigeon holes⁹. Religiously, it is believed that God cannot be realised by living a standard life. Women in the text wish to stay in the old and broken huts. After coming to the Braj everything changes in the life of a woman. In a way, it is because of material scarcities but on the other way it is surrounded by superstitions. No proper food remains available for these women and depends on begging and eating in the temples during festivals. "All of them shared the superstitious belief, or faith, that if one could but view this festival once, they would be free from the pangs of hunger throughout the year" (Bhattacharaya, 57). They believe that if they can see or attend some festivals, God will bless them with food for the whole year.

Serving others or doing charity works also occupies an important place in the beliefs. People believe that by serving miserable ones, one can attain salvation. Dr. Roychoudhuri has a small dispensary through which he keeps on helping the sufferers. His wife Anupama too helps him in the service. They also wanted to engage Saudamini in this service. Her parents firmly believe that helping needy people can bring prosperity to their lives. Dr. Roychoudhari would help anyone at any time,

⁸ Small compact rooms in a building in the Braj

⁹ Similar room like khupris or huts

thinking this service would later bring a reward in the form of a smile to his daughter's life. Such practices are very rare nowadays but many people still practice to satisfy their inner selves.

Giving donations is another significant religious practices performed in Brindavan. Offerings and alms are considered very sacred doings by a person. Generally, these kinds of religious offerings are practiced by a person who is financially established. Occasionally, they come to offer food and money to the women and beggars in the Braj. They worship in the sacred temples to seek blessings from God. Ramnivash Sethni is one of such ladies who occasionally distribute food and blankets to the radheshyamas and beggars in the Braj. This tradition has become a part of the religious ceremony in the society. The radhesiymas kept on looking for such offerings in the temples in Braj. Because such offerings would provide them opportunities to eat satisfactorily and even earn few pennies. The radheshyamas generally receive more offerings and donations during festivals like Radha Ashtami mela, Ranganath Rath mela, Nanda Utsav, Holi festival, Haronga festival, etc.

The most notable religious or caste practice depicted in the text is misconceiving other religions. Perhaps in every religion this happens, a society goes with stereotypical beliefs that their religion is superior to all other religions. Similarly, in the text, the parents of Saudamini restrict that she shouldn't marry a Christian boy. After years of her husband's death, Saudamini falls in love with a Christian youth. But due to her family's worries in the matter, she tried to maintain a gap with that youth. These religious laws are created in such a way that it restricts marital relationships with men of other religions. On the other hand, it is very ironical when someone faces some problems. At that moment, one does not count religion. People do not question the religion of a doctor when they are sick, they do not inquiry about the religion of a

banker. But when it comes to their homely matters they question and create a bar. People start counting the values of one's own religion and neglect other religions and beliefs. As an educated girl, Saudamini thinks rationally for her future, she wants to marry the Christian youth but her heart doesn't allow doing so. The religious rules followed by her parents and society become a bar in between her new life and old memories. She openly discusses her physical feelings and mental emotions with other radhesiyas. She asks, "Did you also face a situation similar to mine?, And what about your physical hunger ?" (Bhattacharaya,166,167). She fails to decide what she should do in such circumstances. On one hand, her religious background stops her but on the other hand, her rational mind and heart say to cross the bar and step into a new world. The creator of the world has perhaps made human beings to live without discriminations but men have made so many laws to segregate each other. If people think deep down from the heart there is nothing called religion in separate entities. There is only one religion which is the religion of humanity and the law of this religion is to love each other. The principle of this religion is brotherhood and care to fellow human beings. Men may create many religious and caste rules but God is never pleased with such practices. People have built many holy places and temples in the name of God. They have declared those as holy and sacred places. But if it is so, why the sons of the same God are not allowed to visit? Only a few upper caste people claim to be the progeny of God. This question clearly proves that men are in fragmentation by disobeying God. People in the same country are divided by manmade sects. They are classified with some imposed rules made by a certain section of society. Because these rules indirectly benefit them to hold power and position in society.

2.6. Dalits and Caste System, Its Practices as Reflected in *Karukku*.

The word 'Dalit' is very impactful to the readers. As soon as one reads or hears this word, one's mind and heart immediately imagines a painful scenario. Moreover, an autobiography of a Dalit woman is more tragic than that of a man. It is imbued with more painful stories of suffering. *Karukku* as a Dalit narrative is mostly dealt with caste issues rather than religious elements. But both the issues are interchangeably related with each other. Since caste-system and religion can be studied as the two different sides of the same coin. The word 'caste' plays a degradable role before the word 'religion' could acclaim its significance in society. The whole story of the novel is about the sufferings of Bama as a Dalit self and whole Dalit community before the upper caste society. People of this community are neglected, hated and discriminated in terms of caste in society. Howsoever, they may be skilled or qualified in any field, they are just neglected in the name of the lower caste. In the select text, caste is sometimes presented to reflect the oppression of the author herself and sometimes the oppression of the Dalit community as a whole.

The first and foremost indication of practicing caste-system reflected in the text is maintaining a gap from the upper caste society. There is a traditional practice of the lower caste people to maintain a distance from the upper caste people. Many centuries back this practice had been started by their ancestors. But now, it has transformed into a traditional rule for them to show respect to the upper caste people. Considering this rule, the Dalits maintain a distance from the people of the upper caste. On the other hand, they have to show a mark of respect if they go near to them. Bama writes in the text, "The elder went straight up to the Naicker, bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand that held the string with his other hand. Naicker opened the parcel and began to eat the vadais" (Holmstrom, 15). These

coated lines resemble the submissive behaviours of the Dalits towards the Naicker caste. The Naicker community is an upper-caste community who exercises their power over Paraiyar Dalits. Though the Dalit person is elder to the Naicker fellow, the elder Dalit must appear as a servant before him. Long back, due to their power and position, the upper castes people were able to lay those rules on the lower castes people. The rules imposed centuries back are still prevalent in exploiting the lower caste groups. Such societal rules always project their cultural identity as superior to lower caste cultures. In the novel, caste is also reflected based on the settlements of the communities. The settlements of upper castes are in different locations than the lower castes. The Dalits' villages are located at least a few spaces away from the upper castes villages. People from the upper castes never visit the lower castes villages. A Paraya family cannot build a house within the Naickers' place. Bama writes, "I don't know it came about the upper caste communities and the lower caste-communities were separated like this into different parts of the village. But they kept themselves to their part of the village, and we stayed in ours. We only went to their side if we had work to do there. But they never, ever, come to our parts" (Holmstrom, 7). The upper and lower castes never lived together in the same village. All the communities like Brahmins, Chettiyaar, Aasaari, Thevar, Nadar, Koravar, Chakkiliyar, Pallar, Parayar, etc have different villages. Their villages are situated according to the streets' names related to the castes like Naicker Street, Koravar Street, Pallar Street, etc. There is no purpose for upper castes people to come to the Dalit villages. But, the Parayas have to go in search of works in the villages of Naickers. Hence, they are bound to live under the rules of the upper castes. Even if they do not want to work in the Naickers houses, further they do not have any other sources of income. Perhaps such rules have been maintained to control the Dalits. If

they are allowed to stay in the upper castes villages they may refuse to do their works. Those Dalits may be familiar with the upper castes politics and may revolt against them. The upper castes politics is not about remaining dependent on the Dalit workers but how to make the Dalits remain dependent on them forever. Therefore, they always attempt to push their villages into remote areas which would turn them to remain aloof. Public institutions like schools, hospitals, offices, etc are always set up in the upper castes areas. Religious institutions like churches and convents are also built within the upper castes boundaries. Bama mentions that, “Besides, there was a big school in the Naicker street which was meant only for the upper-caste children” (Holmstrom, 7). Therefore, they never allow the settlement of Dalit villages in urban areas. Bama shares about her experiences of school days. As the school was too far from her village she had to stay in the hostel. This system of maintaining a gap brings a lot of miseries to the Dalits.

Untouchability is another significant caste-practice followed in the society which has been reflected in the text. Perhaps this is the most inhuman custom practiced in society. The Dalits are being segregated in the name of impure beings. Dalits have been labeled as 'untouchables' which means 'not to touch' or 'one cannot be touched' by upper castes. In the past, the upper caste society had initiated a rule in the caste-system that an upper-caste fellow shall not touch a lower caste fellow. There is a notion of impurity towards the Dalits. They are considered as impure beings in comparison to other upper castes people. If a man of upper caste group touches a Dalit fellow then he too becomes an impure being. They believe that the impurity could be transferred from a Dalit to the next. Many traditional rituals which are so-called 'holy' are being organised to re-purify the upper caste subject. The upper-caste priests are

invited to perform the religious rituals to remove the touched impurity from the subject. Bama mentions in the text,

"all the time I went to work for the Naickers, I knew I should not touch their goods or chattels; I should never come close to where they were. I should always stand away to one side. These were their rules. I often felt pained and ashamed. But there was nothing that I could do. They belonged to a higher caste. They had the money" (Holmstrom, 53).

For them, not only persons get polluted when a Dalit touch but a commodity too becomes polluted when a Dalit touches. Such worst rules have been initiated by the upper castes societies on the Dalits. Through their strong economy and political hegemony, they continue to control them. As portrayed in the novel, poor Dalits do not have any other way for their survival. When a Dalit touches them or their commodity, it gets polluted. The same Dalits are also called to work in their household works and crop fields. But then the question of pollution remains in silence while working in their fields. It signals that such rules are only a means of controlling the lower castes populations. The rules imposed on them perform as a proper channel to maintain their hegemony. These atrocities in the name of untouchability do not stop here. There were some unimaginable horrifying practices imposed on certain Dalit groups. They were bound to hang pots around necks and carry brooms where ever they go in society. "It was the Peshwas who forced Mahars to hang pots around their necks and tie brooms to their hips" (Roy, 78). The upper castes mandated these rules by creating superstitious beliefs. They believed that wherever the untouchables go, they begin to pollute that particular place. Therefore, they mandated to carry a broom

to clean the place. The pot was for the purpose of spitting, so their spit would not pollute the soil. Even in some places of India, they were directed to carry a branch of a tree while walking on sunny days. So the branch could protect the shadows before it would fall on the surface. History is the evidence of such inhuman practices implemented where a group of powerful upper castes people make degrading rules and other poor groups have to follow. These rules are not only a rule for certain Dalit groups. But, it is a disgrace to the whole human race living on this planet. Writers and historians have only attempted to record a few atrocities done to the Dalit lives. There are innumerable unexplored stories of exploitations of Dalits, where perhaps no pen has yet shed its ink.

As depicted in the text, waste cleaning works are being done by the lower castes workers. It is supposed that such works should be done only by them. In the select novel, these workers do manual labour works in the crop fields and cleaning works at the upper castes homes. They go to the houses of the upper castes early in the morning and return home late at night. The Dalit workers clean and carry the toilets, latrines, dungs and other wastages at the upper caste houses. In return, they are given waste-tasted food to the lower castes workers. These pity workers break bones dropping every drop of sweat for their interest but they are not even rewarded with a couple of proper meals. Bama pens down the painful story of her grandmother (patti). She goes early in the morning to work in the fields of Naicker houses but in return gets only the tasted food from the Naickers. "My other Patti was the same. As soon as dawn broke, she would go to the Naicker houses, sweep out the cowshed, collect up the dung and dirt, and then bring home the left-over rice and curry from the previous evening" (Holmstrom, 16). The helpless Dalits are treated worse than animals. Even animals are given fresh feed to eat. Dalits are only given left-over foods to eat. The

upper caste's hegemony is so barbaric that they cannot feel the sacrifice and hardship of the poor Dalits. They just want to use them as their slaves. Slaves sometimes live, even in a better position than the Dalits. By treating the people of the lower castes in so shabbily manners, they, in a way attempt to protect the caste-system. In a much-dominated manner, the upper castes society manages to run the system for getting services from the Dalits. They get their services without any price, just by handing over those left-over.

In the novel, segregation is yet another significant practice which catalyses the caste-system. It plays an impactful role in diverting the notions of people. Few people display their beliefs that they are traditionally and professionally superior to the others. On the other hand, the lower castes people have to accept that by no other choice. This belief of superiority does not allow the communities to build a casteless or common society. The text *Karukku* reflects that, in every public and private place, people of lower castes are being segregated by the upper caste peoples. Segregation of lower castes by the upper castes people plays a paramount role in separating the identity of both the castes. The practice of segregation with the poor castes by upper castes preserves their identity as a cultured society. But, it diminishes the identity of the lower castes as uncultured and uncivilised in the eyes of society. Bama writes about her experiences in the text. She writes about her traumatic experience in the school. The Dalit students are harassed in every possible way by the teachers. Since, they belong to the lower castes society. The upper-caste teachers always have a castiest mentality, a sense of inferiority towards the Dalits. These teachers always speak something bad about the Dalit community. If anything bad happens, they would just point out the guilty towards the Dalit students. "It must be one of the Cheri children who did it" (Holmstrom, 18). Once, Bama was similarly targeted by the

school headmaster. When she was in the seventh class, she was playing along with her few friends. It was about touching the coconuts up in the tree. While playing, a coconut fell at her touch. Every one of her friends blamed her for plucking the coconut. The next day at the morning assembly she was scolded by the headmaster and ashamed her before all other students and teachers. Finally, she was restricted from school. It was only after the apology written by the priest, she was again allowed to return to the school. Caste ideology is dominating everywhere in society. It neither excuses a minor girl nor any old man. No one can escape from the cruel clutches of the caste system. Bama also shares the treatment of the poor Dalit children by the church authorities in churches and prayer halls.

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

At schools and convents, the Dalit students are segregated because they were from lower castes. These students are many times made to clean the classrooms and streets. Children from these castes are harassed without any valid reason. They are tortured and targeted only because no one stands to speak for them. In this caste-system, they have been segregated from time immemorial. From ages, the higher castes have been dominating them. The upper caste people know that even if they will

be segregated no one will stand to protect them. Therefore, in every walk of life Bama has been victimised and segregated.

"There were only a few days left for us to finish our training and to become fully-fledged nuns. In a particular class, a sister told us that in certain orders they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns and that there was even a separate order for them somewhere. I was thunderstruck. I despaired at heart ...I lamented inwardly that there was no place that was free of caste" (Holmstrom, 25).

Bama was totally shocked when she came to know that a Dalit woman is not accepted as a full nun. After lots of training and hardships, again caste becomes a barrier in her ambition. The caste-net is spread everywhere and no one can escape from this net. Every Dalit, in some way or other, has to fall in the trap spread by the upper castes people. All the rules and traditional practices are made to follow in such a way that makes the Harijans suffer.

People may realise, if they notice it from a broader lens that these rules have been set in a planned manner long back. They are directed to follow rules which are harmful to the Dalits themselves. It is like a suicidal attack against oneself. Firstly, the men of the upper castes typecast the lower castes people as inferior to them. Secondly, they are segregated by them in the name of purity and pollution. Thirdly, Dalits are being engaged in the houses of the upper castes in cleaning and farming works. In his book, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd writes that,

“The concept of ‘Brahmin’ in my diction does not mean knowledge. It means consumption of the socio-economic resources of the nation without investing any amount of labour power in it. It means consumption and destruction of national resources without any understanding and effort for rebuilding such resources” (151).

The upper castes tag the Dalits as inferior but engage them in their works. In return give them left-over foods. They are given very low wages and their farmlands are garbed by them. These clever upper castes people know that if the Dalits would become economically static, they would no longer be able to use them as slaves. So the Dalits are continuously exploited in every possible way. A French Catholic missionary, J.A. Dubois writes that "They were beaten at will by their masters and had no recourse but to accept their lot. They were indeed 'the born slaves of India'" (Webster, 28). Though the poor Dalits know that they have been exploited by upper castes, no one dares to stand against it. Since, their families have been living through the meals provided by these exploiting upper castes masters. If they stand against them, even the left-over of two times will be immediately denied. And there will be no way left out for their survival.

Chapter 3: Pushing Women into the Class of Subaltern and Other.

3.1. Introduction

Women have always been placed in the second class in order. They are pushed aside into ignorance in any situation while men claim to be the superior one. The two select texts in this study portray some similar situations of women. From the very beginning of human civilisation, women have been bound within the four walls of home. Women are restricted from those freedoms which men enjoy. Their lives are set with certain limitations. Those limitations were set thousands of years back by the ancestors. But till date, it plays significant role in pushing women into a helpless situation. In the select texts, women are regularly pushed to the subaltern position by different colonial and traditional forces. At every home, women are being pushed into the situation of neglect. The stability of patriarchal society has always affected the lives of the opposite sex. It is an injustice happening in the society inviting each moment a misfortune to the fair sex. Numerous rules have been laid for them to follow. These rules are neither useful nor have any positive value for women. In the selected novels, women are encouraged to follow these rules and thereby they are made to suffer. From early childhood, a girl-child is taught to follow the rules laid by the men-dominated society.

The women who occupy a notable position in a family or who are respected for their elderly positions do support the same culture. This considerably happens because they too have experienced the same tradition. In such a state, women have no other choice than painfully accepting the ordered rules. Women are pushed to a situation where they cannot refuse to accept the prevalent rules. They do not want to

go through these rules but unwillingly become followers of these traditional orders. Though they want to refute the rules, they know that their voices won't be heard. Remaining silent becomes the ultimate reality to them. This turn of women from unwillingness to silence pushes them to become subaltern or other. For this subalternity, women cannot stand for themselves and become victims.

3.2. Indian Society

Indian society is a very different type of society compared to the rest of the world. It is considered a very complex society. This complexity is influentially depicted in the two select texts. In India, a society is developed with many societal and hierarchical orders. It is constructed on the basis of class, caste, and gender. From the early Vedic period, Indian society has been a patriarchal society like many other societies. It has been traditionally prevailing on, as strongly patriarchal and strongly hierarchal. Patriarchy is dominantly represented in the select novels. As reflected in the select texts, the position of a woman is always next to a man in an Indian family. In the Hindu epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, women have a lesser role than men. It is described that women worship their spouses as equal to God. Women have a lower status in society than men. In the Vedas and Manusmritis there are several men-centric rules mentioned. The rules found in these sacred texts have maximum similarities with the stories in the Hindu epics. These rules were strictly followed in those ages. In following such rules projected by men, women had remained none other than soulless lives. The select novels portray some similar rules imposed on women. They have always been passive subjects in the hands of men. Patriarchal rules advocated during that time are still active in our society. Men have played the

role of a preacher to preserve and preach those old rules. In patriarchal society men still, continue to dominate women. The patriarchal rules have been suitable sources for men to suppress women. The analyses of the select novels bring us to notice that the application of these rules on feminine gender turns them weaker and insecure in society. As a result, women at every step become dependent on men. They are bound to follow the patriarchal rules or else one is segregated from society. A female child from her very childhood is taught to accept the norms and rules of society. In the select novels, the protagonists are pushed to follow these rules. Slowly when one enters her youth, she is again introduced to follow some new rules. Moreover, different rules are being introduced to follow inside the four walls and outside it. The situation becomes more typical when girls have to leave their maternal homes during the process of marriage. Since, they have to adopt the new cultural norms at the new home of their husbands. Though this seems usual but in maximum situations, women undergo various problems. This possibly happens due to the lack of space and flexibility within these norms. A woman is introduced to a new community with a difference.

Democracy is the bedrock of the Indian constitution. It is basically constituted on the basis of three ideas namely equality, liberty, and fraternity. But, traditionally India has always been following the class and caste hierarchal system. The idea of equality is seldom evident in Indian society. Both the select authors have attempted to depict the inequalities prevailing in the society. Anywhere in any part of India, maybe it in the west, east or northern part of India, equality is not evident. Similarly, equality is not observed within the religions in India. Either it could be a Hindu society, a Muslim society or a Christian society, the notion of equality is negligible. Societal hierarchy can be witnessed in any part of India and in any religion. The select

texts show us the prevailing inequality in the upper Hindu and in the Dalit Christian societies. It works on the basis of caste groups, family individuals and kinship groups. Caste hierarchy is most commonly practiced in Hindu societies, but other religious communities like Muslims, Shiks, etc also follow it. As depicted in the texts, a person is ranked according to his caste background, wealth and power. In a family, the senior-most man is considered superior. He holds the highest right to take a decision in family affairs. The texts in studies show us that women hold a very small position in a family, they are mostly outranked by the male members of the family. Their positions are quite negligible in a family. Purity and pollution is another important part of Indian society. This phenomenon is frequently depicted in the two select texts. It is categorised in two ways. One is ritual purity and the other is pollution. The former is associated with the upper castes or the Brahmin castes while the later is associated with the lower castes who work in cleaning activities. A Brahmin or a priest is considered pure while lower caste Dalits are considered polluted. In other words, purity is associated with ritual cleanliness by avoiding contacts with restricted polluted subjects and objects. For women, it is applied in a different way. Women's purity and pollution are taken into account in various conditions. They are restricted to get involved with the rest of the family members. Moreover, if they are considered polluted, they are restricted from entering holy places and reading sacred texts.

Another important characteristic of Indian society is an ideal joined family. Though the system of joint family is diminishing in urban areas, it is still prevalent in rural places in India. And India's maximum areas are filled with villages. A joint family is related to the male line, where men are counted first along with their wives and children. In such families, patriarchy is more dominant. The texts *Karukku* and *The Blue-necked God* portray the unhealthy practices done in Indian societies. There

is more possibility of women suppression in these families. Generally, a wife in such families stays with her husband's relatives. Today it has been observed that the suppression of women and disunity within the family members has raised the idea of nuclear families. Authority and hierarchy of family members are clearly drawn accordingly. All family members especially the females are socialised to accept the authority of the hierarchal order. The eldest male in the family acts as the head and the youngest has the least authority. In Indian society, males have the right to control family properties like land, farms, and businesses. Women generally do not inherit properties from their fathers. Such instances have been observed in *The Blue-necked God*. They have only control over their precious jewelry. Moreover, women have to pay a huge amount of cash and kind to their husbands' homes in the name of dowry. A woman who fails to bring a dowry to her husband's home is tortured by the in-laws.

There are numerous complexities laid for women in Indian societies. Purdah-system¹⁰ is strictly followed by women in India. Veiling and seclusion of women is a common practice in the northern and central parts of India. Women are made to follow these complex rules to avoid public appearance. Basically, they avoid direct eye contact before the relatives linked through marriage and any strange man. Wearing purdah¹¹ is strictly followed in the conservative higher class families. The practice of using purdah directly limits the freedom and power of women. This makes them restricted and aloof in a male-dominated society.

Maintaining chastity is yet another significant notion of Indian society. In the novel *The Blue-necked God*, Sashiprova attempts to preserve her chastity and she remains very proud of this fact. Women who preserve their chastity are considered

¹⁰ A social-custom of covering faces or bodies by women.

¹¹ A piece of cloth to cover up the face or the body.

virtuous and pure. Sex before the marriage and for widows is generally not allowed. It is widely believed as a sin. Hence, the Indian patriarchal society is more rigid for women while men have the assistance of flexibility in it.

3.3. Understanding Patriarchy

Patriarchy is very dominantly portrayed in the select texts. The word patriarchy refers to "the rule of the father" which is taken from Greek origin "patriarkhes" meaning "father or chief of a race". It is a compound of words "patria" which means lineage or descent (originated from the word 'pater' meaning father) and "arkho" means rule or govern. Patriarchy is a social organisation marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line (Merriam-Webster). In other words, patriarchy is a social structure in which men primarily hold powers and predominate in the roles of political leadership, moral authority, special privilege and control of the property. It is mainly associated with a set of principles that are based on patriarchal ideology. This ideology believes in the supremacy of fatherly figures or male members in a society. A family or society is regulated by male members. Patriarchal societies are also patrilineal where the male lineage inherits the property and title. Historically, the term patriarchy has been used to refer to autocratic rule by the male head of a family; however, since the late 20th century it has also been used to refer to social systems in which power is primarily held by adult men (Cannell and Sarah, 592). The concept of patriarchy is more appropriate to understand the male dominance in a social system rather than understanding as a biological phenomenon. Patriarchy has been the most predominant social system in the history of human

civilisation. Almost in all parts of the world, it has been the machinery to control a family or society.

Many thinkers, philosophers, social scientists, etc had given their ideas in support of patriarchy. These thinkers primarily believed that men are superior to women in many ways. They have justified that men are morally, intellectually, and physically superior to women. Following are the notions of a few thinkers. The ideas of the given thinkers influentially support to understand the notions in the select novels by the authors.

Aristotle is considered one of the greatest philosophers of the ancient period. He had made significant contributions to nearly every aspect of human knowledge, from biology to philosophy to ethics and aesthetics. Aristotle believed women were inferior to men. In his famous text, *Politics*, he laid some traditional and conservative views on women. He believed women as subject to men but higher than slaves, and lacking authority. Aristotle stated that a husband should exert political rule over the wife. Women are more compassionate and more readily made to weep. Furthermore, they are more jealous and querulous, shameless and false, fonder of railings, and more contentious.

Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis. He is regarded to be the father of psychiatry. Freud had given many controversial views on women in analysing his psychoanalysis theory. He believed that women's lives were dominated by sexual reproductive functions. In his 'Penis envy' theory Freud theorised the 'female psychosexual development' in which young girls experience phallic conflict. His theory was considered to be baseless where there was no place for femininity. Women were stamped forever as morally inferior to men.

Immanuel Kant was a notable German philosopher in the 18th century Enlightenment era. He had made a great contribution to the field of philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, etc. During his time he inaugurated a new scholarship in the development of philosophical thought. But in analysing women he had given many peculiar views. His views on women are very complex and basically had traditional views on women. Kant mentions that the functions of women in a civil society consist of their biological role in the "preservation of the species". Furthermore, women are in general subject to men politically, economically, pedagogically. He preferred the natural superiority of the husband to the wife in his capacity to promote the common interest of the household.

Patriarchy plays a significant role in suppressing women's values. It is highly instrumental in executing patriarchy. In this social system generally, men have power over women. Such a society is built by individual relationships through a male-dominated power structure. Privilege is supported through power in a society. Therefore, men acquire more power than women and have greater privilege than women in society. The following are a few critics who had attempted to analyse this phenomenon, which is helpful to know how power works in society. In the select texts, power is used to dominate the subordinate subjects.

Michel Foucault was a post-modern French philosopher, critic, theorist, and historian. He was very influential in shaping the understanding of power and the use of power as an instrument of coercion. Foucault mentions that "power is everywhere and comes from everywhere so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure (Foucault: 1998:63). He had used the term 'power/knowledge' to signify that power established through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding, and truth. Truth is considered a thing and produced by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. It

indulges the regular effects of power in systematising general 'politics of truth' in society. Such truth is accepted and makes function as true. These 'general politics and regimes of truth' are the result of scientific discourse and institutions, and reinforced (and redefined) constantly through the education system, the media, the flux of political and economic ideologies (Foucault, Rainbow, 1991).

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist thinker and politician. He had given many new ideas on political theory, sociology and linguistics. In his concept of 'cultural hegemony' which is developed out of Marxist theory, Gramsci discusses that the dominant ideas of a society reflect the beliefs and values of the ruling class. The rule of these dominant groups is achieved by the spread of ideologies, through social institutions, beliefs, assumptions, and values such as schools, courts, churches, and the media, among others. Such institutions do the work of socialising people into the norms, values, and beliefs of the dominant social group. Hence, the group that controls these institutions controls the rest of society.

Jim Sidanius is a professor of psychology at Harvard University and Felicia Pratto is a Professor of Psychological Sciences at the University of Connecticut. They together formulated a theory in 1999, popularly known as 'Social Dominance Theory'. This theory primarily discusses the formation of structured societies through group-based social hierarchies and the function of social structures which lead to patriarchy, intergroup, conflict, and racism. There exists a hegemonic group at the top level in human social hierarchies. They play more powerful social rules where males are more dominant than females. The important high-status positions are occupied by males in society.

3.4. Subaltern and Other in the Select Texts

Both the texts *The Blue-necked God* and *Karukku* have been interwoven with subaltern sensitivity. Almost all the time the characters in the novels move around subaltern situations. The women characters go through many stages where they cannot change their conditions. From the very early stages of their lives, step by step they are pushed into inevitable situations. Subsequently, the women characters are surrounded by miserable circumstances. They are bound to be the 'other' with painful everyday experiences. No positive indications appear before them to step up towards fortune. Even if it appears in some way, sooner or later it disappears again after leaving them in more derogation. Both the select authors had several bitter experiences throughout the phases of their lives. They had mostly written about the causes of women's sufferings. In the novel, *The Blue-necked God*, Indira Goswami depicts the sufferings of the widows and the radhesyamas. The novel is a typical representation of women who pass their lives in the Brindivan. Most of the women living in the Braj are either widows or helpless women who have become old. Saudamani, the protagonist in the novel is a widow who comes with her parents to live a religious and traditional life. There are two more significant women characters who suffer from similar situations. In the second text *Karukku*, Bama portrays her painful experiences from childhood until she becomes a school teacher. She exposes her torturous journey in a society where no space is open for a Dalit girl. She is mistreated, tortured and punished right from the beginning in her village streets to schools and convents. The subaltern situation is very frequent in the texts. Many a time the characters are unable to speak of their own. They considerably remain silent because they do not have any other choice than staying passive. No one seems ready to extend a little assistance to them. There are many reasons which directly or

indirectly stimulate women's subalternity. Patriarchy is one of the major causes of women's suffering. On the other hand, traditional rules had been set in such a way that it always misguides women to be passive in nature. Women under the crush of so-called patriarchy and tradition push them into the class of subaltern and other. Gender is yet another significant cause of provoking women's subalternity.

3.5. Patriarchy, Tradition and Cultural Rules

In the very opening chapter of the novel *The Blue-necked God*, patriarchy and tradition are very dominantly portrayed. Dr. Roychoudhury and Anupama along with their widow daughter arrive at Mathura railway station. Although they wanted to pass their old age peacefully in Brindavan this would not happen because a few months back their only son-in-law, Saudamini's husband had suddenly died. Again Saudamini had an affair with a Christian guy which seemed more problematic to them. They have come to Brindavan with good hope that living in Brindavan could bring peace and solace to Saudamini. It is patriarchal and traditional rules which stop Saudamini to speak against her parents. She is a very young and attractive lady who falls in love with a Christian guy. But she fears her parents and society. Her parents are anxious about the question of self-prestige. If Saudamini would marry a Christian guy their reputation will no longer exist in society. The societal rules stop them from allowing their daughter to marry a man of a strange religion. Saudamini too thinks that her actions against her parents and society would only bring regret to her. From the very beginning to the end of the novel she tries to overcome the cruel shadow of patriarchy and tradition. Wherever she goes she questions herself as well as others that why she is bound to stay in Braj? Saudamini suffers from loneliness and depression, she

questions to other radheshyamis, "Did you also face a situation similar to mine?"...She wondered if she was a sinful woman. Whether what she was thinking was a sinful act.... "And what about your physical hunger? Tell me the truth," persisted Saudamini" (Bhattacharyya, 166,167). The psychological impact of patriarchy and tradition is so predominating in her mind that she could not forgive herself. At last, when she decides to marry the guy her conscience forbids doing so. Finally, realising that her actions may hurt her parents and society she becomes indecisive. Saudamini requests her lover to return back and commits suicide by drowning herself into the river. The power of patriarchy is so dominating where one is only taught to follow its commands. Resistance and freedom of thought is not a part of this institution. In this system especially the girl children are more dominated by the parents. They are only taught to be passive. Further, their voices are not heard when they grow matured enough. They are silenced by either patriarchy or tradition. Sex and gender together play an influential role in pushing the cause of feminism. As in her seminal text *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir states that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", the body is only a passive receiver of the cultural expression and gender thereby is a social construct (Beauvoir, 301).

In the novel, Sashiprova and Mrinalani are two other significant comparable characters to Saudamini. Sashiprova is a young widow who stays with priest Alamgarhi. She helps him in his temple duties. Many helpless women are engaged in such activities, they are assured that someone will take care of them after these priests' death. These poor women are victimised in the ashrams by the priests. They are exploited by giving false promises and engaging in caretaking and housekeeping works. Moreover, in most of the cases, they are sexually exploited. Sashiprova's father lost his life during the partition of India. Her mother too died in a famine. She

had no other choice than coming to the Brindavan. The structure of the society is so nastily built where even a poor and helpless woman is not supported. In a patriarchal tradition, a widow has no place to live. She is only an ill omen in the eyes of society. In her autobiography, *An Unfinished Autobiography*, she writes about the cruel treatment of her widowed aunty by the patriarchal and orthodox society. On the other side, Mrinalbani accompanies her parents to Brindavan for the rest of their lives. Mrinalani along with her mother becomes another prey of patriarchy and tradition. It is because of her father's disgraceful and scandalous acts in the past, they are about to suffer now. She speaks, "You see this blind old man? He is responsible for ruining our prosperous and happy lives. He left us to starve while he squandered all the money on liquor. And now, see how liquor has taken its revenge and kicked him down into this life!" (Bhattacharyya, 141). The author not only portrays the patriarchy but also displays how a certain class of men misuses power in a patriarchal society and destructs their own family. Being men are considered superior in a patriarchy, it is very disappointing that they can also participate in ill deeds. In these situations, women suffer much more than men. Mrinalini and her mother become subjects of subalternity when they cannot leave their father and husband. The traditional and orthodox beliefs bring them to the ashram to suffer together. It is not only Thakur Sahib, but an educated person like Dr. Roychoudhury also believes in holy dying. They believe that dying in Brindavan would bring salvation to them. Thousands of helpless old widows and women come to pass their life in Brindavan just because they are widows, old, poor and helpless. Secondly, a patriarchal society does not provide space for them. Because of this long maintained tradition, they accept that as their ill-fate. They feel like someone 'other' with a difference. These senses push them towards subalternity. Women in the Braj start aging. They think to die there for

salvation but, who will perform their last rites? This question troubles them every moment. They keep on begging and collecting money for it.

Karukku is a significant novel which reflects the sufferings of Dalit women in a patriarchal and caste-based society. At every moment the protagonist undergoes some sort of patriarchal or traditional sufferings. This sort of sufferings recurrently pushes women into the class of subalterns. Wherever Dalit women go, they are encircled by many circumstances evolved out of traditional caste backdrops. On the other side, at home, they are bound with patriarchal norms. They are trapped with many societal and patriarchal rules. It eventually drags them into the class of 'other'. Bama portrays the sad reality of Dalit women in the select text. She explores her own story of suffering which is about patriarchy and culture set in Dalit background. Bama writes in the novel,

"In this society if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste-difference does not disappear.....If you are born into a low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle"
(Holmstrom, 26, 27).

Traditionally, the structure of society is divided into such an entity that does not allow the lower castes to become independent. In this system, the lower castes are always treated as the worst human beings. They are not given that required opportunity to march forward. The so-called caste and community in Indian society divide people into segments. In the text the protagonist belongs to the Paraya caste, a lower caste group generally found in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. They are

surrounded by many higher caste groups like Nadar, Naicker, Chettiyaar, Aasaari, Thevar, etc. The author narrates the traditional and cultural harassment done to them by the higher caste groups. The Paraya caste women are always bound to display their regard and servitude towards upper caste people and also at their own homes. Dalit women suffer in two ways. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her essay, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, describes the double colonisation of third world women. At first, they suffer from western colonisation, secondly, they suffer from existing patriarchy and tradition at their own homes. In a society where caste elements are so rigidly maintained, it left no place free for women. The line which has been drawn in between Dalit women and higher caste is not just a line. It is but the line which divides whole humanity into certain segments. This line is like an electric shock produced out of a thunderstorm that destroys anything that comes before it. Bama refers to her childhood experience in the novel, "The elder went straight up to the Naicker, bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand that held the string with his other hand.....He said everybody believed that Naickers were upper caste, and therefore must not touch Parayas" (Holmstrom, 15). For the first time, Bama saw this Paraya elder bowing down before a Naicker. This scene entirely changed the thought of the author. At her very young age when she did not even know about the caste system and untouchability, she had seen it, experienced it and been humiliated. The cruelty and domination of the upper caste people have always been disastrous to the lower castes. They have been dominating the Dalits in every possible way.

Generally, upper-caste people are directly harsh to Dalit women. But, many a time atrocities on Dalit men further affects the lives of Dalit women more severely.

Bama reflects a similar incident from her childhood past. It was such a horrible incident where all the men in her village had to hide in the jungle for many days.

"All of a sudden a huge gang of policemen came out of the Chaaliyar settlement, batons in hand, drove our men back ruthlessly, mercilessly beating up those they caught, before arresting them....Outside, we heard the thud-thud of police boots stamping up and down, the sharp sounds of blows as our men were struck repeatedly, and the yells, 'Ayyo Amma', of unendurable pain" (Holmstrom, 34, 35).

Caste differences are so dominant that it totally attacked the whole elder males of the village. The upper caste groups are very aggressive towards the Dalits. It was for a small piece of cemetery land, they attempted to kill the Dalits. These upper-caste groups have huge areas of land but they too attempted to grab a small cemetery ground from the poor Dalits. Societal rules have positioned the Dalits in a subordinate place. The governments and organisations also have a distasteful focus on lower castes groups. In the text, the policemen who are called the preserver of laws blindly follow and side with the higher castes. The whole police team is being feasted to arrest the Dalit men. In such a desolate situation what could these women do, where shall they go for help when everything has turned against them? They become silent before the situations only hoping for a good turn every other day.

Bama portrays several realities of her life which reflects the patriarchy in Dalit culture. In another seminal text *Sangati* she points out, "My mother told me that in our village, they didn't make any difference between boys and girls at birth. But as

they raised them, they were more concerned about the boys than girls" (Holmstrom, 3). During the time of birth, though gender and patriarchy remain inactive slowly it starts to prevail in a Dalit family. Boys enjoy more freedom than girls. They are given more importance in terms of getting education and other development initiatives. Young girls are being engaged in household activities. Bama painfully expresses the hardship of Dalit women through the story of her own grandmother. The Dalit women would go to the upper caste homes and reach back home at night after doing huge manual works. They have to earn something for the family. Women in Dalit society have to remain busy with household activities at the same time they too have to go for wage works at upper caste homes. On the other hand, men only take charge of income activities.

3.6. Poverty, Hunger and the Question of Survival

Lines from the poem *Ode To A Whore* by Indira Goswami

*"How do I say
the way I have brewed
this mellow wine?
I have lain fainted
In the dark hall of
sorrow!
In agony
I have whipped my own
flesh
and have drunk my own
blood.
I couldn't*

take off my clothes

in front of my lovers.

*And I had a hundred
lovers.*

yet, I remained a virgin.

The women from the other

Bank of the river, scream

You are a sinner

*You will earn a leper's
death!*

My body, which is like

*the supple bodies of
barali-fish*

*that dance with the waves
of the Red River!*

*My breasts—the Saramati
Peak*

in the Tuensang valley.

My mekhela is like

*those branches of
Rhododendron*

*which bloom in the Satoi
Ranges!*

The women from the

other bank of the river –

spit their venom

*Oh hunted woman! Let
your body
become a feast for
worms!"*

The above-mentioned lines written by Indira Goswami herself, present the two sides of women. To evade the pain of hunger and poverty, women choose to become whores. They cannot compromise anything with hunger. In the poem, hunger has compelled a whore to sell her body wherein the process she has to whip the body and drink own blood. After knowing about the whores, people call them sinners and curse for their sexual infidelities.

Similarly, the question of survival is very notable in the select texts. On the other hand, poverty and hunger are two major social evils displayed in the select novels. It is hunger and poverty which can transform one from a human being to a devil. At the same time, it can also make one a silent subaltern being. Poverty and hunger are very evident in *The Blue-necked God*. Goswami has portrayed the submissive state and subalternity of the characters very painstakingly. It is hunger and poverty which pushes women to face tragic circumstances. In a patriarchal society, a woman is always considered a secondary subject. There is no place for them to have any share of property either at her maternal home or at her in-law's home. Technically, they gain no share of the property from both sides. They have to remain economically dependant on male members of the family. So, when someone's husband dies, economically a widow becomes unstable eventually. Afterward, no one supports her except her own family, which is also very rarely seen in society. In the select novel, thousands and thousands of young, as well as old radheshyamis, suffer

from poverty and hunger. They are being victimised by men in many epitomes who are so-called priest, seth, paanda, swami, baba, sadhu, goonda, etc. Since the radhashyamis have nothing for their survival, they engage themselves in begging activities. Some of them have to stay with the priest as their helpers and caretakers. Many of them choose to be religious song-performers in the temples and holy festivals of Brindavan. The most painful thing is selling their bodies to men. Goswami mentions in the novel,

"Like butchers examining animals before buying them, the young men would make these young widows strip off their clothes in order to examine their bodies thoroughly and make sure that they were without any blemishes. They had found those unfortunates who had been widowed at a very early age and whose only immediate problem was hunger because they had not eaten anything for days" (Bhattacharyya, 8).

No one wants to sell their body but it is hunger which makes them sell. It is generally said that 'a loss of identity is equal to death' but what if one is about to die digesting hunger? The question of survival becomes more eloquent than the answer to identity. Since life is greater than anything. Identity is only purposeful when one is alive. The ache of hunger pushes them to the class of 'other'. Although they want to speak for themselves they cannot speak . Poverty brings them to the street and hunger causes wounds to their bodies. Poor radheshyamis are bound to beg for clothes and foods in religious offerings and festivals. They have no other ways than begging and selling their bodies for survival. "Soon all the other women, the starving radheshyamis, also started shouting, "Give us more. Why do you fear that Govindji's store will be

finished?" (Bhattacharyya, 58). These radheshyamis do not get enough food to eat and starve for many days. They have the fortune to eat satisfyingly only occasionally, in the holy festivals. It is only because of poverty and hunger a young widow like Sashiprova starts spending her days with a priest called Alamgarhi. She is used as a slave by the priest, but she is graced with her two-time meal at least. Sashiprova is ready to sacrifice everything at the cost of compromising with hunger pain. On the other hand, Mrinalani with her family arrives in the Brindavan in a way to escape from poverty. Her father had sold all the inheritances except a temple remaining in the Brindavan. He too sales that temple and dies in Braj. Mrinalani has no other way out to survive, except becoming a radheshyami. When no one stands with someone, silence remains the only option, letting the river of life to just flow on and on towards the flow of time and finally to the ocean of death.

Lines from the poem ***Hunger*** by Namdeo Dhasal

*"Hunger, if we cannot mate you
 Cannot impregnate you
 Our tribe will have to kill itself
 Hunger we have all the aces
 Why talk of the songs of the half-sexed jacks?
 Here's our manhood before you now,
 Let's see who wins this round
 You or we.
 Hunger
 which came first, seed or tree?
 Hunger you make things too difficult*

Hunger just tell us what breed this monkey is

And if you can't

Then we will screw

Seventeen generations of you

Hunger, you and your mother..."

(Translated by Shanta Gokhale)

Poverty and hunger are the two worst evils of every society. These have always been an issue for the Dalits from ages. It is poverty that compels Dalits to stoop before the upper caste people. Furthermore, it is the hunger that turns Dalits to do the filthiest works at the homes of the upper castes. The given lines from the poem *Hunger* by Namdeo Dhasal explain the sufferings of Dalits due to hunger. It also reflects the urging angry and resistance of Dalits from hunger. The question of survival becomes more important than anything. Either it may be accepting physical torture of the upper caste or by cleaning wastages at their homes.

In the text *Karukku*, Bama has portrayed a series of incidents that reflect Dalit poverty and hunger. "Most of the land belonged to the Naicker community. Each Naicker's fields were spread over many miles. The fields were spread over many miles....Our people knew all the fields by their names and turned up exactly where they were required to work" (Holmstrom, 6). The above lines clearly reflect that the Dalits are deprived of land and properties. They are not given lands by upper castes to cultivate their own crops. Moreover, the Dalits have to stay in particular streets provided to them. The upper castes masters know well that providing land and properties to Dalits would be a blunder. If they would offer them the wealth they would no longer serve them. Wealth could empower them which would be unworthy

to the upper castes. The Dalits are neither given enough foods nor properties. Only a minimal amount of sources are being offered to simply survive so they can serve them. As mentioned in the text, their villages are thickly populated in small rows (Holmstrom,7). Therefore, they have no other way except working in the fields of upper castes. Webster mentions in his well-known text *The Dalit Christians*, "The Pariyar and other dalits, however had no such rights to the land, but did the actual cultivation work for the mirasdars" (Holmstrom, 32). This kind of dependency on the upper castes pushes them to become 'other' in the eyes of society. If they do not obey as instructed by the upper castes, the Dalits would remain jobless and unwaged. It is usual that no one would like to react to the cost of survival. Hence, the Dalits have to go according to the commands of the upper castes. The question of living becomes more significant than suffering. Any kind of oppression on them becomes acceptable if there is an answer to survival. In such a flow, from generation to generation, Dalits have been suffering from upper castes oppressions. Bama mentions the hardships and sufferings of women in the text,

"Both my grandmothers worked as servants for Naicker families.....My other Paatti was the same. As soon as dawn broke, she would go to the Naicker houses, sweep out the cowshed, collect up the dung and dirt, and bring home the left-over rice and curry from the previous evening. And for some reason, she would behave as if she had been handed the nectar of the gods"(Holmstrom,16).

Whatever the upper caste gives in exchange for service provided, the Dalits have to accept that with satisfaction. The phrase in the quoted line above 'And for some reason' reflects everything which is the only answer to the question of hunger. The acceptance of the tasted food would eventually evoke a question of their identity. But these foods would curb their hunger which works as nectars in those empty stomachs. These old women are compelled to go to work so early in the morning. If for some reason, they would reach in late at their masters' houses, even the left-over food would not be served. These poor women have no other ways than breaking their bones, days and nights. After working hard for the whole day in the crop fields they reach back home late at night and continue to do the same on the other day. In his famous autobiography, *Joothan*, Om Prakash Valmiki describes his mother, how she goes to work at the houses of upper castes and in return, she is only given the left-over food. Bama further attempts to portray the misery of thousands of Dalit girl-children. Through her own story of hassle and struggle, she describes the destiny of many other girls like her. She writes about the manual labour work that she had to do at the upper caste houses during her school days.

3.7. Gender and Being Lower Caste Women

Gender is the utmost factor of women's exploitation. It is because of their gender women are being treated as secondary to men. Gender limits women to a certain extent. It makes them weak before a patriarchal society. A patriarchal society does not provide sufficient space for the female gender. The moment the word 'female' or 'women' is heard, one perceives a sense of weakness or powerlessness in their psychological insight. This existing psychological thought towards feminine gender

pushes them to the class of the other. Traditionally, women have always been educated to be passive. They are being taught to submit themselves and negotiate with the situations. Hence, the passive essence is ingrained in a girl child right from childhood. This psyche of considering women as inferior subjects pushes them to become subaltern subjects in the future. In the novel, there are scores of evidence that reflect the cause of gender. After her husband's death, Saudamini had no choice except following the footsteps of her parents. Primarily she is a woman, a weak gender considered in the eyes society. The cultural position of a girl is only to accept the command. They have never been taught to resist the oddities. Had Saudamini been a boy, she would not have accepted the decision taken by her parents. She could have the freedom to go the way she liked in her life. Judith Butler, in her text, *Gender Trouble*, expands the feminist distinction of sex and gender. She argues that not only gender is a binary social construct "whereby gender mirrors sex" but that sex itself is constructed by scientific discourse. In the text, when Saudamini's mother tells her about the vacancy of a teaching post in a school, she has no answer to it. She questions herself about her educational qualifications. Though she is a well-qualified girl she feels having some barriers which stand before her. Gender stands taller than any other factor which pulls them to be the other. She is unable to decide anything in a society where most women do not think about the answer to this question. The other significant characters are Mrinalini and Sashiprova who are affected by the cause of gender. Like Saudamini, Mrinalini comes to the Braj after her parents. Her father decides to pass his last days in Brindavan after losing all his properties and inheritances. Due to the patriarchal tradition, a decision taken by a senior male member of a family is taken for granted. But, being a woman, Mrinalini and her mother are compelled to respect the decision. It is the gender that prepared them to

agree with the decision. Her father is the only option that she could follow. If she doesn't agree with it she will be left alone and remain unacceptable in society. Similarly, after her parents and husband had died, Sashiprova comes to Braj for livelihood. She could not go for any other choice. Firstly, as a woman and secondly, as a widow, no place had any flexibility where she could adjust. It is gender which makes her weak and insecure. Therefore, she started living with a priest named Alamgrahi, who kept her as his helper. Discrimination exists everywhere which suffocates women. The novel expresses the subalternity of thousands of radheshyamis staying in the Brindavan. They are exploited in multiple ways. As they are weak, passive and helpless, no one cares about them. The exploiters know that the radheshyamis do not possess enough strength to protect themselves. They belong to such a class where nobody wants to lend a helping hand. All these happen in Braj only because of gender differences. They are discriminated, put into the class of others and separated.

Gender and caste are the two significant issues that have been expressed in the text *Karukku*. Caste and gender are the two different faces of women sufferings. The former is a social construct while the later is due to a biological difference in sex. Women are considered second class human beings in the society. They are labeled as inferior to males in many respects. But the situation becomes catastrophic when women suffer from weaknesses of gender caused by lower caste together. Bama has portrayed the bitter incidents of her life right from the childhood days. She writes about the oppression of Dalit women at the hands of the upper caste at every place. Right from her childhood days, in the village to school, from churches to college, from convents to service, etc, everywhere, she went through suffering. She states in the text, "The next morning at assembly, the headmaster called out my name. 'You

have shown us your true nature as a Paraya,' he said. 'You climbed...you stole a coconut. We cannot allow you inside this school. Stand outside' (Holmstrom, 19). The Dalit children are seen as 'other' everywhere. They are being segregated due to the lower caste background. At school, though Bama did not steal any coconut she was punished by the teacher. It happened because she belonged to a lower caste. Low caste people are labeled as inborn thieves in society. Whatever is related to bad denotations like a thief, crime, loot, etc are tagged with the Dalits. Similarly, Bama was targeted and punished by the teacher though she did not commit the crime. The Dalits are bound to suffer everywhere they go. Within a society, almost all the institutions and sectors are run by upper caste people. So, wherever the Dalits go they are discriminated against, first in the name of caste, second, women, as considered weaker than men, are more harassed by the upper caste. In Indian society, not only the Dalit women but women of all castes are generally regarded as passive and dependent on men. Taking this advantage women are suppressed everywhere. Bama also expresses the exploitation of Dalit children in the hostels during her school days. She writes, "The warden-sister of our hostel could not abide low-caste or poor children. She'd get hold of us and scold us for no rhyme or reason. If a girl tended to be on the plump side, she'd get it even more. 'These people get nothing to eat at home.....'" (Holmstrom, 20). At the hostel, the Dalit girl students were segregated and tortured due to the caste background. The upper caste wardens had a different mindset towards the Dalit students. They did not have any kind of sympathy for the hardships of poor Dalit students. At every moment the Dalit students are treated separately in a humiliating manner. The class teacher or the PT teacher always discriminates against the Dalit students at school. They make them stand up again and again, sometimes write their names among all other students which really hurt them (Holmstrom , 21).

It has been very disappointing and shameful for the Dalit students to stand up and bow their heads before all. Teachers are called 'the builders of the nation' and they are often compared with God. Sometimes teachers are placed even at a greater place than God. A teacher teaches students to choose the right path of life. He gives proper guidance to the students. But, what could these Dalits students do if their teachers turn to exploit them? Teachers are meant to guide the students but here the situation appears reverse to the Dalits. The upper caste teachers kept exploiting the students because of their caste inferiority. Bama states about how she was not allowed to go home by the warden during the First Communion of her younger brother and sister. The school principal too joins with the warden to stop her. But, the high caste students in the hostel are allowed to go home on several occasions. Being a Dalit student she was stopped several times from going home. Furthermore, Bama narrates,

"Then I completed my education and went to work. At my first place of work, a nun asked me, 'Are you a Nadar?' I said, 'No, we are Parayar. When I recall the expression that came over her face, I want to laugh, even now. Most of the nuns there were Telugu people. They did not care for Dalits like us" (Holmstrom, 23).

The caste psyche is so dominant in our society that no one can escape this. It is very sad to highlight that the lower caste is seen as the evil of society. Lower castes are not seen as a part of our society. Rather it is taken as a degraded and useless element of the country. Dalits have always been treated as slaves in our society. While Bama was teaching in a school, she had observed the oppression of Dalit students by the school authorities. Without wasting any time she decides to become a nun. So, she could

teach the Dalit students properly on her own. But, being a Dalit woman she was targeted by the upper castes nuns in the convents. She writes, "they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns...I was thunderstruck. I despaired at heart, thinking, 'She tells us this now, at last moment....I lamented inwardly that there was no place that was free of caste" (Holmstrom, 25). After a lot of training and discipline, the Convent Order was not ready to accept her as a nun. But later she was somehow accepted as a full-fledged nun. The suffering of Dalits did not end here. She thought that she would take care of Dalits students in the convent by herself. But she found that caste politics are even more dominant in the convents. Inside the convent, she found a huge difference between the rich students from upper castes and poor students from lower castes. In the Christian religion, it is said that 'God is equal for all'. But the preachers of religion are so cruel that they have separated the followers by their caste and class backgrounds. They have left no sense of humanity or Godliness. Bama realises that in the convent there stands no connection between suffering poor and God. As a belonging from Paraya caste and being a woman she was tortured by the senior nuns in the convents. Only the higher caste nuns from Nadar and Naicker caste are preferred to have better positions and place in the convents. At last, Bama is transferred from there to Jammu. She again suffered there and finally returned back with desolation.

3.8. Violence and Exploitation

Violence has been the most dominating force to control anything. It plays multiple roles in dominating a class. The two select texts reflect various ways of using violence. It is violence through which colonialism started. In the post-colonial context, violence is very actively unleashed to dominate a system or a person. Violence is executed in several ways like domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, acid attack, reproductive coercion, female infanticide, prenatal sex selection, obstetric violence, mob violence, honour killings, dowry violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, marriage by abduction, etc. According to a report, considering all women around the world almost one out of every three women suffers due to some kinds of violence.¹² In the text, *The Blue-necked God* violence and exploitation of women has been significantly projected. Every moment the radheshyamis are warned with a threat of exercising violence over them. They are pushed to the subaltern position by frightening with a brutal attack. It's not only the living radheshyamas, but their dead bodies also remain unsecured from the cruel acts of men. Goswami mentions, "Suddenly, a tall and hefty panda arrived there as if he were a Yamadoot, the god of death, himself! The timid old women crouched even closer together. The panda started throwing the dead woman's things around, looking through them.....or on her upper arms?" (Bhattacharyya, 13,14). When any woman dies in the Braj, these paandas try to find the precious ornaments from the dead body. They act like the vultures smelling out a dead body. If they do not get any ornament out of the corpse they start to threaten the other fellow radheshyamis. In every sphere of Brindavan women stay threatened by men. Either it may be, a tongawala, a paanda, a seth, a

¹² Moradian, Azad (10 September 2010). *"Domestic Violence against Single and Married Women in Iranian Society"*. Tolerancy.org. The Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Archived from the original on 25 April 2012. Retrieved 1 March 2015.

priest or any other man. When Saudamini meets these radheshyamas for the first time, she interacts with them and asks about the wages of bhajan singers in the temple. But the radheshyamas laugh and expose the grim reality of the wages meant to them. The accountants of the temples exploit them. He had never provided their wages sufficiently. "These women were compelled to sing even if they were starving (Bhattacharyya, 23). Women are threatened and exploited in every possible way. Even their small amount of wages for survival is snatched. They are made to work in empty stomachs. The author has explored the horrible condition of women living in Brindavan. The radheshymis pass their lives even worse than animals. They are bound to live in so-called pigeon holes and khupris. Moreover, their bodies are occupied with numerous marks due to the cause of fatal diseases like leprosy. Sexual exploitation is equally dominant in the text. Men in many appearances kept on searching for sexual prey. These helpless widows are sexually harassed as if wolves eat pity animals' flesh. Since no one stands for their help, they can do nothing except surrendering before the cruel animals in the form of men. Generally, young widows are being targeted by the men in Braj. In the name of jugal upasana few women like Sashiprova agree to live with the temple priests for their protection. But then again these priests leave no stone unturned to exploit radheshayamas. Society is so much filled with monsters that no woman is free from their claws. "Sherafi Sethni shouted at her in a contemptuous tone: "I lived with the Swamiji for twenty days, and now I am pregnant. But why am I wandering around like this? Why can I find no peace anywhere?" (Bhattacharyya, 121). There remains no place safer for the women in Braj. Everyone is busy exploiting these pity women. They appear as if they are the preachers of peace and religion but the truth is quite contrary. Exploiting and seducing women have been their prime targets to fulfill physical and material needs.

Violence and exploitation of women is a very traumatic issue in Indian society. Through her writings, Bama has projected different kinds of violence and exploitation faced by women in Dalit society. Since patriarchy is dominant in Dalit communities, women become easy prey at the hands of men. They are victimised through many types of domestic violence. Outside their community, they are exploited in some other ways by upper-caste people. In *Karukku*, Bama has reflected various types of violence and exploitation done on Dalit women. Violence is unleashed on women at different places like home and workplace. Similarly, they are exploited in many ways like economically, socially, physically, etc. As Dalits are regarded as untouchables, there are certain rules which have been laid down for them. Many times, if by mistake they disobey the rules, violence is unleashed on them. The Untouchables were not allowed to use the public roads that privileged castes used. They were not allowed to drink water from common wells. Similarly, they were not allowed to go to schools and temples where the upper caste used to go. They are not permitted to cover the upper part of their bodies (Roy, 8). The upper castes manifest their hegemony through violence at different levels. Most of the time violence is released by upper caste groups over the Dalits. This happens because the population of Dalits is so less in numbers. The upper caste people can easily threaten them. Bama exposes the communal clash between the two castes. A Dalit man named Izhava was stabbed by the Chaaliyar boys. After that, they jointly attacked the Paraya community. "All the Chaaliyar women had hidden themselves behind the trees, from where they flung stones and rocks with as much skill as their men might have done" (Holmstrom, 31). Not only men but women also took equal participation in exploiting the Dalits. In such cases, the government authorities also blindly take the side of the upper castes. It is seen in the text that the police authorities had supported the upper castes without

doing any proper investigation. They started beating the Dalits mercilessly and put them inside the bars. The exploitation of women is too recurring in the text. It reflects every aspect of the exploitation of Dalit women. When the cocks crow early in the morning these Dalit women start going to the workplace. After working for the whole day they are given only the left-over food. Through the character of her grandmother, Bama portrays the hardships and exploitation of Dalit women. The wages of Dalit women are too low in comparison to the wages given to men. For the same level of work, women are paid less than men. Bama writes in text, "Even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. I could never understand why" (Holmstrom, 55). No one respects a Dalit woman. Even a little sense of humanity is not shown towards them. From their home to the workplace everyone makes all kinds of effort to exploit them. Bama states about how the tradesmen managed to cheat them by collecting several bundles of cotton and bags of grain. Naicker employers also exploited them in every possible way. Violence and exploitation of Dalit women are not only limited up to these misdeeds. It was very difficult for Dalit women to move openly outside their village. Dalit women have been targeted at various places. They always had fear and danger of becoming the victims of the devil's act like rape at the hands of the upper caste. Bama writes in the text about the peripheral positions of women. The women working in the crop fields have to escape from the upper caste men's molestations. Sometimes, they were even raped brutally by these men. In *Sangati*, Mariamma was targeted to exploit by a higher caste landlord in the crop field (20). But when the villagers and the headman judged the incident, she was blamed and targeted by saying an immoral girl (24, 25). Arundhati Roy mentions in her text *The Doctor and the Saint*, "Men of the privileged castes had undisputed rights over the bodies of Untouchable women. Love is

polluting. Rape is pure. In many parts of India, much of this continues to this day" (Roy, 9). On one hand, they discriminate Untouchable women tagging them as inferior and impure. But on the other hand, they target to exploit them by claiming their rights over the bodies of Untouchable women. To satisfy their physical needs they declare rape over Untouchables as a pure deed. The violence and exploitation of Dalit women are not only exercised within the boundaries of the upper class. It is equally dominating at their homes. Domestic violence is a common phenomenon in Dalit societies. Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd writes in his text *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, "Wife-beating is a patriarchal practice that exists among all castes" (39). In her texts, Bama fuses various types of domestic violence executed on Dalit women. Dalit women have to work from the early morning to till the late night. They work in the upper caste people fields, works in their own fields and graze the cattle. Returning home at night after serving food to everyone with tiredness if they deny sex, they are beaten up mercilessly by their husbands. Therefore, they usually submit to their husbands before they could cook something or take rest for a few moments. Bama describes, "There wasn't a single person in the village who did not know him. Because every day he'd drag his wife by the hair to the community hall and beat her up as if she were an animal, with his belt" (Holmstrom, 61). There is no place for Dalit women to live safely and securely. Every day from the dawn to the night they go through various layers of colonisation. According to M. Prabhavathi, Dalit women have to suffer from triple layers of colonisation. At first, they are exploited by Dalit men at their homes, secondly, they are exploited by upper caste women and thirdly they go through the exploitation of upper-caste men (Jogdand. P. G, *Dalit Women Issues and Perspectives*, 91). Hence they are triply colonised. Bama too explores the realities of the Christian Missionaries. At first, the Dalits had been convinced to adopt

the Christian religion. They were tempted to get various facilities from the missionaries. But, after their conversion into Christians, they are segregated, set apart and exploited.

In the convents, hostels, and schools the Dalits are treated differently than the upper caste people and students. There stands a huge separation between the poor and the rich students. In the convents, the nuns speak about God's three vocations i.e. poverty, chastity, and obedience but in reality, they lead a life full of wealth and luxuries. "In the name of God they actually rob the poor who struggle for their very livelihood. They teach them to shut their eyes when they pray, with the deliberate intention that they should not open eyes and see" (Holmstrom, 61). As the Dalit students belonged to poor families they were exploited and set apart from the rich students. Only the rich students were preferred in every possible way. Bama describes several stories of her own exploitation at the hands of upper castes and nuns. When she was at school, they were treated separately. At the school hostels, she could not get equal opportunities on several occasions like the upper caste students. Firstly, the Sisters refused to accept Bama as a full nun. But after they were compelled to accept her as a complete nun, they started exploiting her in the name of Dalit caste woman. In every walk of her life, she went through exploitation and suffering in some ways or another.

3.9. Denial of Education

Education is the most important need in the present-day world. Without education, one cannot live a meaningful life. The ratio of female education in India after independence was quite negligible. At present, it has raised up to near about sixty-six

percent. In the texts, the authors have very sensitively portrayed the problems of women's education. In a patriarchal tradition, women are not preferred for education. Only the male children are given the first chance to grab education. A few conscious parents rarely allow their daughters to go to school. In the text *The Blue-necked God*, Goswami reflects the miserable condition of thousands of radheshymis who are illiterate. It is only because they couldn't achieve proper education during their youth age. Due to the lack of proper education, they were unable to get absorbed somewhere for their livelihood. Therefore, the only way to survive stands is living in Brindivan. Many reasons obstruct women from acquiring education. The traditional set up in Indian society neglects girls' education. In a patriarchal society, everything is reasoned through a male perspective. It is generally believed that finally after education only boys could bring back money home. Instead of providing school education, girls are educated to take care of domestic responsibilities. Such social set up keeps them unsuitable and unskilled to become self-dependent. The majority of radheshyamis in the Braj are illiterate. They were not given the opportunity to acquire education. In a patriarchal society, girls are considered the burden of price to be paid in the future. Those are in the form of costly pieces of jewelry, amounts of cash and dowries. They are hence not sent to school by paying any extra price on education. In some higher class families, though education is provided to girls, it is only meant for their degrees which may help them to get a good husband. In the novel, Saudamini is a well-educated girl but she is not given the chance to establish herself. Instead, she is taken to Brindavan in terms of acquiring solace and peace. "Her university certificates must still be lying in some corner of her suitcases. Why had she studied, she wondered? Was it merely because of her enthusiasm for higher degrees, or was it as a precaution against future insecurity?She too, had no answer" (Bhattacharyya, 98).

At first, women in a Patriarchal society are not empowered by educating them. Secondly, even if in some way they get the education they are not allowed to be independent.

In the novel *Karukku*, denial of girl's education in the Dalit communities is one of the crucial issues portrayed by the author. In a patriarchal society, education is always preferred for the male members of a family. Even very few numbers of Dalit males get a chance to acquire education. The literacy rate of Dalit girls in the country is almost negligible. Only a small number of them have been able to see the blackboard of a classroom. It is very painful to mention here that in the early years of their lives, they are engaged in housekeeping works. They are taught to work in the crop fields. Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd mentions in his text *Why I Am Not a Hindu*,

"The elder girls were taught, even as they turned three, how to handle a younger brother or sister. Holding a three-month-old baby requires skill and care, more so when the arms are those of a three-year-old girl. This was the most important help that the mother needed when she left home for sheep-related activities or agrarian work, early in the morning. Mothers would also teach them how to powder chillies, husk the paddy, sweep the home, and clean the eating bowls" (3).

The road to education for girls is not built from their childhood. They become and work as supporters to their parents. Bright futures of Dalit girls are snatched at their early ages. Girls had to sacrifice everything in the interest of their parents and siblings. Bama describes in *Karukku*, "It is always the girl children who had to look after all the chores at home" (Holmstrom, 52). Patriarchy is the first and foremost

reason that becomes an obstacle to girls in obtaining education. Secondly, poverty is another degrading barricade to girls that stop them from going to school. It is due to poverty these young Dalit girls have to help their parents from the very early age of three or four. Their help in household works gives their parents more time and opportunity to do wage works. Bama was quite lucky to have the opportunity to go to school. Her father, working in a defense service had perhaps provided her the chance to march towards school. At least her family was economically a bit stable than others. Unlike Bama thousands of Dalit girls do not get an option to see the sight of any school. Bama reflects her childhood experience of hardship for education. "In the face of such poverty, the girl children cannot see the sense in schooling, and stay at home, collecting firewood, looking after the house, caring for the babies, and doing household chores" (Holmstrom, 79). Bama worked as a labour in the fields of Naickers to earn some pennies at the least. She worked as labour until she reaches eight class standards. Even after completing her school education she continued to carry firewood and did labour works. The upper-caste women can acquire proper education because they have good economic and social backgrounds. On the other hand, Dalit women have no one to support their education. They themselves have to remain busy with earning activities since their childhood. Security and timely marriage are yet other significant causes that stop women from taking education. Dalit girls are not allowed to go alone in society. Sometimes they are even not allowed to go in groups. There is a huge risk of becoming prey at the hands of upper-caste men. They often target Dalit girls for molestations and sexual violence. Bama writes about such an incident when they were stopped to go to a cinema. They were warned because the boys from other communities would pull the Dalit women if they were seen in the cinema hall (Holmstrom, 58).

Timely marriage is a patriarchal notion imposed on girls. Women in Dalit societies as well as in other societies are engaged to get married in time. It is considered a huge responsibility of the parents to manage their daughter's marriage in time. As the author has mentioned, Dalit women are no longer allowed to go to school and colleges after reaching puberty. They do not get further chances for university education.

"But then, my parents wanted to stay back home saying there was no need for me to go to college or to study any further. In any case, there was no money. Then, they said it would be difficult for me to find a husband in my community if I went in for further education. So they wrote off to a few places to find out about teacher training" (Holmstrom, 74).

There was a great fear in the parents' mind that if she goes for higher education she won't get a good husband from her own caste. Comparing to the other side, her brother had already completed his university education but when Bama's turn came, everyone refused to allow her for higher education. At last, when Bama came under the influence of the nuns and decided to go for University education, everyone objected to her. Her father too objected to her, "Meanwhile, my father wrote to me from army, very abusively, 'you listened to the nuns' advice and joined college; so now ask them to give you money; go on, go to them" (Holmstrom, 75). No one cares about girls' education because everyone tries them to engage in works and marriages. In reality, there is no space given to them for essential education. Bama struggled a lot for her education, taking all those hardships into account right from her family to the

school and college. The barriers which had come out at own home in the form of patriarchy. Many types of oppression carried out by the teachers in schools to the cruelty of nuns in the convents and hostels. The discrimination and exploitation of Dalit women in common society are equally oppressive. Hence, Dalit women can hardly get their education in such an imbalanced society.

3.10. Portrayal of Women in the Hindu Epics

The portrayal of women in the Hindu epics has been a controversial subject. As tradition is followed in terms of old values found in the histories and religious texts, women characters mentioned in the epics play a paramount role in protecting it. The characters found in the epics have been portrayed as weak and dependent on men. They are represented as passive followers of social laws under the command of men. Women in the Hindu epics are shown as the able sufferers who can face the atrocities in different circumstances. Similarly, in the select texts, women characters are pushed by various societal and religious forces to turn them like those characters found in the epics. On the other hand, there are mentions of many Dalit women characters or women Adivasi characters in the Hindu epics. They have been portrayed as the women from uncivilised society. The Dalit women in the epics are portrayed as aggressive, reactive, ugly and brainless. In a similar way, the select texts reflect on some similar issues of Dalit women. They are regarded as some other by the upper caste society. The societal forces in the select text have attempted to consider and compare the Dalit women with the negative characters portrayed in the epics. There are many statements given in the religious texts regarding women. These statements are very controversial up to a certain level. Vizia Bharati writes in the text, *Dalit*

Women in India: Issues and Perspectives that, “At some point it says that the mother should be respected highly more than the father and guru (teacher). And elsewhere it advises not to trust women”. Furthermore, Bharati discusses that if someone’s father or teacher is bad, the son or the student can abandon them. But, even if one’s mother is a bad character one should respect her. One must obey her. In the other side, again in the Manudharma Shastra women are said not to be given freedom. They should be kept under the tight control of men at every stage of life. The characters in the select texts go through under such tight control of men. In the epic *Ramayana*, Sita is portrayed as a submissive character. When Lord Rama is declared to go for fourteen years of exile, Sita agrees to accompany to him. She agrees to face the challenges with him. But at last, when Sita is brought back from Lanka, she is not accepted by society. She is asked to go through a test (agni pariksa) to prove her chastity. In the text *The Blue-necked God*, Sashiprova tries to protect her chastity and she is proud to announce the fact to Saudamini. On the other hand, Saudamini and Mrinalini are the submissive characters who usually submit before their parents. In an incident when Saudamini and her mother meet a baba, Saudamini is compared to Sita by that baba, “Baba said, True, she is living in the midst of human wolves. But that does not matter. Do you not remember Sita (Bhattacharaya, 32)”. Mrinalini’s life is depicted like the character of Drupadi in the epic *Mahabharata*. Drupadi happily accepts the declaration made by her mother-in-law. When prince Arjuna brings Drupadi to home, Arjuna tells his mother Kunti that he has brought something. But without noticing it Kunti instructs to share it equally with his brothers. Drupadi finds no way to oppose it except submitting herself. She is brought to a gamble when the Pandavas lost all their properties and inheritances. In the gamble, she painfully accepted the torture done by the Kauravas. In the text *The Blue-necked God* Mrinalini, accompanies her

parents to the Braj after her father loses everything by drinking and gambling. She submits and agrees with the decision of her parents.

There are many female demonic and low caste characters mentioned in the Hindu epics. They are either killed or insulted by the upper caste protagonists. Sometimes they are neglected and insulted only because they belong to the lower caste. On the other hand, few characters have been violently insulted in the epics. The text *Karukku* portrays some similar aspects of women as mentioned in the epics. Those epics were written thousands of years back but they still continue to influence society. People from the upper castes still presume to have some similarities of the Dalit women to the women mentioned in the Hindu epics. The description of the Matanga Kanyas (girls) is found in the *Mahabharata*. As mentioned in the *Mahabharata* they belonged to a lower caste group. When king Harishchandra goes to the forest for hunting, he becomes so tired. Then the Matanga Kanyas approached the king and entertained him. After entertained by their dance and music, he is very much pleased to gift them something. But, accordingly, when the girls asked him to gift them an umbrella, he refused. Since in those days, an umbrella was considered to be a symbol of royal honour. It could be only gifted to the upper caste people. Therefore, the king refused to gift an umbrella. When he again told them to ask something else, this time they ask him to marry them. The king rejects their wish and expressed his anger towards them. Such types of incidents still happen in our society. In the text *Karukku*, Bama is not accepted as a fully-fledged nun after having all the training and experiences. This happens only because she comes from a lower caste background. In the epics, there are also mentions of races like the 'Asura', 'Danava' or 'Rakshasa'. They have been considered some uncivilised and brutal races. The 'idea of misrepresentation of eastern subjects' given by Edward Said is comparable in this

context. In his foundational text, *Orientalism* Said puts forward the idea of Western knowledge about the East, basically of Middle East. He exposes the false cultural assumptions of the Western World or the Eurocentric prejudices against the Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture prevailing since ages. Such false conceptions have developed because of preconceived archetypes. These notions developed gradually by the spread of ideas and knowledge from the literary and historical texts. Similarly, the races like the 'Asura', 'Danava' or 'Rakshasa' are found in the Hindu epics. The Shudras or the Untouchables have been portrayed as the 'other' in the epics. Therefore, a kind of misrepresentation is prevailing within the people of the upper caste society. They believe that these races are violent and inferior. There are cultural prejudices against these so-called lower castes people, which have been developing for ages due to the interpretations found in the religious epics. Shurpanakha is described as Ravana's sister, who belonged to the Asura race. When she first meets Lord Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the forest, she interrogated in a proper manner. She again asks them to marry her. But, as she comes from a rakshashi race, a lower caste, her proposal is rejected in a degrading manner. As a punishment, she is caught and her nose and ears are cut off. In the same manner, such atrocities on Dalit women are still prevalent in society. Bama mentions in the text *Karukku* about the severe atrocities done against the Dalit women. If sometimes, knowingly or unknowingly they break the caste rules, they are punished mercilessly. Once in the school, she was punished for the charge of plucking a coconut. Inside the bus, a woman segregated her after asking about her caste and left her alone in the seat. Bama has been segregated at various places and also punished for various accusations which happened only due to her lower caste background. She was many times pushed to the class of the 'other'.

Women are thereby pushed into the class of 'subalterns' by various societal and institutional forces. They are treated as 'other' by positioning them on the basis of caste, patriarchy, gender, class, etc. These separations of women done in various layers turn them to be the 'other'. Apart from the above-discussed factors various other interrelated factors push women to become 'subalterns'. Therefore, they are suppressed and victimised at the same time remain silent.

Chapter 4: Relocating the Women's Voices.

4.1: Introduction

Women have been suppressed since ages. Though women had been resisting their pain in passive ways, no one was ready to listen to their voices. Their voices remained unheard due to the existence of extreme patriarchy in society. But now women's voices are being given space in our society. Up to a considerable extent, women have been able to support themselves. They no longer remain dependent on male members of their family. At present women are also considered important members of a family. Their needs and demands are being taken care of by the head of the families. On the other hand, they too play a significant role in decision making in the interest of the family. In the early days, women could not feel freedom in their homes. The anticipation of freedom in society was an impossible endeavour. But now women have been able to enjoy freedom both at their homes and in society. In the two select texts in studies, women have attempted to attain freedom from the clutches of orthodox society. Through participation in various fields, they have been able to establish their identity. Today, women are taking part in every field, from politics to sports, music to dance, business to services, etc. Many initiatives have been sensitive in the course of women's empowerment as a whole. The most important step towards women's empowerment is growth in girl's education. The protagonists in the select novels in studies are educated and therefore do not want to accept the orthodox caste rules and tradition. Women were not allowed to get education in the past ages. But now they are allowed to acquire education. Though the literacy rate of girl's education in India is still poor, an appreciable percentage of girls have been able to acquire

education. At present education has become the most significant tool towards development. It is not only for girls but boys equally require education for advancement. Without education, no society can march towards progress.

4.2: Major Turning Points in the History

The subalternity of women has been very painful and barbaric in the pages of human civilisation. Men did not allow women to speak and keep their interest in the past. The voices of women have always remained inactive in the interest of their families. They have always been sacrificing their 'self' for someone and thereby suppress own voice. Though they suppressed their voices, they too tried to whisper from time to time. This phenomenon is very evident in the select novels. Through the novels, Goswami and Bama have influentially portrayed both weaker and stronger sides of women. The voices of women got recognition after the passages of many centuries. It is well said by someone that "Rome was not built in a day". Similarly, after many landmark movements in history, women were given significance. They were provided with spaces for their selves. Their voices were taken into consideration and they have been able to speak with this long turn of time. The following are the few landmarks that had been crucial in establishing women's place in society.

Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement that was popular in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. It is also called the age of reason. This movement was mainly centered on reason and individualism rather than tradition. The notion of tradition was replaced by the idea of rationalism. Traditional and religious beliefs were questioned by the Enlightenment thinkers of different European countries. During the period of the Enlightenment movement, new

revolutionary ideas emerged from every field like Science, Religion, Politics, Philosophy, etc. some of the major revolutionaries who shaped the idea of Enlightenment are Descartes, Voltaire, Locke, Kant, Newton, Goethe, Rousseau, Adam Smith and few more.

The introduction of Democracy in the third world countries brought a drastic change in the governing system. It gradually granted rights to the people according to their needs. Since, in this system, people have their own rights to elect the government. It is generally defined as 'by the people', 'for the people' and 'of the people'. Unlike Monarchial or Dictatorial government, Democracy is very flexible in nature. It is a governing system that is pro-people. The introduction of such a system provided a platform for the 'sublaterns' to raise their voice. Since in this system, there are various grants to the people. The following are the few rights and grants to the people in India by the Indian constitution.

- (i) Right to equality. (Article 14-18)
- (ii) Right to freedom. (Article 19-22)
- (iii) Right against exploitation. (Article 23-24)
- (iv) Right to freedom of religion. (Article 25-28)
- (v) Cultural and educational rights. (Article 29-30)
- (vi) Right to constitutional remedies. (Article 32)

Apart from these rights and grants, there are other similar grants provided by many National and International Human Rights commissions like United Nations Human Rights Council, International Human Rights Commission, Asian Human Rights Commission, European Commission on Human Rights, etc. Through these

commissions, basic human rights are guaranteed to the citizens in the world. Few Universal declarations of Human rights are as follows.

- (i) All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood. (UN Article-1)
- (ii) Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. (UN Article-3)
- (iii) No one shall be held in slavery or servitude, slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms. (UN Article-4)
- (iv) No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. (UN Article-5)
- (v) Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law. (UN Article-6)

Liberalism or liberal philosophy is based on the idea of individual liberty. It is a doctrine which focuses on the idea of protecting a person from the threats of a political and social system. In this system, the government is supposed to protect one's liberty at the same time prevent its own abuses to the person. The introduction of liberal policy in the third world countries brought freedom to the subalterns. Through the implementation of this policy, they have been secured with civil and human rights. Liberalist policy instituted new ideas like secularism, gender equality, racial equality, internationalism, etc by replacing the old traditional ideas. Liberalism has played a significant role in protecting the interest of weaker class people.

The implementation of modern education in third world countries brought a significant change in the lives of subalterns. Many educational institutions have been

established in rural areas to impart modern education to the poor and lower classes. Through education, the subalterns became aware of their status. With the flow of time, they began to demand their constitutional rights. In the select texts in studies, the protagonists are able to raise their voice only because of having education qualifications. They have been influenced by the democratic and liberal ideas. Article 21A of the Indian constitution provides 'right to elementary education' to the citizens. Various schemes and projects have been promoted to implement women's education in India. The following schemes have brought considerable changes in the present to support women.

- Sarwa Shiksha Abhiyan
- Indira Mahila Yojana
- Balika Samridhi Yojana
- Rashtriya Mahila Kosh
- Mahila Samridhi Yojana
- Employment and Income Generating Training-cum-Production Centres
- Programme of Development of Women and Children in rural areas
- Short Stay Home for Women and Girls

4.3: Women Movements: Resistance and Discourse

Feminist movement or Women's movement generally refers to women's reform movements for equality. It is about their awareness through campaigns, writings, awareness acts, etc against gender inequality and exploitation. Their primary aims have been towards establishing equality and stability on issues like maternity leave, reproductive rights, domestic violence, women's suffrage, sexual harassment, and

equal pay. These movements started in western countries during the late 18th century. Till now it has gone through three stages. These three stages are namely categorised as First Wave Feminism, Second Wave Feminism, and Third Wave Feminism. Postcolonial feminism is yet another significant feminist movement in third world countries. This movement has mainly been active in Eastern and African colonised nations. This movement began in the 1980s as a response to Western feminist theorists. The movements have been very influential in championing the cause of women. Following are the illustrations of these above-mentioned women's movements.

The First-Wave feminist movement took place in the 19th century and continued until the 20th century in western countries. The activists of this movement are basically known as the suffragettes. Their primary focus was on gaining voting rights of women. The terms 'first-wave' and 'second-wave' feminism were coined by Maratha Lear in 1968. Many writers like Virginia Woolf were related to this movement. In her famous book, *A Room of One's Own*, she mentions men's social and physical dominance over women. The suffragettes were able to secure voting rights for women in 1928 in Britain. Susan B. Antony, Helen Pitts, and others were active in the United States. They campaigned for women's rights and abolishing slavery.

Second-Wave feminism started in the 1960s and continued until the 1980s decade. This movement was based on the idea of bringing equality in laws and culture. Very soon it became popular in the United States and spread to other European nations. The Second-Wave feminists raised their voice larger than the voice raised in the First-Wave movement. It was for equal voting rights, property rights, reproductive rights, right against sexual violence, etc. French writer Simone de Beauvoir was immensely associated with this movement who had given the idea of

"other" being related to women in the patriarchal society. She expressed this idea in *The Second Sex*, her seminal text on male-centered ideology. Another influential text which shaped the notions of the Second-Wave feminism is *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. Through this text, she explored the ways on how women are depicted in media and thereby limit their potential and possibilities.

The Third-Wave feminist movement emerged in the 1990s and lasted up to 2010s until the rise of Fourth-Wave feminism. It arose out as a response to the failures of Second-Wave feminism. The Generation X scholars and activists were the prominent leaders of this wave. This movement made unique contributions towards establishing gender, racial, economic, and social equality. Rebecca Walker, Jennifer Baumgardner, and Amy Richards were some influential members of this group. They were hugely influenced by postmodernist ideas. Hence, they began to reclaim the identity of womanhood in a new way.

The Fourth-Wave feminism took its momentum around 2013 and continues to this date. Unlike the other feminist waves this wave primarily focused on focus on sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture and other issues. On the other hand, this wave also laid the idea of women empowerment through the use of internet tools and digital media. Many notable incidents turned up the acceleration of the fourth wave movement. In 2012, a mass protest rally that took place in India against the gang-rape of a girl who eventually died later. The 'Women's March' in the United States was organised on January 21, 2017, against Donald Trump's inflammatory remarks about women after his win over Hillary Clinton in the U.S Presidential election in 2016. The 'Me Too Movement' was another landmark in the history of women's movement launched in 2006 against sexual violence, especially females of colour.

Postcolonial feminism or third world feminism gained its momentum in the 1980s after the publication of essays like *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* by Audre Lorde and *Under Western Eyes* by Chandra Talpade Mohanty. This class of feminism studies about the representations of women in the colonised countries and western countries. It developed as a critique of the western feminism by the eastern feminist scholarship. This feminist group was against the notions of western feminism for misrepresenting the 'third world women' as similar to the 'western women'. They stated that the third world women have different social, racial, ethnic, and political backgrounds which are a lack in the western feminist scholarship. Chandra Talpade Mohanty mentions the production of a singular category of 'Third World' women in Western feminism which damagingly creates the 'discursive homogenization and systematisation of the oppression women in third world' (Williams and Chrisman, 198). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak exposes that the singular notion of 'Third World' woman is an ideological construct wholly produced within 'First World' intellectual debates, and not an individual subject (McLeod, 191). The idea of 'a double colonisation' is significant in analysing postcolonial feminism. This phase was first used by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford in their text, *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post- Colonial Women's Writing*, 1986. This idea generally explains how women in colonised countries have suffered from dual oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy. Hence, they are oppressed in double senses.

4.4: History of Dalit Women Discourses

Dalit Feminist movements generally started in the 1920s and the 1930s while participating in the Ambedkarite movements. But, it turned into larger social movements in the 1970s and the 1980s, when many Dalit narratives and autobiographies on Dalit women's lives began to be published. Through these movements, the Dalit feminist activists raised their voices against the caste and gender inequalities. Their rage stands aloud against the societal and governmental negligence towards the marginal lower castes. Many Dalit women groups had been organised during the last few decades. In 1942, almost 25,000 Dalit women took active participation in the All India Depressed Classes Women Conference held in Nagpur. For the first time, the national meeting of Dalit women was held in Bangalore in 1987. Some of the active organisations like the National Federation of Dalit Women, All India Dalit Women's Forum, etc were established which continue to work in the interests of Dalit women.

Along with the rise of Dalit movements, Dalit writings became an important tool in demanding their rights. Through art and literature, they began to raise their voice. They started to represent their issues of untouchability, hunger, pain, sufferings, poverty, etc in writings like novels, autobiographies, plays, and poetries. Writings became a medium of their revolution. Datta Bhagat's play, *Roots and Escapes* depicts the real picture of transition of the Dalit society. Daya Pawar's autobiographical narrative, *Baluta* represents the miserable conditions of Dalit women. Similarly, Kishor Kale's *Kolhatyacha Por* delineates the sufferings of Dalit women under patriarchy. Urmila Pawar's *Weave of My Life* reflects on Dalit issues and the plight of Dalit women.

4.5: Ideas of Freedom and Nation Building: Ambedkar and Fanon

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar needs no introduction to be called the advocate of the depressed castes or Dalits. As he was from a lower caste, he had experienced the oppression of the depressed castes. Ambedkar's vision for free India was with a larger foundation for all the castes and classes. He firmly believed that without annihilating the castes, the freedom of a nation is meaningless. Since castes and classes will continue to dominate the lower sections of society. He wanted to reshape India by bringing equality in the nation which could be attained only through annihilation of castes. The upliftment of the depressed classes and minorities socially, politically and economically is essential for the progress of a nation. Since, the depressed classes and minorities have been the 'subalterns' of this country. The idea of Ambedkar was accurate at the peak of independence. But, during that time his concept of freedom and nation was not followed. Ambedkar opposed the idea of the existence of Caste Hindus in the country. Since this would always cheat the lower castes people. He believed in the notion of national integration by empowering the depressed classes. It could be only through providing their valuable share of power, resources, services, education, etc. For acquiring this share Ambedkar demanded the reservation and separate electorate for the Dalits. Since, without granting reservation the depressed classes and minorities would not be able to get their proper share. Furthermore, Ambedkar wanted the cleaning and menial jobs should be done through modern machines and technologies. He wanted the Dalits not to participate in doing such sanitary jobs. The proper emancipation of women can only be possible by establishing them through sustainable economic development. They should be uplifted by engaging in small-scale and local industries. Such engagement will make them

economically stable and free from caste and patriarchal barriers. Apart from that Ambedkar made many amendments in the interest of depressed classes and minorities. As he was the chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee of newly independent India, he researched deeply to protect the interest of every citizen of the country. Reservation for the depressed classes is notable in this regard.

Frantz Omar Fanon was a Martinique-born French psychiatrist, philosopher, revolutionary and writer. He is popularly known for his anti-colonialist philosophy. In his decolonisation theory, Fanon had given several ideas to re-establish a nation after independence. *The Wretched of the Earth* is his seminal text where he explains the various process of decolonisation. In this text, Fanon describes that,

“In decolonization, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation. If we wish to describe it precisely, we might find it in the well-known words: ‘The last shall be first and the first last.’ Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence. That is why, if we try to describe it, all decolonization is successful”.

Like Fanon has discussed in his seminal text, ‘the last shall be first and the first last’, similarly the subalterns can be considered the last in a newly independent nation. They should be placed in the first place in the eyes of the government for upliftment and support. Secondly, Fanon discusses the colonised ‘intellectual class’ or ‘bourgeoisie class’. He puts forward the idea of national consciousness to aware of the newly decolonised people. After the independence of a nation, the elite class people attempt to gain the power to control the working-class people. This class of people

may be compared to the 'subalterns'. Fanon has also mentioned the class of lumpenproletariat people, the absolute lowest class of people in society. He describes that the intellectual class or bourgeoisie class should not be allowed to rule the country in a newly independent nation. If they are allowed to rule the country by electing them in the government, they may follow the old colonial ways to rule. Fanon further discusses the notion of national culture. Colonisation damages the national culture and its sense of the past. Fanon appeals to refute the colonialist imprints and tags like barbaric, uncivilized, etc on national culture. It can be regained only by revisiting the glorious past. He argues the building of a nation economically and politically is more significant. The economic and political development of a country will develop the national culture. Hence, according to Fanon, freedom must be achieved at the cost of complete destruction of colonial dominance. Liberation should bring redefined humanity into the nation by the complete reconstruction of human relations.

4.6: Postmodernism: New ways of Dismantling Self

In the post-modern era, the influences of traditional and societal norms have started to decline. Various developments in the field of arts, commerce, and science have empowered women through skills and employment. The loss of faith in the caste system and religious beliefs has failed to make imprints in the minds of people. Therefore the rigid rules have become flexible according to the demand of time. Women in the present time have able to get rid of the old traditional barriers. Due to the growing influences of modern temperament highly influenced by modern education and constitutional demands, women are free to become self-reliant. In the select text *Karukku*, at last, Bama is successful in establishing herself as a school

teacher. The notion of women as weaker sex has started to change. There has been a neutralisation in the minds of men and they have accepted that women can equally progress on this planet. They have proved themselves by turning many possibilities into reality. Women have made a lot of progress in different areas. Higher education of women has equipped them to participate in every field. It has been a potent tool in empowering women. Their memberships in politics have turned them for demanding equal rights to women. Therefore, today they enjoy equal rights as men. At present, globalisation equally provides a larger space for women. They are engaged in various types of public and private services. The working of women in the call centers and malls have brought a huge positive change in their lives. Globalization has changed the world by reducing barriers between countries and by encouraging closer economic, political and social interactions (Mittleman, 2000:5). Women can travel to any place in the world to work. The achievements in technology and connectivity have brought safety and security to the women to stay in any part of the world. Today, women have become independent and empowered.

4.7: Making of the Self in the Texts

The question of self is very significant in the two select texts. At every moment, the protagonists go through a question, who are they? They want to know about themselves and want to discover themselves among all others. In every possible way, the characters make attempts to find out their identity. In the text *Karukku*, Bama portrays several incidents of her life when she dared to stand against the upper caste atrocities. Wherever she goes, Bama is ready to accept her identity as a Dalit woman. The novel is equally important in reflecting the suppression of Dalit women and at the

same time in enlarging the voices of Dalit women. As a whole, she also reflects women of her community who have equally challenged the upper caste hegemony and dominance of men in society.

On the other hand, the women characters in *The Blue-necked God* are though passive in nature, they equally have a sense of resistance to protect themselves. The three protagonists in the text *The Blue-necked God* namely Saudamini, Sashiprova, and Mrinalini suffer from the traditional norms but they do not continue to stay mum. Though they suffocate, their efforts to get rid of the traditional oppression continue at every time. They try to speak for their freedom which could only provide them a happy life.

The Realisation of Oppression and Exploitation under Caste-System and Tradition

While analysing the two select texts, it has been observed that the resistive voice is more active in Dalit societies. They have a larger platform to speak against the atrocities of men. In upper castes, freedom of women is only up to a certain limit. They can only speak for their assets like ornaments, clothes, etc. Women of upper castes though react sometimes, they are often seen as the observer of patriarchal norms. Most of their protests against men have always been passive and silent. In his classic text, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd mentions the differences in both Dalit and Hindu societies. He writes,

“A Hindu family is hierarchal. Girls must obey boys, children must obey elders. Sex and age are two determining

and measuring rods of the status within the family. Children are trained not to get involved in production-related tasks, which Brahmins condemn as 'Sudra' tasks. Similarly, their friendship with Dalitbahujan children is censured..... The father's atrocities against the mother cannot be discussed in Brahmin or Baniya. But this is not so in our families. The father abuses the mother right in front of the children and the mother will pay back in the same coin then and there. The children are a witness to all that. In Hindu families, the father can abuse the mother, but the mother is not supposed to retort. A wife is supposed to put up with all the atrocities that a husband commits against her; the more a wife puts up with the husband's atrocities the more she is appreciated" (8,9).

The contexts of two social setups are different in many ways. One is built based on patriarchy and age while the other has a certain freedom to fight for righteousness. Dalit women can stand against the male members according to the need. But an upper-caste woman cannot raise her voice against the male members. They have to remain silent even the male members are found guilty in homely affairs. In the two select texts, various societal forces have attempted to suppress the women characters. They have observed the oppression of women under the patriarchal and traditional forces. But at a point in time, they come to realise that they have been suppressed to dominate by the established male-centered society. When they observe those atrocities done against women they feel insecure within the society. The characters in the texts develop a sense of consciousness in their heart and mind. As a result, several questions arise to relate the happenings, but they finally come to realise

the realities. Bama describes her childhood experiences in the text that once she saw an elder man bowed down by cupping the hands and extended a packet towards him. After observing this she rushes to her brother and explains the scene. Observing the incident Bama realises that something disgraceful is happening between them. Since a man from her caste has bowed down before the Naicker caste man to deliver a parcel. Her doubts became clearer when she narrated the incidents to her elder brother. Being an elder brother, he made Bama understand the rules and realities of the caste system. This experience of life has made Bama aware that they are someone, considered as others in the eyes of society. Like a protagonist in a bildungsroman novel, step by step she grows up with many struggles. With every new step of her life, she moved on realising the existence of caste discriminations. She questioned herself, why Dalits are being treated like animals by the upper castes? Why people are divided into many caste groups in society? Bama couldn't find the answer anywhere but she could only become aware of it. As Dalit literature is rightly called the literature of realisation, she realises the grim reality of caste oppression under the upper caste's hegemony. Secondly, identity has been an important issue in Dalit literature. The Dalits are deprived of their identity. They do not know about their origin and identity. Hence, when the characters in the select text *Karukku* step into the new institutions within the society, they go through an identity crisis. The dominant forces of society in the form of institutions address them as the Dalits or Untouchables. Knowing about their place and position in society they become shocked and find difficult to accept it. These encounters between the upper-caste institutions and Dalits make them aware of their identity. Moreover, they are enforced in a way to accept themselves as inferior to the upper castes people. This realisation makes them ready to accept the Dalit identity in society. Bama describes in the text,

“The warden sister of our hostel could not abide low-caste or poor children. She’d get hold of us and scold us for no rhyme or reason.....‘These people get nothing to eat at home; they come here and grow fat,’ she would say publicly ‘Look at the Cheri children! When they stay here.....’ (20, Holmstrom).

Such treatments in society make the characters aware and realise about their identity. Finally, they have to accept whatever society imposes on them. They cannot resist imposition on them at the first stage of realisation, but become more conscious of the issues. The Dalits feel aloof from the caste-centered society as a result of segregation. Slowly, after this realisation they move to react against the caste discriminations.

The novel, *The Blue-necked God* primarily depicts the innocence and silence of women. The women characters in the text are passive in nature. But resistance is equally observed within the women characters. Their sense of resistance is not much active like in *Karukku*. Sometimes they attempt to resist themselves aggressively but most of the time they react calmly. From the very first day of her arrival in Brindavan, Saudamini began to feel very troubled observing the desolate situation of women staying in the Braj. The widows in the Braj have been staying in such a bad situation that she is shocked to know them. Although, following the steps of her parents she attempted to know what is true in Brindavan. At first, she believed whatever is told to her by her parents. She followed with her mother and visited many well-known priests. Charanbehari is one of those Paandas who usually helps them as a guide to visit the new places. It was very shocking to her to see, where a dead body is laying and nobody is weeping or showing grief. Instead of worrying about the dead body the

women and a man (paanda)¹³ continue to argue and stay busy in search of coins and ornaments from the dead body. Slowly and gradually she began to think independently. She discovers many shocking realities inside the Braj. “Saudamini tried to get familiar with this new life and to adjust to it” (19, Bhattacharyya). Saudamini becomes familiar with the pigeon holes and khupris where the radhesiyamis stay. She becomes deeply intense after seeing the rooms which are like animal habitats. She questions to the radhesiyamis, “Ladies, how do you make your living here?” (21, Bhattacharyya). These pitiful conditions of women raise several types of questions into her mind. As an educated woman Saudamini could not accept whatever she has been observing in the Braj. She further comes to learn about their source of living. They are dressed in dirty and faded clothes and they are sick. Most of them have leprosy marks. Saudamini suffocates after observing the pathetic conditions of the widows. Since her parents too wanted her to accept the way of life as radheshyamas live. They want her to become a radheshyami and pass the rest of her life in the Brindavan. Step by step Saudamini learned more about the sufferings of the widows in the Braj. Wherever she goes, she used to interrogate about the happenings. In the beginning, she thought that radheshyamas live a happy life by earning every day. Later, she realises that they hardly manage to remain alive. Most of the widows starve. “These women were compelled to sing even if they were starving” (23, Bhattacharyya). After experiencing those bad situations she realises that in the name of religion these women have been suffering under religious rules. They are being tortured and exploited in the name of tradition. The radhashyamas are actually forced to live such lives due to blind faith and patriarchy. Along with her mother, Saudamini visits many temples and meets Babas to get any kind of suggestion

¹³ Men in the Braj who usually exploit the radheshyamas.

and hope for her future life. Saudamini follows her mother but at the same time, she also questions within, to the fraudulence of the priests.

The two other central characters in the novel are Sashiprova and Mrinalini. These two characters are equally aware of their circumstances. They too are dropped by the situation to pass their lives in the Braj like Saudamini. At every moment they attempt to relate their past lives with the present happenings. Mrinalini is forty years old, an unmarried daughter of Thakur Sahib. When she arrives in Braj with her old father and mentally afflicted mother, she feels helpless. "Mrinalini's mind was filled with an unknown fear, and for some time past, she had been overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness. She felt like a beast of burden, like an over loaded donkey at the end of her tether!" (41, Bhattacharyya). Observing the conditions of poor radheshyamas she began to feel destitute. Because this time her father has come to sell the Behari Kunj temple. And very soon they will have to stay like those radheshyamas. Behari Kunj temple is the only remaining property of her father. But, that too will be sold soon for their survival. Mrinalini realises that her father is the reason for all these happenings. He had enjoyed his whole life with wine and money by selling all the inheritances. Now, only the Behari Kunj temple is left to sell for their survival. Mrinalini is conscious of their present situation. She comes to understand that after losing all his properties, her father has brought her and her mother in the Braj to die in starvation. At last, Sashiprova too started to feel that something is not going right. She realised that she is suffering after their coming in the Braj. She asks Saudamini, "Tell me, have you really found any peace after coming to the Brajdham? I mean, have you been able to come to any conclusion about how you will spend the rest of your life?"(61, Bhattacharyya). To make her doubt clear she confronts Saudamini, since Saudamini has been passing her days in the Braj.

Sashiprova fears with uncertainties about her future days to come after getting no answer from Saudamini.

Developing Resistive Senses within Self

In postcolonial studies, resistance has been an important part of decolonisation. Resistance generally comes in the second phase of exploitation. At the first stage, the characters are exploited and oppressed. Thereafter, resistive sense consciously develops within the characters. Like the social scientists of a society, the characters go through many observations. These conscious characters observe the behavior of society minutely. They think and judge what could be the right thing to bring changes in the society? What can uplift the oppressed class? How women can be independent of the shackles of society? After the realisation and acceptance of their identity, they interrogate themselves about their identity. As in the text Bama questions such several inequalities in society. She writes, “Are Dalits not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honour and self respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack? ” (27, Holmstrom). Observing the oppression of Dalits in various institutions she raises her voice against the upper-class masters. Dalits too are human beings, they too work hard for their livelihood but they are not treated equally as human beings in society. This consciousness impels Bama to take some revolutionary steps to stand against society. In chapter two when Bama’s brother Annan explained to her that only education can earn respect to them, from that very day she studied hard.

“Annan told me all these things. And he added,
‘Because we are born into the Paraya jati, we are never

given any honour and dignity....But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities....The words that Annan spoke to me that day made a very deep impression on me. And I studied hard, with all my breath..." (18,19, Holmstrom).

These words from her brother changed her mind forever to work hard so that they can establish their lost identity before society. Her commitment towards her studies became a resistive sense that further assisted her to speak for her community. Bama began to perform well in her studies. She stood first in the class among the Harijan students in her S.S.L.C exam. Due to this achievement, she became the face of Dalit students. She could prove that Harijans too can touch the excellent like upper-caste students. In the 18th century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau *had stated*, "*Man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains*", *this statement certainly suggests about the situations of the Harijans. Dalits are bound with various types of social chains that stop them to make progress. But Bama never lay down before those social chains.* Her achievements made her an ideal among all other Dalit students. It was because of her resistive sense and the right path shown by her elder brother that she could stand like a soldier to protect other fellow beings. With every step of realisation she kept on challenging the issues to bring about changes in society. Similarly, when Bama worked as a school teacher she noticed the harassment done to the Harijan students by the upper caste teachers. Seeing the helpless scene of the Dalit students her heart overwhelmed to become a nun. So she could help those poor Dalit students openly. Bama writes about her continuous battle for five years as a teacher in the convent where Harijan students are harassed, "But somewhere or other a desire came over me. It struck me overwhelmingly that these nuns collectively oppressed Dalit children and

teachers so very much; why should I not become a nun too and truly help these people who are humiliated so much and kept under strict control?" (23, Holmstrom). Caste-based discrimination in the convents and schools was clearly visible in the eyes of Bama. Her passion for empowering the Dalits turned her to decide to become a nun. This decision of becoming a nun was a decision of resisting the Dalits directly in the form of a powerful voice. It is an answer to hundreds of upper-castes oppressors in the institutions and at the same time a support to the thousands of Dalit students studying in the convent schools.

The select text, *The Blue-necked God* is about religion and orthodoxy. In a way, it is about following the religious norms to attain salvation. Whatever is prevalent in society is followed by the characters strictly. In another way, the text questions all the orthodoxies which are in a form of religious rule that punishes women living in Brindavan. The novel is a conflict between religion and rationality where the older generation tries to pull the younger generation into tradition. But the younger generation is conscious enough not to accept the tradition blindly. They interrogate and refuse to accept blind faith. The novel has a similar idea like the 'Victorian Conflict' between 'Science and Religion'. There was a huge Biblical criticism in the Victorian Age in England, and due to the growth in scientific and technological development, the faith in God and religion began to be questioned. The three protagonists Saudamini, Sashiprova, and Mrinalini are dragged into a similar position to accept the prevalent religious tradition. But, as they are educated and conscious they refuse to adopt the culture prevalent in the Brindavan. They observe the pitiable conditions of the radheshyamas in the Braj and question the tradition. After knowing all the oppressive characteristics of Braj, the protagonists realise the exploitation done to the women in the name of tradition. Therefore, they try to

develop a resistive sense to oppose baseless religious practices. They refuse to follow the religion which suppresses and exploits women. Thousands of radheshyamas fight for their everyday life. They are exploited by the male power in the Braj. Men in the form of priest, paanda, saint, baba, etc are at every moment threaten the radheshyamas. The women characters in the text go through a dilemma. In the beginning, they try to adjust themselves in the Braj, but after observing the conditions of the radheshyamas they come to realise the prevailing inhumanity in the Braj. They started exploring the things in detail, thinking perhaps they might be wrong. But their consciences have always answered the questions in their minds.

The first thing they did to develop their resistance is questioning. While exploring the everyday life of Brindivan Saudamini and Mrinalini started questioning their abilities. They tried to resist that they cannot accept such a bad way of living a life in Braj. Although, they had misfortune in the past still there is time to start a new life. Tradition and patriarchy direct them to mingle with the demand of time. It projects them to maintain widowhood and pass a simple life by becoming radheshyamas. On the other hand, their physical urge and understanding instruct them to start a normal life. Since Saudamini is a young widow who can still start a new life with her Christian lover. Goswami writes, "Sometimes she would scrutinize her own body. She had a lovely, soft young body. Even the mental imbalance and torture of the past seven years had not been able to leave any permanent mark on this lovely body" (24, Bhattacharyya). Saudamini defends her youth and beauty by asking several questions. She rejects the idea of embracing widowhood. When they together go to visit a temple, she asks many questions to Charanbehari. "Why, do you not feel any desire for me?...Have I really become like an old women, then?" (78, Bhattacharyya). As an educated girl she firmly believes in the idea of living a

meaningful life. Her inner self never allows her to be a *radheshymis*. Similarly, Mrinalini too develops a resistive sense by questioning her ability. She expresses, “Could I not have become a mother? Could I not have given birth to a ‘divine’ child?” (141, Bhattacharyya). Mrinalini rages against her parents because they have been the reason for her sufferings in the Braj.

Secondly, the characters in the text develop a resistive sense by negotiating their feelings with each other. Sashiprova is also a young widow. But unlike Saudamini and Mrinalini she has been passing her days with a priest named Alamgari. As the temple where they stayed for years is about to sell by Thakur Sahib, Sashiprova is quite disturbed. She thinks about her livelihood and protection. She discusses her relationship and feelings about Alamgari with Saudamini. “ “But you can still get married,” consoled Saudamini. Sashi almost shouted out the words, Alamgari is an eunuch!. This is not the end of the world for me. But the problem is that I have started to fall in love”. (63, Bhattacharyya). Like Saudamini, Sashiprova too expects to live a conjugal life with a male partner but it is not possible since Alamgari is an eunuch. Here, Sashi tries to prevent herself not to be like those helpless *radheshyamas* who starve. She cannot reject everything like Saudamini, but if she stays with Alamgari at least she will be protected and not starve. She thinks for a better life within the Braj as she doesn’t have any other option whereas Saudamini and Mrinalini want to prevent everything happening in the Braj.

Application of Resistive Force in Society

Resistance is the only way to overcome colonisation. Either it would be through violent resistance or non-violent resistance. The characters in the select texts attempt

to show resistance in both ways. In *Karukku* resistance is carried out by the characters in various ways like silence, pain, anger, frustration, courage, violence, etc. It is possible up to a level because the nature of a Dalit society is democratic. Unlike upper-caste Hindu patriarchal society, the Dalit patriarchy is a patriarchal-democracy. In his seminal text, *Why I Am Not a Hindu*, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd writes,

“Among the Dalitbahujans political relations within the family or community setting are basically democratic....Wife beating is a patriarchal practice that exists among all castes. Dalitbahujans are not exempt from this vice. But the beaten-up wife has a right to make the attack public by shouting, abusing the husband and, if possible, by beating the husband in return” (39, 40).

The custom of practicing such democratic rights in Dalit society makes the women courageous to stand against the injustice. Resistive force is applied in several ways according to certain conditions. The domestic issues are addressed differently within the home or the community. On the other hand, upper-castes exploitations are taken differently to retaliate with. In chapter two when Bama asks for permission to go home to attend the First Communion of her siblings, she was not allowed. The principal and the warden joined together to stop her. Bama became furious and turned her anger on them. She lost her temper and challenged the authorities to face to face. “How is it that you are allowing these others to go; why is it that you only refuse me?” (22, Holmstrom). By challenging the school managing body she raised her voice against the whole convent hegemony over the Dalits. She questioned the convent’s sympathy only towards the rich and upper-caste students. Their support and

consideration are only seen towards the rich students. They only permit the upper-caste students to go home, leaving the Dalit students aside. Bama opens and applies her challenge like a resistive force at the right place to protect the Dalit community. Her consciousness and zeal for the Dalits to overcome the suppression are visible in every incident in the text. Similarly, Bama stands against the opinion of her two grandmothers who have excessively served in the Naicker houses. In return, they are given the left-over food to bring back home. She advises her grandmothers not to lay down before such inhuman behavior of the upper-castes people. In the text *Joothan* by Valmiki, it is noticed that when Valmiki's mother works for a whole day in a marriage party but at last when she is rewarded with the left-over to take back home, she threw the food back at her master's face and reacted. Such expression of anger and retaliation in the form of resistance shakes the whole caste-system. It becomes a powerful voice to bring changes in society. When Bama was teaching in the convent, she became familiar with the realities of Dalit students. Caste discrimination and oppression of Dalits were very common in the convent. Realising that, she couldn't wait of a long time. As an aware Dalit teacher, Bama knows that only proper education can change the lives of Dalits. Therefore, she decided to resign from the teaching post to become a full-fledged nun. "The thought kept returning every day, however hard I pushed it away. So at last I resigned the teaching post that I held, and went and entered a religious order" (23, Holmstrom). She thought that her becoming a nun could be the best possible way to help the oppressed students. Since her position as a nun would access her with more power and freedom to direct the students. This time she turned herself to resistance in the form of a nun to resist the Dalit students. Bama has also portrayed several modes of resistance against domestic violence. She mentions in her another groundbreaking text *Sangati*, where Kaaliamma and

Raakkamma do not surrender before the male domination. If Raakkamma is beaten by her husband, in retaliation she too similarly attacks him. Once Raakkamma hits her husband in a counterattack and shouts,

“How dare you kick me, you low life? Your hand will get leprosy! How dare you pull my hair? Disgusting man, only fit to drink a woman’s farts! Instead of drinking today everyday, why don’t you drink your son’s urine? Why don’t you drink my monthly blood? And she lifted up her sari in front of the entire crowd gathered there” (61, Holmstrom).

Such actions work as a resistance against the domination of the male regime. Though Dalit women pass their lives in a pitiable condition, they never step back to fight for their rights.

With the advantage of time, the concept of ‘subaltern’ is changing from time to time. Due to the political and economic growth in the third world countries ‘subalterns’ are now taken into consideration. Various social and political setups have provided them a small platform to stand. These small platforms have become agents for them to support their voice. Earlier, those agencies had their own interest in supporting the subalterns. But now, due to their growth in education and transparency in institutions, they do not come under the trap of the agencies. Hence, both the subaltern and the agencies have an equal interest in raising their voice. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak in her well-known essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, mentions that “subaltern cannot speak on their own” and they need agencies to speak. In the select texts, the characters try to speak but they are actually ‘not allowed to speak’ by

various societal forces. Whenever they have got any chance and channel to speak they have raised their voice. In the novel, *The Blue-necked God*, the central characters Saudamini, Mrinalini and Sashiprova have attempted to speak many times. Though their ways of speaking are different they frequently speak for their resistance.

Silence is one of the regular manners through which the characters resist. Many times it has been observed that they do not reply and remain silent to protest. In a visit to a temple when Charanbehari assists Saudamini and her mother, he passes a bad comment. Responding to it Saudamini doesn't reply anything. Goswami mentions, "There are hundreds of young women like you who come to stay at Braj. Do you know what people say about them? They say they are mentally ill and in need of psychiatric help.....Saudamini did not reply. The chameli flower with which she had decorated her hair had withered. She wrenched them off and threw them away" (54, Bhattacharyya). Saudamini through her silence and action made it clear to Charanbehari that she is certainly not one of them who needs mental care. She does not want to be like those radheshayamas in the Braj. In a different proceeding when Sashi and Saudamini come back after bathing Sashi asks Saudamini, "Tell me, have you really found any peace after coming to Brajdhham?.....Saudamini did not have an answer....Saudamini tried to avoid Sashi's question" (62, Bhattacharyya). She is unable to make her understand her feelings to Sashi. Hence, by remaining silent, she makes it clear that she is not interested in passing the days in Braj.

Secondly, through expression the characters in the text resist . This is one of the regular modes of defending. Expressions are of various types like rebuking, shouting, anger, tearing clothes, breaking things, crying, accusing, etc. Anupama wanted her daughter to be a traditional widow. She wanted her to maintain all the traditional norms of widowhood. Therefore, Saudamini sometimes tries her best to

follow the instructions of her mother but she fails in accepting the norms. Saudamini refuses to take part in an event of parikrama. Failing to console her daughter she herself takes part in the event. After participating when she returns back home, she found Saudamini in an unhappy and depressing situation. Saudamini's facial look reflected her mental agitation. She cried with emotion,

“I cannot spend my entire life like this, doing charity work... I am not a devi, I am an ordinary girl, and I cannot pass all my years in serving society like you ... I am an independent person, and I fear no one and nothing! If you are thinking that I have changed then.....” Pointing and accusing finger at her father, she screamed, “You are all hypocrites. You are like butchers” (71, Bhattacharyya).

Through her painful words and cry, she tries to resist herself from the cruel clutches of widowhood. In anger, she points to her parents as hypocrites and butchers. Generally, the first duty of parents should be protecting their offspring from any trouble. But, here the situation is different. Instead of protecting her, her parents are busy pushing her daughter into the traditional hell. This sort of showing irresponsibility turned Saudamini's anger against her parents. She started raging and accusing them by calling butchers and hypocrites. Similarly, Mrinalini is compelled to come in the Braj for supporting her parents. Like Saudamini she is also fed up with the ideology of her parents. Her parents want her to live in the Braj like the radheshyamas. Mrinalini is frustrated taking care of her old parents. She is very anxious about her father because he is the reason behind their present situation. Whole life he kept on losing all his money by enjoying and drinking. In the Braj, Mrinalini

has to arrange food for them by begging in the temples. Therefore, from time to time she keeps on roaring on them to resist from this daily routine. Goswami writes, “Mrinalini’s voice could be heard. She was screaming like a tigress who had lost her cubs. “You see this blind old man? He is responsible for ruining our prosperous and happy lives. He left us to starve while he squandered all the money on liquor. And now, see, how liquor has taken its revenge and kicked him down into this life!” (141, Bhattacharyya). Mrinalini shows her frustration to make it clear that she cannot accept such a dull life.

Thirdly, the action plays an important role in resisting suppression. In the text, the action is portrayed as one of the modes of resistance. The characters in the novel go through various actions like tearing clothes, becoming naked, attempt to suicide, etc. In a rage of anger or unable to bear the suppression they dare to undertake such fearful activities. There are two intentions of exposing their bodies while scolding others. By exposing they completely deny to accept the traditional rules of widowhood. They resist and express their anger. Mrinalini’s mother exposes her body while scolding her husband Thakur Sahib. Secondly, by exposing their bodies they try to prove that they are still young and can start a new married life again. Mrinalini exposes her breasts before the radheshymas and interrogates about her ability to become a mother. Most importantly, Saudamini attempts to commit suicide and dies at last. After the rejection of social norms for several times by Saudamini, Dr. Roychoudhury finally agrees with her to marry her with the Christian lover. He no longer can bear the pain of his daughter. Therefore, Saudamini is accompanied by Dr. Roychoudhury at midnight to meet the Christian lover. But, when they finally meet, she has a sense of repentance within. She feels that by marrying a Christian boy she would disobey her parents and religion. As her parents did not want her to marry a

boy who belongs to the Christian religion. On the other hand, traditional and religious rules also obstruct her to bond this relationship into marriage. At the moment when they reached nearer to each other, they seemed like two pure flowers. But, when Saudamini comes to think about those barriers, she began to weep in sorrow. One question troubled her that if she marries her lover she would hurt her parents. She could not bear that pain of hurting her parents and asks her lover to go back. “She whispered a few words, intended for that Christian youth, whom she thought she had loved with her whole heart, “Forgive me and go back. Forgive me, please forgive me”” (181, Bhattacharyya). Saudamini thinks but fails to get any answer to the question, “Why? Why did this have happen?” (182, Bhattacharyya). Finally, she allows herself to be drowned by the river water. As she was unable to change the mind of people she commits suicide to resist the tradition and patriarchy. She answers to the whole world that death can be accepted but the misery of widowhood is not acceptable to her.

Positive and Negative Consequences of Resistance

Actions always bring some kind of consequences in our society. It is perhaps not always necessary that the consequences of any action would be worthwhile. But, in the long run those optimistic actions would surely turn to be fruit-bearing. These resistive actions help to roar a louder voice against the evils of society. The women characters in the select texts come across such several challenges. They knew that by challenging the situation they are alarming themselves. It would invite danger to them. But when the suppression crosses the limit and it becomes unbearable, they no longer remain silent. At every moment Bama is ready to advocate the lives of Dalits

and regain their identity. Without any sort of anxiety, she dares to walk through the right path of life which may bring changes in the lives of Dalits. As Sharatchandra Muktibodh in his famous article “*What is Dalit Literature*” writes,

“Dalit literature is the literature produced by the Dalit consciousness. Human freedom is the inspiration behind it. That is its implied value. The nature of this literature consists in a rebellion against the suppression and humiliation suffered by the Dalits—in the past and even at present—in the framework of the varna system” (267).

In the novel, Bama is concerned about Dalits’ freedom and inspiration through rebellion against suppression under upper castes. She keeps on raising her voice against humiliation without fearing any consequences. The first and foremost decision she had taken was studying hard to progress. As she came under the influence of her elder brother Annan, she became committed to her studies. She once observed how Annan was regarded with great respect by the library attendant because of his M.A. title. She mentions, “Once, when Annan was signing out his books, he added his title, M.A., on a sudden impulse. Immediately the attendant brought him a stool to sit on, and what’s more, began addressing him as ‘Sir’” (17, Holmstrom). From her childhood, she realised that only education can bring dignities to the Dalits. Therefore, her commitment towards her studies brought positive results when she secured first in S.S.L.C. exam among all the Dalit students in the state. Bama’s progress became an inspiration to the Dalit students. It brought a sense of possibilities that Dalit students too can make progress in any field.

The second important consequence of Bama's resistance in the text is her decision towards becoming a nun. At first Bama thought that by becoming a full-fledged nun she could serve the Dalit students with full command and freedom. She was also inspired by the story of Mother Teresa who sacrificed herself for the sake of poor people. Soon after Bama entered the convent to become a nun she came to know the realities of the convent. In fact it was more painful for her to see the hypocrisy of the nuns in the convents. In the convent, she observed that most of the students are from wealthy upper caste families and there is no place for Dalit students. They are treated separately in the convents. Bama writes in the texts,

“But I began to think, soon after I entered the convent, Chi, is this all there is to the life of renunciation? Is there an understanding of poverty here?....Convent life had changed me fundamentally. I who had once been bold had become an extremely timid person, fearful of everything, ready to burst into tears, without any strength. I felt orphaned, as if I had no family” (78, Holmstrom).

The nuns take the oaths to help the poor but the situation is totally opposite in the convent. The nuns marginalise the poor students by insulting them. They consider the Dalits as inferior beings who are never allowed to sit together with the upper caste students. They did not have any sense of humanity towards the poor Dalits. Christianity is about love and humanity but Dalits are being discriminated ruthlessly under the convents. “They claimed that God's love is limitless, subject to no conditions. Yet inside the convent there were innumerable conditions” (106,

Holmstrom). Only the upper-castes Christians enjoyed the facilities of the convents. These sorts of exploitation and harassment on Dalits have left a fearful impression in the heart and mind of Bama. She mentions about her, “dying several times within” (26, Holmstrom). Though her decision to become a nun dragged her to face many horrible experiences in life she could know the dark realities of the convents.

Bama’s decision to leave the convent is equally miserable. Deciding to become free from the curb of the convent brought many severe consequences to her life. Although it was a very challenging decision in her life it made her free from all those boundaries. Bama worked as a nun for three years and finally decided to resign. Observing all those caste and class differences in the convent she could not tolerate anymore. Not only the Dalit students but she was also discriminated against many times. The Provincial usually protected and preferred the upper-castes nuns in good places and positions. After receiving five transfer orders within a month, she is transferred to Jammu. But then there she finally felt the need to resign. She breaks her vows to resign and returned to start a new life having full of freedom. Though she has to lose all those luxuries receiving inside the convent, after resigning she becomes free to live an independent life. Bama writes, “I can breathe once again, independently and at ease, like a fish that has at last returned to the water, after having been flung outside and suffered distress” (121, Holmstrom). At first, she thought, what she would reply to her parents, how she would show her face and empty hands before her parents? But keeping aside all those worries, she dares to return from Jammu to her home place. She mentions, “I comfort myself with the thought that rather than live with a fraudulent smile, it is better to lead a life weeping real tears” (122, Holmstrom). Bama has bravely accepted the realities of life rejecting the hypocritical

convent life. At last, she finds a job where she starts working independently and starts a new life.

The consequences of resistance in the text, *The Blue-necked God* are of a considerable level to leave a message in society. Though the characters in the text are passive in their behavior at the climax of the novel they convey a powerful message in the Braj as well as to the readers. From the very beginning of the novel, Saudamini is troubled by the religious norms. At first, she tries to adopt the strict rules of widowhood in the Braj. She did not want to hurt her parents by rejecting the rules in the beginning. But, very soon she made it clear that she cannot obtain those traditional rules. Saudamini suffers from an emotional predicament. Throughout the novel, she remains confused about whether to choose tradition or to go with the Christian lover. Her love and understanding finally make her meet her lover. As a father, Dr. Roychoudhary also helps to meet her lover. In the end, several questions worry her to accept and stop her to marry the Christian lover. She thinks that her decision to marry the guy would bring shame to her parents. If she marries, would she be able to live a happy life? All such questions compelled her to choose the path of committing suicide. Her act of committing suicide indicates that widows like Saudamini in the Braj have been under suppression. They do not want to follow the traditional rules which are ruinous to them. It gave a definite answer in the Braj and to the whole world that they cannot bear the suppression done in the name of religion. On the other hand, it is a direct reply to orthodox parents like Dr. Roychoudhary and Anupama who skillfully try to push their daughter into the traditional hell. Saudamini makes it clear by jumping into the river water that she would rather like to die than living the life of a traditional widow.

Mrinalini is yet another important character in the novel who keeps on resisting the traditional forces. Like Saudamini, she is also compelled to come to the Braj under the direction of her parents. Basically, she has to accompany her parents to take care of them. Her parents have become too old, hence her care is needed at every moment. But, Mrinalini knows well and she is aware about the character of her father. He has been a licentious and drinker who lost all his money by enjoying the whole life. Therefore, Mrinalini always keeps on accusing her father, for bringing disgrace to their life. Only one temple in Braj is left as Thakur Sahib's inheritance. That too is about to be sold soon to someone. Soon after it was sold Mrinalini's tensions began to grow more. She is aware that after spending all this money they too will have to come to the streets for begging food for survival. Her growing anger and regular accusations to her father turned him down to commit suicide. For one reason, he is unable to answer his daughter and perhaps he has realised his lifelong mistakes. Secondly, his blind faith in dying in Braj also gets fulfilled by committing suicide on the day of a festival. Furthermore, he is an escapist and wanted to get rid of everything by dying on that particular day. Mrinalini's regular resistance before her father made her father realise that he had done great mistakes in life which cannot be revisited to rectify at the moment. He has brought his wife and daughter to the streets by enjoying his whole life. Hence, the consequences of her resistance are answers to every irresponsible and orthodox father.

The women protagonists in the select texts are though suppressed, they dare to speak for their rights. They are surrounded by various social and religious barriers. But, it has been noticed in the study that the so-called caste and religion have failed to stop them from raising their voices. Perhaps, at first, all the men and women in this world are human beings who need some space and freedom to live. Howsoever, the

cruel clutches of men made rules may be imposed in the name of caste, religion, and sex, it will not exist for a long time. The reality of every defective and destructive rule imposed on humanity would expose out one day. Women in today's world have come to realise about the oppression done to them for ages. They will no longer remain silent and not allow it to continue on the future generations. Vijay Tendulkar in his groundbreaking play *Silence! The Court Is in Session*, has rightly reflected the two sides of women in this era i.e. traditional versus modern. The first one is about maintaining old traditional order and the second one is the new women who want to progress by breaking the old meaningless rules. Leela Benre raises her voice in the play, "this body is a traitor! But this body is necessary to rear a child, to show it the light of earth. And here again the rules of male-dominated society impede the free woman's right to raise her child on her own: 'He (the child) must have....father to call his own'". Hence, women are no longer a passive receiver of caste, traditional and religious order. Today, they have able to establish their place in society. They have and they can raise their voice. Subaltern women no longer want to remain under the dominance of men and traditional rules.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion.

5.1: Summing Up

The analyses and examination of the two select texts have brought to light many subaltern aspects of women in third world countries. Women in third world countries are bounded with various types of problems. From the very lower to the upper stratum of society, women are perplexed with numerous issues. The study of the novel, *The Blue-necked God* has brought several issues to light that are associated with women's subalternity in the upper-caste Hindu society. On the other hand, the study of Bama's *Karukku* has brought to light women's problems associated with women in Dalit Christian society.

In chapter one, "Introduction" the history and background of postcolonial literature and theories have been discussed briefly. The origin and concepts of subaltern school of studies have been discussed thoroughly. Furthermore, in the first chapter the works of the select authors have been introduced. The subalternity of Indian women presented in the literary texts has also been introduced in the chapter.

In the second chapter titled "The Practice of Caste System and Religious Rules as portrayed in *The Blue-necked God* and *Karukku*", the rigid caste and religious rules practiced in two different societies reflected in the select texts have been discussed. The religious and traditional practices reflected in *The Blue-necked God* and the societal rules prevalent in Dalit societies reflected in *Karukku* have been studied separately. Various social and religious practices mentioned in the novels like patriarchy, untouchability, widowhood, celibacy, sin and salvation have been studied properly. Moreover, the process through which these practices help in dominating the lower class society has been studied.

The third chapter titled “Pushing women into the class of subaltern and other” is the analyses on various issues of women. In this chapter, the subalternity of women in the two select novels has been analysed. Moreover, the ways by which the women are subjected to oppression and thrown into the peripheral positions in the society have been discussed. The analyses in this chapter have shown that the subjects of subalternity are interrelated with women who are traditionally forced by society to accept the religious rules, women those who are victimised by the traditional social system. In the chapter, the subalternity of Dalit women has been studied. The subalternity of Dalit women is about sufferings due to various caste and gendered issues.

In chapter four titled “Relocating the Women's Voices”, the women’s voices in different modes raised in the select texts have been studied minutely. Moreover, the capability of women and their fight for equal rights in society have been discussed. In the chapter, an attempt has been made to examine how the women in the select texts speak in different situations. It has brought to light the various modes of speaking like shouting, crying, rebuking, silence, etc. Moreover, it discusses the crucial changes in the society due to the introduction of modern education and democracy.

In this chapter, ‘Conclusion’ the summary of all the chapters has been discussed. Moreover, the findings and limitations of this study have been mentioned. The scope of further studies of these select texts has also been discussed.

The study of the select texts shows that the lives of both the select authors have been tragic and they had gone through several painful situations. One belonged to the extreme eastern state of Assam while the other belongs to the southern state of

Tamil Nadu in India. Both of them have different backgrounds. Goswami was born and brought up in a typical upper-caste Hindu Brahmin family. From her very childhood, she had seen and experienced the strict Satra-tradition of lower Assam. On the other hand, Bama was born and brought up in a Dalit Christian society. At a young age, Bama too realised caste oppression of the Dalits. She has mentioned in the text *Karukku*, “When I was studying in the third class, I hadn’t yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced, and been humiliated by what it is”(13). This research shows that the two women authors suffered from caste and religion from the very infant age. One suffered from the Hindu religious orthodoxies and the other suffered from the cruel clutches of the caste system under the Christian religion. Goswami sought her education easily under her father’s guidance but after his death, she suffered from various social obstructions. Many of her marriage proposals and engagements got rejected since the death of her father. In her society, a girl without her father was not easily accepted for marriage. Goswami’s mother was much tensed about her marriage. As her mother was a staunch believer in faith and religion, she met several religious priests to get a solution for her marriage. In her autobiography, she writes about sacrificing a male goat in the Kamakhya temple. On the other hand, Bama struggled a lot in seeking her education. Being a girl from Dalit society, caste became a barrier in every step of her life. She had to help her parents in agricultural works and wage works in the upper caste homes. Moreover, caring for her siblings and doing homely works have been other important tasks. Bama has been tortured and exploited in the schools and convents. The Dalits have been extremely discriminated against in social and educational institutions.

In comparing the lives of the two prominent woman authors, Goswami's life has been a tragic one while Bama's life has been filled with full of suffering. Religion played a critical role in oppressing Goswami and caste in several ways suppressed Bama. After the sudden death of her husband Madhavan Raimon Iyengar, Goswami was shattered and left under trauma and depression. She attempted suicide many times after her father's and husband's deaths. To escape the trauma she started taking sleeping pills. Goswami had mentioned several dilemmas of widowhood in her autobiography. Being a widow, she was treated separately and neglected in society. In the novel, *The Blue-necked God* she fuses her own experiences as a widow with the thousands of widows living in the holy city of Brindavan.

Bama was suppressed in the convents both as a student and a teacher. When she was studying, only the upper caste and rich students were taken care of in the convents. To teach and care for the Dalit students, at first she became a school teacher and later decides to become a full-fledged nun. At first, she was stopped from becoming a nun because of her caste background but when she became a nun she was again exploited. The text, *Karukku*, depicts her sufferings right from the infant age to her becoming a school teacher. As a nun, she was not preferred by the senior nuns. At last, she was transferred to Jammu but here she takes the most optimistic decision of her life. She breaks away from the dominance of convent authorities and is finally able to get a service in a different institution.

5.2: Voices: Women's Freedom and Equality

The study of the two select novels has brought to light the two different sides of women. On one side, women are suppressed by caste and religion and thereby they

accept the suppression. These women are traditional in a sense and belonged to the older generation. On the other side, the present generation or the young generation women are not completely bound with tradition. They are rational and revolutionary up to a level. The religious and caste rules are forcefully imposed on them but they try to resist those rules. Due to the social and political changes over the last few centuries, many crucial changes have taken place in society. With the gradual passage of time, the stereotypical sense of people has changed. The religious and ethical beliefs have been replaced with rational and practical thoughts. After the introduction of democracy and liberalism, every society raised its voice for equality and liberty. Economic independence has become the most important need of the present era. Therefore, today women have started to march towards globalisation. Through modern education, they have equipped and skilled themselves to work in any private and public sectors.

In the study, it has been found that the subaltern women in the selects text are bound with societal and patriarchal rules. But the impact of modernism on them has been observed in the texts. They have been seen fighting for their education and rights. Moreover, they attempt to resist every kind of irrational rules imposed on them. The depiction of Saudamini's character in *The Blue-necked God* is comparable to the life of Goswami herself. Mrinalini keeps on resisting the traditional and religious forces in the novel. Representing herself in *Karukku* Bama attempts to resist the caste and traditional forces both at her home and society. All these resistance shows that subaltern women want freedom from societal dominance. They need equal rights and opportunities to progress in society. Furthermore, subaltern women have been observed speaking on numerous occasions. But, their voices have not been heard

by society. They do not have a proper platform to speak before their society. Hence, their voices are neglected and not heard.

Today, there is an urgent need for establishing the freedom and equality of women in society. At first, women have to be given equal space in every field. From one's home to society, schools to service opportunities, politics to businesses, national to global level, etc. They must be empowered through education and employment. In the select texts, the protagonists are educated but they fail to get their requirement of a proper place for income and independence. The Dalits are observed as doing menial and sanitary jobs in the upper caste societies. Their professions have to be shifted to other jobs. As B.R Ambedkar had suggested, these sanitary jobs should be done by using modern machines and technologies. The idea stated by Mahatma Gandhi that every individual or every society should do their sanitary cleaning by themselves can be strictly applied in society. Economic independence of Dalit women can be established by engaging them in sustainable income sources like local level small-scale industries. Their agricultural products and handicrafts can be commercialised. Women are seen as weaker subjects in the texts. They have been restricted, suppressed, victimised and sometimes also protected but these patriarchal natures of society only bring devastating impacts on women's lives. At first, they should be given freedom and space to strengthen. Women should be given the space and opportunity to work, to let them command the family, to explore in society, to step forward in society. Without providing space and opportunity and thereby declaring them as immature and weak would be a blunder. Tagging them always as uncompetitive, unhealthy, weak, etc are only barriers to them. Like Fanon has stated colonialism brings dehumanising effects on the colonised people, hence women should be free from every kind of physical and mental suppression. Allowing them to

speaking or the freedom of women is necessary to build a good family and a healthy society. Women must be free from the chains of tradition, religion, and caste.

5.3: Research Findings

After the close examination of the two select texts by Goswami and Bama, the following findings can be put forward from the subaltern context.

- (i) Tradition, caste, and religion play a significant role in the suppression of subaltern women in the select texts.
- (ii) Patriarchy or patriarchal-system is another important cause behind the domination of subaltern women in the select novels.
- (iii) As stated by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, the 'double colonisation' of subaltern women has been observed in the select biographical texts.
- (iv) The women in the select texts are not allowed to speak by various traditional and post-colonial forces but at the same time, they attempt to speak.
- (v) As Frantz Fanon and Ranajit Guha have mentioned, the 'bourgeoisie class' or the 'elite class' have been observed exploiting the lower or the subaltern class in the texts.
- (vi) Women in the select texts have been seen resisting in various modes like silence, shouting, crying, tearing clothes, suicide, rebuking, etc.
- (vii) The women characters in the texts analysed have been observed that although they are capable of progressing in every area to become self-dependent yet they are not given a proper platform to progress.

- (viii) As observed in the select novels, to establish women's freedom and equality they must be freed from all kinds of social, religious and political barriers.
- (ix) It has been observed in the texts that the introduction of modern education and democracy has helped to bring a crucial change in society.
- (x) Like Ambedkar has stated, while analysing the texts it has been noticed that the annihilation of caste is surely necessary to establish equality in society.

5.4: Limitations and Scope of Further Study

Scholars and researchers from various departments and universities have done many scholarly works on the two select texts. Many studies have also been carried out in different local languages. These researches have been carried out on topics like gender, marginality, Dalithood, widowhood, art and style, suppression, etc. During the course of the research several constraints were faced. It includes shortage of time and availability of resources. Within the context of postcolonial studies only a few issues of the texts have been possibly explored. Other areas like myth and reality, faith, historicity, conversion and equality, motherhood, Dalit feminism and Dalit ecofeminism, Dalit matriarchy, etc can be further studied with a new dimension and direction.

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