

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A SOCIAL CRITIQUE: A STUDY OF MADHOPURI'S CHANGIYA RUKH AND VALMIKI'S JOTHAN

A Dissertation submitted to the Central University of Punjab

For the Award of

Master of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

BY

Kamaljeet kaur

Administrative Guide: Prof. Paramjit Singh Ramana
Dissertation Coordinator: Dr. Amandeep Singh



Centre for Comparative Literature
School of Languages, Literature and Culture
Central University of Punjab, Bathinda

March, 2012

CERTIFICATE

I declare that the dissertation entitled "*AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A SOCIAL CRITIQUE: A STUDY OF MADHOPURI'S CHANGIYA RUKH AND VALMIKI'S JOOTHAN*" has been prepared by me under the guidance of Prof. Paramjit Singh Ramana, Administrative Guide, Acting Dean, School of Languages, Literature and Culture and Dr. Amandeep Singh, Assistant Professor, Centre for Comparative Literature, Central University of Punjab. No part of this dissertation has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

(Kamaljeet Kaur)

Centre for Comparative Literature
School of Languages, Literature and Culture
Central University of Punjab
Bathinda-151001
Punjab, India

Date:

CERTIFICATE

I certify that KAMALJEET KAUR has prepared her dissertation entitled "*AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A SOCIAL CRITIQUE: A STUDY OF MADHOPURI'S CHANGIYA RUKH AND VALMIKI'S JOOTHAN*", for the award of M.Phil. degree of the Central University of Punjab, under my guidance. She has carried out this work at the Centre for Comparative Literature, School of Languages, Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab.

(Dr. Amandeep Singh)

Assistant Professor

Centre for Comparative Literature,

School of Languages, Literature and Culture,

Central University of Punjab,

Bathinda-151001.

Date:

(Prof. Paramjit Singh Ramana)

Acting Dean

Centre for Comparative Literature,

School of Languages, Literature and Culture,

Central University of Punjab,

Bathinda-151001.

Date:

ABSTRACT

Autobiography as a Social Critique: A Study of Madhopuri's Changiya Rukh and Valmiki's Joothan

Name of student : Kamaljeet Kaur
Registration Number : CUP/MPh.-PhD/SLLC/CPL/2009-10/03
Degree for which submitted : Master of Philosophy
Administrative Guide : Prof. Paramjit Singh Ramana
Dissertation Coordinator : Dr. Amandeep Singh
Centre : Centre for Comparative Literature
School of Studies : School of Languages, Literature and Culture
Key Words : Autobiography, Dalit Literature, Changiya Rukh, Joothan, Balbir Madhopuri, Om Prakash Valmiki

Autobiographies shed light on the whole social milieu of a particular time and space through the life story of an individual. In the Dalit literature, autobiographical writing occupies important place. By foregrounding the problems of the current social structure of India, these autobiographies present important social critique of the prevalent problems. Balbir Madhopuri's autobiography *Changiya Rukh* and Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* reflect the internal agony and pain of Dalits. This research work is an attempt to analyze these two autobiographies as a form of social critique. Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh* represents the painful history of Dalit fraternity. It outlines the difficulties, sufferings and harsh realities of Dalit life. Along with the real picture of casteism, it also highlights the physical torture, mental anguish, religious and educational exploitation of Dalits. The writer points out the dual nature of society in the context of caste based discrimination. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* is not only one man's biography, but it is also a tale of whole Valmiki fraternity. *Joothan* unveils our cruel social system that exploits Dalit people. The word '*Joothan*' itself reflects the poverty, pain and disrespect towards the Dalit fraternity and represents the gravity of the socio-economic and cultural rift between the different castes in Indian society.

Through these autobiographies, Omprakash Valmiki and Balbir Madhopuri try to bring forward the difficulties faced by an individual in a layered/divided society. Both autobiographies are centered on the struggle against exploitation on the basis of casteism and point out the need for improvement and upliftment in Dalit people's life. This study highlights the need for greater efforts on the part of individual and the society to remove these obstacles in the path of progress.

(Kamaljeet Kaur)

(Dissertation Coordinator-Dr. Amandeep Singh)

(Supervisor-Paramjit Singh Ramana)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who gave me the possibility to complete this dissertation, and for making this my life's very precious and memorable experience. This is the first acknowledgment of my life on paper, so I would like to thank God and my parents first and other family members.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Central University of Punjab, Bathinda for providing me with the entire infrastructure for my research work. My deepest gratitude is due to very respected and honourable Supervisor Dr. Paramjit Singh Ramana, COC and Dean, Centre for Comparative Literature, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda. I am thankful to him for his guidance and help. I would like to thank my dissertation coordinator, Dr. Amandeep Singh for his continuous guidance. I am also grateful to Dr. Neetu Purohit, Research Associate, Centre for Comparative Literature for her ungrudging assistance and guidance. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Rajinder Kumar Sen and other faculty members of Centre for Comparative Literature.

Being a student of Hindi literature in my post graduation, it was not an easy task for me to do research in English language. I am also thankful to my classmates and friends Manpreet Kaur, Aman, Manpreet, Shyamkiran, Yeshpal, Manohari, Shweta, Barjinder, for their immense and continuous support and help in day to day work. Finally, I would like to thank everybody else who was helpful the successful completion of this Dissertation.

(Kamaljeet kaur)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Content	Page No.
1.	Autobiography and Society: Dalit Personal Narratives (Chapter - 1)	1-23
2.	<i>Changiya Rukh</i> – Against the Night (Chapter - 2)	24-39
3.	<i>Joothan</i> – Fight against Injustice (Chapter - 3)	40- 57
4.	Comparative Analysis and Conclusion (Chapter - 4)	58- 62
5.	Bibliography	63- 65

Chapter I

Autobiography and Society: Dalit Personal Narratives

It is generally believed that the term '*Dalit literature*' was first used in 1958 at the first ever Dalit literature conference held in Bombay. However, as an identity marker, the term '*Dalit*' came into prominence in 1972, when a group of young Marathi writer-activists founded an organization called Dalit Panthers (Mukherjee xviii). Dalit literally means the suppressed and the oppressed, i.e., the poor, scheduled tribes, women and all those beings that are exploited politically and economically. The Dalit literature often tries to give voice to these important concerns. Though it is difficult to find a universally accepted definition of the term, the conception of Dalit literature suggested by Arjun Dangle can serve as a good starting point:

Dalit literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary. (265)

Apparently, Dangle sees writings of the Dalits as an attempt to draw attention of the society to social evils and also as a space for protest and political and ideological struggle. Often using personal narratives as a tool for social critique, Dalit autobiographies represent and voice the need for the social upliftment of weaker and caste-wise marginalized sections of society. They highlight the problems faced by the deprived sections during their struggle against prevailing social structures.

The autobiographies *Changiya Rukh* by Balbir Singh Madhopuri and *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki, the two works chosen for study here, give us significant insights into Dalit life. Both writers belong to the socially backward classes. Nonetheless, they were privileged enough to be the first generation in their families to have access to education. Education enabled them, not only to lead a relatively better life socially and economically, but also gave them the opportunity to be able to voice their grievances by penning down the difficult circumstances and experiences of their lives. In this manner, they brought to fore the social inequality and inhumanity, a callousness, injustice and oppressive

ruthlessness that is often hurled at these people, who are treated as social outcastes.

Dalit writers try to present the harsh realities of their everyday lives through their personal experiences. This literature can have diverse aims: need for a separate identity for the Dalits or the necessity of social transformation in material conditions and mental make ups. Issues related to poverty, untouchability and powerlessness are frequent raised in their writings. It is mainly autobiographical literature, narrating personal and representative experiences. Anger, sorrow, shame and hope form the some if the main motifs of Dalit writing. Such literature gives priority to humane values of life. It is generally representative in use of daily language, rustic and crude for the elite and the privileged. Life of poverty, ignorance and social discrimination is portrayed realistically and tellingly. Sharankumar Limble observes: “Dalit literature is precisely that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits” (30).

The people belonging to lower castes are often downtrodden and oppressed. This fact comes to the fore from the study of most of Dalit narratives. The present study comprises the comparison of the autobiographical works *Changiya Rukh* and *Joothan* as both these narratives present the social structure of one particular period of time. Both the autobiographies were written by Dalit writers in different regions and different languages. But the situation and thematic preoccupations of most Dalit writers are all most the same as they were in the past.

What we call today as Dalit writing first gained prominence in Maharashtra. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar was a prominent leader of the Dalits and he has written extensively about casteism and its impact on marginalized people. Namdevo Dhashal is one of the founder leaders of Panther Movement. He wrote in Marathi. Dhashal’s writing represents the anger and an untouchable’s protest against the social discrimination and caste system. In the Indian literature there are many Dalit writers who write about different aspects of life related to the Dalits. Among them major names are Baburao Bagul, Raja Dhale, Gaddar, Arun Krushnaji Kamble, Kaviyoor Murali, Dagdu Maruti Pawar, Chandra Bhan Prasad, Annabhau Sathe, Daniel Selvaraj, Surendar Valasai, Om Prakash Valmiki, Lal Singh Dil, and Balbir Madhopuri, to name only a few.

Caste system is prevalent in almost all of India in some form or the other. In this sense, the Dalits and the Dalit writers belong to almost all parts of the country. They are more visible and vocal in states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab and Tamil Nadu etc.. Dalit literature is being published in all known forms of literature, such as poetry, autobiographies, novels, short stories, essays, theatre and street plays, but their prominent themes are caste based discrimination, poverty, untouchability and social and political revolution. Dalit writings present a critique of the caste system and Brahmanical Hinduism. Dalit literature has arisen from cultural conflict (Kumar 147). It is the voice of 'downtrodden people'. In the words of Baburao Bagul,

The established literature of India is Hindu literature. But it is Dalit Literature, which has the revolutionary power to accept new Science and technology and bring about a total transformation. 'Dalit' is the name of total revolution; it is revolution incarnate. (289)

Dalit literature is a literature of resistance. The Hindu society believes in the Varnashrama system but Dalit literature denies this mentality. Dalit literature represents the reality of poor people whose voice remained unspeakable through ages. Khandekar, a Dalit writer puts it:

Man is the centrifugal force in the philosophy of Dalit literature. Man is supreme. He is above all God, sacred books and science. It is man who can make and unmake anything. Dalit literature believes that nothing is permanent. Everything is subjected to decay. With every decay there is resurgence, new creation. It, therefore, does not accept the maxim 'Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram'. (6)

Death and decay are apparently a part of everyone's life but resurgence is the next step of for most people but it almost never comes in a Dalit's life. Due to difficult circumstances of their lives, hopelessness and negation become central issues of their lives. Sometimes sensitive Dalits feel that life provides no hope for them. The gods appear unkind and responsible for all of their sufferings. They reject the system that ties them down:

.... nothing is true which is not applicable for man's sublime freedom; nothing is good if it is not useful for man's welfare, nothing is beautiful which is not useful for beautification of mankind. (Khandekar 6)

Dalit literature is being written in many forms. According to Ronki Ram, after Dalit poetry, the first expression of the erased consciousness of Dalits is found in the Dalit autobiography. So the significance of Dalit autobiography is immense. Autobiography plays a vital role in understanding the society. Autobiography along with presenting us with the details of the life of an author also presents critically and emotionally valuable picture of society. Autobiography helps in the depiction of social, economic and cultural reality of a society. Thus it represents the contemporary society from the perspective of an immediately perceived experience.

Dalit literature canvas is vast and Dalit autobiography is a distinct genre of literature. Autobiography is written by an individual author, but it cannot be confined to a single person, a single language or a specific group of people, it often portrays the mentality of whole society or whole nation. Famous Hindi writer, Kamleshwar highlights this fact:

Today's writer can assume himself helpless in language but he is not ready to restrict his thinking to the language. That is why today's any creativity, which is written in, owns language; at ideological level, it cannot be restricted to that language but it represents broad directions of Indian thinking. (Qtd in Bechain, 120)

Famous Hindi writer Premchand also favoured Dalit literature and he said that as per the changing times and need of the hour, we have to devise new methods for understanding the aesthetics of literature:

...we have to change the criteria of aesthetic in literature and we should step down from the building of luxury; we have to portray that black complexioned beautiful lady who is working very hard while his baby is laid on the edge of the yard. (Qtd in Namishray 14)

In 1936, presiding over the first conference of Dalit literature, Premchand said:

Now literature is not the thing of entertainment only, it has some other goals also, those who are Dalits, sufferers, deprived – whether he is an individual or a group - it is our duty to support and assist him.(Qtd in Namishray 14)

According to Philippe Lejenune autobiography is a “retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his

individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (Qtd in Anderson 2). Autobiography can be a record of a literary or non-literary person’s understanding and presentation of his own life from his own specific perspective. The author tries to give a meaningful pattern to his past experiences. In this sense, the autobiography often depicts the unique identity, development of writer’s self, and represents the life’s truth claims. Oxford English Dictionary defines autobiography as an Individual’s account of his own life, while Collier’s Encyclopedia tries to define autobiography as that first person account which covers significant parts of the writer's life.

Focusing on an individual, an autobiography interprets the growth of the self, and writes the interaction with the world. The subject of autobiographical writing then becomes, as Mutu Konuk Biasing points out, “the self becoming conscious of itself in and as history” (xiv). The writer expresses real experiences and shows the various stages of self-improvement.

Autobiography is an important literary genre as it juxtaposes the personal with the social and present with the past. In his essay “Autobiography and Historical Consciousness”, Karl J. Weintraub argues that “autobiography as a genre developed its full potential only when Western man acquired a thoroughly historical understanding of existence” (821).

The term ‘autobiography’ is commonly thought to have been coined in nineteenth century. Its three components: auto-bio-graph meaning self, life, writing respectively. The autobiography is an important genre for literary discourse.

First use of the word autobiography can be attributed to William Taylor, who used it in 1797 in *The Monthly Review*, while it is said that in the present sense, the word autobiography was used by Robert Southey in 1809.

The *Confessions* of Saint Augustine whose time period can be approximated to fifth century can be considered an early example of this type of works. Peter Brown says about *Confessions*:- “The *Confessions* are ‘a strictly intellectual autobiography’ and ‘a manifesto of the inner world’” (Brown 167-8).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1789), Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (1818) and J.S.Mill’s *Autobiography* (1873) are seen as the major early autobiographical texts. So autobiography as a well established literary genre has its origin in the west.

Roots of autobiographical writings can also be traced in ancient Indian literature. Vedas and Buddhist texts contain such writings which can be considered similar to autobiographical writings. In the Sanskrit literature (7th century A.D) '*Harshcharita*' is the first historical biography in Sanskrit written by Banbhatt, who was the famous Sanskrit writer. In the Mughal period, autobiographical literature in the form of *Babar Nama*, *Tuzak-i-Jahangiri* etc. is available. *Babar Nama* literally means "Book of Babur" or "letters of Babur". It is an autobiographical work, originally written in the Chagatai language by the first Mughul Emperor Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur. *Tuzk-e-Jahangiri* is the autobiography of Emperor Nor-u-Din Muhammed Jahangir (1569-1609). It is written in Persian language. In the *Tuzk-e-Jahangiri*, the author has included the details of his views and reflections on art, politics and information about his family. The motive behind writing these autobiographies was usually to promote the spirituality or to glorify the autobiographer himself.

In India, autobiography began to establish as a literary genre in late eighteenth century. In the modern period, under the influence of British rulers, English literary forms got a privileged position and many intellectuals of that time started writing in English. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's short autobiographical sketch is one of the first autobiographical writings written in India in English. An autobiography may not have been a traditional literary genre in Indian culture, but from the nineteenth century onwards, we begin to find autobiographical texts. The 19th century is a development period for autobiography in India.

The few Indian autobiographies which have drawn attention of the researchers are: M.K.Gandhi's *The story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) and Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936). Defining autobiography, M.H.Abrams writes in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*:

Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself. It is to be distinguished from the memoir, in which the emphasis is not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed, and also from the private diary or journal, which is a day-to-day record of the events in one's life, written for personal use and satisfaction, with little or no thought of publication. (22-23)

These days most Indian critics tend to believe that autobiography depends on the ideas of self-determination, self realization, genuineness and transcendence which reflects the cultural values and broad politics of the writer.

The terms autobiography and life-writing are repeatedly used interchangeably. The aim of such writing seems to be a search for a suitable genre to launch an emancipatory political and cultural program. According to Laura Marcus: "The nineteenth century saw a gradual alignment of autobiography with the value accorded to authorship" (Qtd in Anderson 7).

The autobiography is different as art form as compared to biography. The biography, written by someone other than the protagonist, generally represents a wide variety of documents and viewpoints. An autobiography, on the other hand, is often entirely based on the writer's memory. The autobiographies typically focus on the life and times of the writer; this work by nature is subjective and personal.

An autobiography is a 'truth-claim' and a 'factual' genre. Autobiography is also a creative work, which is created by particular author and uses all kinds of techniques and methods to tell the life's story. Parmjit Singh Ramana says about autobiography:

Autobiography often focuses on a real individual's real life, particularly the growth and development of his personality, assumes an identity between the author, the narrator and the protagonist in the retrospective narrative. (106)

Comparing autobiography with other prominent genres, de Man says,

Autobiography always looks slightly disreputable and self-indulgent in the company of the major genres- the Novel, Poetry and Drama- never quite attaining aesthetic dignity nor even providing an empirically useful way of understanding texts since each specific seems to be an exception to the norm. (Qtd in Anderson 12)

This subjectivity and exception to the norm is the major positive factor of these kinds of writing. Autobiographies thus produce fiction or figures in the place of the self-knowledge they research. Freud's thinking on the relation between Narrative and the subject has important consequences for the understanding of autobiography and how we remember our lives (Linda 61-62).

Autobiography is one of the most important sites of feminist writing exactly because it shows that there are many different ways of writing the subject:

As strategy, autobiography need not offer a universal model of subjectivity and its representation but 'local uses of the self', ways of expressing a self or a position which arise from the situation as it comments on it (Qtd in Anderson 91).

An autobiography represents a truthful way of life. Julia Swindells has provided a more wide-ranging but similarly optimistic account of the new radical uses of autobiography:

Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness—Woman, black people, working-class people – have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of 'personal' voice, which speaks beyond itself. (Qtd in Anderson 103-104)

The autobiography is purely a personal act. The writing of autobiography describes the individual identity. According to Bhikhu Parekh:

First, as the story of a unique self, autobiography presupposes a culture in which individuality is valued and cultivated. Unless a culture encourages men and women to make their own choices, form their own views, take risks, look upon life as a journey and, in general to fashion their lives as they please, one man's life is no different from another's.... the autobiography is only possible in a society with a well-developed historical manner of thinking. (45)

An autobiography is a story of oneself and in these, there can be endless mysteries. So, these can be of various types. Some autobiographies are related with the philosophical thought as Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography. Many authors have written confessional autobiographies. Saint Augustine's *Confessions* is this type of autobiography. Some autobiographies are based on the culture and some are based on the author's works which are known as literary autobiographies. The autobiography is the source of author's identity. It displays his personality and his development. Autobiography is a fictional account of a real person's life experiences so "its boundaries are unlimited in the sense that the form can be discovered both in literature and non-literature" (Kumar 2).

Although each autobiographical text is unique, even then there are some common elements or features, which can be found in all the autobiographies. Being a personal account, every autobiography is subjective. It tries to reveal the inner workings of a human being. Autobiographies usually contain elements that provide grounds for introspection where author thinks about his life, his purposes, his doings etc.

Being an account of the life of a person, autobiography contains many real or perceived incidents from the life of a person. but what he includes and what he omits or excludes from his text makes his narrative complex and subjective. His choice of subject matter gets influenced by his aims of writing the autobiography and also by the intended audience that he has in his mind.

So, as Janet Gunn and Coburn suggest, in writing autobiography, the writer is trying to depict his persona as he wants to project and this can or can not have any direct relation with reality. Same can be said about other persons mentioned in the autobiography, which get tainted by the personal choices of the author. But, ideally, an autobiographical writing should try to focus on being objective and unbiased.

Literature is a product of a society. Literature is imaginative and the facts of life are reshaped by literature. The facts are given a distinct touch in an autobiography. Social or public life and private life are inter connected and influence each other. So, even if a writer is focusing on his private life only, social influences automatically will enter into the picture, so an autobiographical account has always some social significance or relevance, because it will provide new insights into the workings of the successful mind along with the particular socio-political-cultural conditions that made this person as he is.

Although autobiography is a historical account, it is also a narrative produced by a subjective being from his perspective. So if story is not told in a convincing way, it loses its appeal. The imaginative truth of autobiographical literature usually appears convincing because it is based on those experiences which are based on real-life situations. The autobiography is a personal version of the writer's life and it can't be just a minute by minute account of the life of the author, it will always have some view point and a particular take on the significant events of the life of the author.

Reading of autobiography as a literary text is much more important than its reading as a chronology of facts related to a particular author's life. While writing an autobiography, the author uses the literary devices such as symbolism, imagery etc. to produce an impressive text. So, a good autobiography always have the characteristics of a good literary text, and this same characterstic makes it eligible for literary analysis and application of other literary analysis tools for understanding the nuances of autobiographical writings.

Although, autobiography is a literary piece, but still its narrative techniques can be significantly different from other literary genres. While putting life to paper, the writer has to ensure a fine balance throughout the text, so that it may not become biased. The author should be very neutral about the positive and negative side of his temperament.

The autobiography is not only a record of the happenings and occurances. The author, in a sense, has to give a map of his growth and development through different spheres of his life. Like all other literary forms, the autobiographical texts get influenced by the social setup in which these are produced. That is the reason that although autobiography is a personal narrative, but it also touches upon the broader social, political and economic issues. So, an autobiography can provide significant inputs about the life and concerns of the whole community or region. Making judgement about Indian people on the basis of literary texts like Mahatama Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth*, he writes that for them the outside world matters only as it affects the inner. (101)

Conflict is an important part of literary narratives, which can be seen very easily in autobiography. Life is a continuous site of conflicts and the writer shows these conflicts through his autobiography. Life is more eventful for those persons who have to face hurdles and who successfully cross those obstacles, so this type of conflicts in life can provide a significance to an autobiographical account. Without the conflict, autobiographical account becomes monotonous and gives uninteresting reading experience.

As autobiography is based on individual life, so recollection of past life and events forms the core of an autobiography. But this recollection can't be neutral and whenever someone tries to look back, his view can be distorted by a number of factors and in a way past and present are always interconnected at multiple points. Early life, especially childhood memories have their impact through out the

life and bad behaviour, stigmas etc faced in early years of life can get imprinted permanently on the psyche of an individual. Autobiographies written by oppressed persons can be an ideal example for this, where scars on the body and mind get intermixed and haunt the persons throughout their life. This retelling can be very painful for the author, because he has to experience the same torture again, while writing those bad incidents.

The writer expresses real experiences and shows the various stages of self-improvement. The Autobiographical writings can take various forms like journals, diaries and letters. Diaries describe a day to day recording of a writer's daily life. Encyclopedia Britannica gives following definition of autobiography:

The book in which are preserved the daily memorandums regarding events and actions which come under the writer's personal observation or are related to him by others. (365)

Diary is a canvas of the life and it represents the personal idea, image. It's related to the self. Diary represents the each breath of author's life. But a story line is missing in diaries and there can be many unwanted entries. On the other hand, while presenting his life in autobiographical form, writer selected the events that he wants to share with the world and also he chooses the particular pattern in which he will depict those life events.

Journal is also very much similar to autobiography, but emotional quotient is usually missing in Journal. It is very difficult to differentiate a journal from diary. Journal is usually larger than diary. It tries to narrate the self from personal confines to relate the world in larger perspective. Journal shows various incidents of life but journal writer also judges those incidents in the light of other experiences. Diary shows the reality of the writer.

Autobiography furnishes the chronological record of the writer's mental state. But journal does not give a chronological record. Entries in journal are usually written in continuous form. It depicts the spontaneity of record. Biography has been defined in Oxford English Dictionary as: "The history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature" (573). Depicting the life and social sphere, biography provides a complete account of the man and his experiences, ideas, issues. Autobiography is the life story written by the concerned person himself while biography is the depiction of life of a person written by another person. In the biography life of one man is judged by another person.

Memoirs, a literary genre are based on individual experiences of memory. The author jots down his thoughts regarding some happenings related to a person, or an event. While in autobiography, focus is on the writings of a man, memoirs usually throw a light on the events as remembered by particular author or an individual. Remembrance or recollection of past events can be significantly altered by present circumstances and extraneous influences.

So, autobiography, biography, diary, memoir, journal etc. are various forms of life writing and there are many subtle differences between them. An autobiography does not separate the individual from his whole historical environment family, community and society at large. His struggles, oppression, assertion and quest of identity of the individual, all these are subject matter of these writings.

Dalit autobiography gives a new extent to the study of autobiography. In the Indian Caste system for a long time Dalits have been denied education, now that they are getting educated, some of them are using writing as a weapon for their social affirmation. The autobiography is a special act for the members of Dalit Community. They use the genre to achieve a sense of identity and a method of struggle against different forms of oppression.

Autobiographical narratives constitute a significant segment of Dalit literature. The Dalit writers call these narratives as self-stories or self reporting's, these narratives represent the personal sufferings, community feelings and experiences in a Hindu society (Kumar 150). Dalit people face the several oppressive social forces in the society. Writing of autobiography by the Dalits is a form of resistance against various forms of oppression. Dalit Autobiographical Narratives is a 'corporeal-isation' a 'making- real' through the body of social suffering (Nayer 2).

The authors faced many difficulties in their lives and 'confession' is mostly made to invoke the bitter experiences. The writer's pain is mostly personal and they narrate their stories with a realization that the other members of their community also suffered and are suffering in the same way. This process of realization is unique in the history of personal narratives which is generally absent in non-Dalit autobiographies, observes Sudhir Chandra, a Dalit writer:

It is difficult not to react to this (autobiographical) literature at a Personal level. There is something elemental about it. It touches you

to the very core... The best of Dalit writers have the guts to strip themselves before us, but they do not want to interiorise their suffering by making a public spectacle of it. Nor do they wish to earn cheap martyrdom by retelling everything they had to suffer for no fault of theirs. If anything, they are extraordinarily restrained and ruthlessly introspective. (68)

Dalit narratives present details of everyday life, rituals and beliefs of these communities. The writer tells the instances of deprivation, suffering and violation as experienced by the oppressed community. Omprakash Valmiki (1950) is a prominent personality among Hindi Dalit writers. Valmiki was born at Barla, Muzaffarnager, UP. He has completed Master degree in Arts. He is a Harbinger among writers who laid the foundation for Dalit literature in Hindi. Valmiki's *Joothan* is an autobiographical account of his experiences. He grew up in a village near Muzaffarnager as an untouchable or Dalit in the time of newly independent India of the 1950s. Valmiki is engineer by profession and he began writing this memoir in 1974. Now a middle class intellectual, he deliberately uses the name Valmiki as a mark of identification with his roots and also with the larger community of the sweeper caste (variously called Bhangi, Chuhra, many of whom call themselves Valmiki, tracing their lineage to the author of Ramayana).

During the college days, Valmiki came to know about Ambedkar. He read many books on Ambedkar. Valmiki says:

Dr. Ambedkar's life-long struggle had shaken me up. I spent many days and nights in great turmoil. The restlessness inside me had increased. My stone-like silence had suddenly begun to melt. (72)

Joothan is the first autobiographical text in Hindi that identifies itself as a part of Dalit literature. Literature has been the realm of the high castes. Dalit literary expression has shown a dramatic increase throughout the Hindi belt since the late 1980s. *Joothan* has been the focus of critical appreciation and debate since its publishing in 1999. *Joothan* is based on Dalit community. He felt the internal pain and upper caste people's satire, so Valmiki wrote the painful experiences in his autobiography. His whole work represents the Dalit peoples' feeling. Valmiki has given a number of books to Hindi literature, his collection of poems *Sadiyon ka Santap* (1989) and *Bas Bhut Ho Chuka* (1997), his short story

collection *Salam* (2000) and *Ghuspathiye*, and his critical work on the aesthetics of Dalit literature- *Dalit Sahitya ka Saudarya Shastra* (2001):

Valmiki has the image of a writer who dared to swim against the tide and has also made pioneering attempts to create an attitude of self-criticism among the Dalits. (Dev, Tiwari, Khana 322)

The pains of Dalits life are intolerable. Writer presents experiences which have not got any place in literature yet. So writings by Dalit writers about their experiences are very important as these are those marginalized voices which had been denied any right to speak uptill now. But this act of speaking is a very difficult and traumatic one. Writer has to revisit his traumatic past to transfer it into words. Telling about the writing process of *Joothan*, Valmiki says:

Putting these experiences on paper entailed all sorts of dangers. After a long period of procrastination, I started to write. Once again, I had to relive all those miseries, torments, neglects, admonitions. I suffered a deep mental anguish while writing this book. How terribly painful was this unraveling of myself, layer upon layer. Some people find this stuff unbelievable and exaggerated. (Viii)

Some friends get shocked and angry with Valmiki. They said that by measuring achievements you got nothing. Some said that he is losing his selfness. Some said that by doing this he is presenting backwardness of the society.

Facing this type of criticism, Valmiki compiled his pains in 160 pages. At last, first edition of *Joothan* was published in 1999 by Radhakrishna paper private limited, New Delhi.

Dalit autobiography explores about Dalit life, which did not get any place in the society yet. *Joothan* is the first autobiography in Hindi literature, in which Valmiki presents different problems related to lower castes. The narrative *Joothan* demonstrates the nature of victim. *Joothan* is the story of Valmiki's individual life. It is also the narrative of community, a caste and a larger collective. An entire community becomes victim. Valmiki, like other Dalit writers, underlines the social status of the victims' lower caste. *Joothan* is a narrative of pain, atrocity and sufferings of Dalits' life. *Joothan* also locates the atrocity at social, political and economic levels. The Dalits in *Joothan*, for example, are economically extremely poor, and socially marginalized.

Valmiki belongs to the lower caste. His big family (five brothers, one sister, two cha-chas, one tau and his family) lived in chuhra basti. On the edges of the pond were the homes of the lower caste peoples. Valmiki says they did all sorts of work for Tagas (upper caste), including cleaning, agricultural and general labour. In the village, nobody dared to refuse this unpaid work. They were sworn and abused even though they were doing free work. Upper caste people did not call us by our names. Older person would be called 'Oe Chuhre'. If the person was younger or of same age, then he was called 'Abey Chuhre'. Their life in the village was very bad.

They were humiliated whichever way the upper caste people desired. According to Maggie Ronkin, "Joothan: A Dalit life, originally written in Hindi by Omprakash Valmiki, exemplifies this activity by tracing one writer's struggle to transform the stigma of his Untouchability into pride in his Dalit identity" (504).

Condition of lower castes is nearly identical in all parts of the country as autobiographical narrative of Punjabi writer Balbir Madhopuri informs. Balbir Madhopuri was born in 1955 in the small village of Madhopur (Jalandhar), Punjab. Balbir worked as Deputy Director (News), All India Radio, New Delhi. He is in charge of Punjabi publications (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) and editor, Yojana (Punjabi). His writing focuses on the problems of the oppressed classes. Balbir Madhopuri is author of two collections of Punjabi poetry, *Maroothal da Birkh* (Tree of the Desert, 1998) and *Bhakhda Pataal* (The Smouldering Netherworlds, 1992), some historical accounts and general books like *Delhi ik Virasat*, *Samunder de ang sang*, *Delhi de das itihase Gurudware* and *literary interviews*. A prolific writer he has translated twenty-three books and edited more than thirty. *Changiya Rukh* is the first Dalit autobiography in Punjabi language, which has been translated in English, Hindi and Shahmukhi (Pakistan). Title of the book *Changiya Rukh* signifies a tree looped from the top, slashed and dwarfed. Balbir uses the metaphor to describe the Dalits' lives, traditions, slashed, and dwarfed by society. This book describes the Indian society's rituals and social phenomenon of castes.

Autobiography though reveals a person's self experiences, but every person of the world is not capable of writing the self experiences with the help of words. There is something hidden in the process of formation of a tree from a seed. In the same way Balbir Madhopuri has not started writing his autobiography abruptly. He says that he wrote his autobiography after some of his short pieces

on his life were praised by readers, so he became more courageous and showed more interest in writing autobiography. He traced all the layers of his self experiences with the help of pen. In this way Balbir Madhopuri's autobiography appeared before the society with the help of Lokgeet Prakashan in 2004.

Changiya Rukh dilates the Dalit situation in Punjab. It focuses on the situation of lower caste person's in Punjab. *Changiya Rukh* represents the Madhopuri's life and caste condition in this region. Post graduation is turning point of Balbir's life. Balbir meets many people in the media and starts moving in the Leftist circle, which adds to his consciousness level. However, he also found out that some of his Communist friends have a feudal approach to many socio-economic problems. While posted in Delhi, Balbir has to live in rented accommodations and faces problems with caste-conscious property owners.

In the starting remarks of the book, Balbir Madhopuri has painstakingly pointed out how he had to enter into the deeper dialogue with self. He is searching for the identity of the self. He writes honestly about his anguishes and battles fought every day.

There are some theses and articles published which try to analyse Dalit literature and its role in the larger socio-cultural context. Sareh Beth's research paper "Dalit Autobiographies in Hindi the transformation of Pain into Resistance" furnishes valuable information about Dalit Hindi autobiographies and sufferings of Dalit society. She starts his research paper with a quote from *Joothan* in which Valmiki writes that Dalits life is very painful and extremely cruel. This paper shows the Dalit narratives' transformation and experiences of pain into a narrative of resistance. She says that in the late 1980s, Dalit literary works began to show their presence in the Hindi belt and there was increase in publication of Dalit books, newspapers, journals and articles by Dalit writers. The marginalized life narrative is based on the identity. Dalit autobiography exposes the caste based discrimination. Beth discusses it very well. Firstly she writes about the Dalit autobiography which is voice of the crushed people. Secondly she says that Dalit narratives are the contestation of untouchability. She puts the question of autobiography of the individual or community? There is much difference between Dalit autobiographies and other celebrity or historical autobiographies. Dalit autobiography shows the communities' picture. In this paper she focuses on the

narrative of pain using Dalit narratives of *Joothan* (Valmiki) and *Tiraskrit* (Chauhan).

Raj Kumar in his book *Dalit Personal Narrative* writes about origin of autobiography, Dalit autobiographies picture and Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*. Raj Kumar says that *Joothan* is a life story of whole Dalit society. It is history of Chuhras or Chamars community who faced the caste discrimination from ages. Valmiki communities feel pride in being children of Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana. But upper caste Hindu people treat persons of Valmiki caste as dogs and cats. Raj Kumar says that title of Valmiki's autobiography *Joothan* shows that the society's humiliation is continuing. In his book Kumar describes about *Joothan* as a real story of Dalit people which shows the discrimination and humiliation of lower caste people.

"The Dalit question: Reading Godan and Joothan as narratives of Dalit protest" is a research paper written by Ravi Sexena. This research paper shows the lower castes' bad condition through the *Godan* novel and *Joothan* autobiography. Sexena says that *Joothan* represents the Dalits own world and worldview. Sexena in research paper has discussed the autobiography *Joothan* by focusing on title, education, castism, upper caste discrimination with lower persons and on poverty. This autobiography highlights the Dalit worldview. Sexena describes that *Joothan* critiques all aspects of exploitative social system, caste system, injustice and exploitation.

Professor Himadari Bannerjee in the letter, *Tree Lopped*, writes about the autobiography, *Changiya Rukh*. Bannerjee says this autobiography shows the social history of rural Punjab in newly independent India. He discusses the Dalits of rural areas and writer Madhopuri's life. In this letter his main focus is on rural Punjabi Dalit and his suffering but he has not done much textual analysis of *Changiya Rukh*.

Dalit Chetna Sarot te Saroop by Dr. Ronki Ram writes about the Dalits. Dr. Ronki Ram in this book talks about Dr. Ambedker, Dalit writers, Dalit media and Dalit literature. He describes the different forms of Dalit literature like poetry, novel, story and autobiography. He discussed the *Changiya Rukh* autobiography. Dr. Ronki says *Changiya Rukh* title shows the helplessness and discrimination of Dalit's life. These communities have faced the economical discrimination from

ages. He says that Madhopuri's autobiography represents the marginalized community's picture.

So, the Dalit autobiography has a special place in the contemporary literature. It is not only an expression of the self, but also foregrounds the various social issues concerned with the individual. This research work is an attempt to study two Dalit autobiographies *Joothan* and *Changiya Rukh* as a form of social critique.

Works Cited

- "Autobiography." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd Edition. 1989. Print.
- "Autobiography." *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of English literature*. Vol-I. 1953. Print.
- "Autobiography." *Collier's New Encyclopedia*. Vol.3. New York: P.F.Collier & Son Company,1962. Print.
- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Delhi: Akash press, 2007. Print.
- Anderson, Linda. *Autobiography*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Bagul, Baburao. *Dalit Literature is but human literature*. Ed. Arjun Dangle. Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009. Print.
- Betterton, Kathleen. *Teach Yourself to Write*. London: Hodder and Stoughton for the English Universities Press, 1942. Print.
- Bechain, Dr. Shoraj singh, Dr. Devendra, ed. *Chitan Ki Parmpra aur Dalit Sahitya*. Bihar: Navlekhan Prkashan. Print.
- Bhikhu, Parekh. *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*. New Delhi: Sage publication, 1989. Print.
- Biasing, Mutlu Konuk. *The Art of Life: Studies in American Autobiographical Literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977. Web. 10 June 2011.
- Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1967. Print.
- Chandra, Sudhir. "Metaphor of suffering". *The first all India Dalit writer conference*. Ed. Bojja, Tharakam. Hyderabad: A.P., 1994. Print.
- Coburn, Kathleen. *The Notebooks of S.T. Coleridge*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957. Print.
- Dangle, Arjun, ed. *Dalit Literature: Past, Present and Future in Poisoned bread*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1992. Print.
- Dev, Anjana Neira, Bajrang Bihari Tiwari, Sanam Khana. *Indian Literature: an Introduction*. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2006. Print.
- "Diary." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 7.1964.
- Gunn, Jannet V. *Autobiography: Towards a Poetics of Experience*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984. Print.
- Huddart, David. *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography*. London and America: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Khandekar, Tarachandra. "Literature of Revolt and Resurgence". *The first all India Dalit writer conference*. Ed. Bojja, Tharakam. Hyderabad: A.P, 1994. Print.

- Kumar, Raj. *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2010. Print.
- Limble, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit literature: Histories, controversies and considerations*. Trans. Alok Mukherjee. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2004. Print.
- Madhopuri, Balbir. *Changiya Rukh*. Chandigarh: Lokgeet Prakashan, 2004. Print.
- Naipaul, V.S. *India: A Wounded civilization*. Canada: Penguin, 1979. Print.
- Namishray, Mohan. *Dalit Patrkarita Sahitik evm Sanskritik Chitan*. Delhi: Shri Natraj Parkashan, 2008. Print.
- Nayer, Parmod.K. "Dalit Writing, Cultural Trauma and Pedagogy: The Testimony of Omparkash Valmiki's Joothan" *Academia edu* 2008: 51-65. Web. 25 May 2011.
- Olney, James, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical & Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Print.
- Olney, James. *Conditions & Limits of autobiography: Essays theoretical and critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Print.
- Olney, James. Ed. *On Writing Autobiography: Studies in Autobiography*. U.S.A: Oxford University Press. 1988. Print.
- Pascal, Roy. *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960. Print.
- Ram, Ronki. *Dalit Chetna: Sarot te Saroop*. Chandigarh: Lokgeet Parkashan, 2010. Print.
- Ramana, Paramjit singh. "Reading and Translating Gurdial Singh's Autobiography". *South Asian Ensemble* 2.1 (2010): 103-115. Print.
- Rasila, Dr. Kadia. *Atmakatha: Swaroop Ane Vikas*. Amdavad: Sadbhav Prakashan.1985. Print.
- Rev. of *Joothan*, by Maggi Ronkin. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64.2 (2005): 504-505. Web. 24 May 2011.
- Robert, Elbaz. *The Changing Nature of the Self: A Critical Study of the Autobiographic Discourse*. London: Croom Helm, 1988. Print.
- Sayre, Robert F. *The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry Farms*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1988. Print.
- Shipley, Joseph.T. *Dictionary of World Literature: Forms, Criticism, Technique*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2008. Print.
- Sodhi, Meena. *Indian English Writing: The Autobiographical Mode*. New Delhi: Creative books,1999. Print.

Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan*. New Delhi: Radhakrishna Prakashan, 1999. Print.

Waldo, H. Dunn. *English Biography*. New York: Dutton & Co, 1916. Web. 10 May 2011

Chapter II

***Changiya Rukh* – Against the Night**

Society is made up of the assortment of different castes, religions, customs, cultures and traditions. From times immemorial, the division of society in upper and lower castes exists. Powerful and privileged people made the lower class people play a second fiddle to them, thus creating different divisions in society. Caste is that axis of social structure which controls and influences the individuals' beliefs and society on the whole becomes incapable of becoming free from the prejudices. Dalit autobiography gives voice to the feelings of pain and suffering being felt by weaker sections of the society. It foregrounds the pain and suffering of this outcast community, and is responsible for giving them an evocative voice, which was considered insignificant before the birth of Dalit literature. According to Ronki Ram:

Changiya Rukh by Balbir Madhopuri is the story of that life whose tree bearing the pang of the axes of castism, superstitions, class divisions and economic poverty still nourishes the hope for the rejuvenation. This autobiography depicts the sufferings of the marginalized consciousness of the Dalits by the dominant discourse of religion, societal norms, political and economic elitism. (210)

The autobiography *Changiya Rukh* is in the form of a statement about the atrocities inflicted on the Dalits. *Changiya Rukh* mirrors the post and pre independence worries of the writer and his ancestors as well. This autobiography portrays the internal conflicts and problems of poor people in pre and post-independence period. *Changiya Rukh* is the manuscript of every aspect of life's qualms and presents a true picture of the caste system, physical exploitation, mental distress and discrimination. Religious places and educational institutions are also not free from these discrimination practices and the writer has faced these dilemmas throughout his life. All these themes are exploited in this autobiography. These themes ensure the importance of the writing of this autobiography. Balbir was born at Madhopuri village in a poor *Chammar* family. His childhood, school and college days were spent in poverty. There are many incidents in Madhopuri's autobiography, which recollect his days spent in poverty. Dr.C.D.Sidhu says:

Balbir Madhopuri's autobiography *Changiya Rukh* is an inspirational epic of tolerance. Balbir is a writer of extraordinary faculties. Although a poet by nature, he is acquainted with the typical language and proverbs of village life and a master of character portrayal. His Dickens's like insight into the village life make him stand aloft among other Punjabi writers. (Qtd in Ram 210)

Changiya Rukh through individual experiences delineates the racial differences. The journey from being an untouchable to Harijan has started but the mentality of society has not changed at all. From times immemorial, the racial differences exist, and without a few changes, it is still inscribed in our minds. Commenting about the caste system and place of his own caste in it, the writer says that from all the four divisions, we are not able to get a respectable place anywhere. Dalit people have been kept aloof from the mainstream of the society.

Changiya Rukh is a prominent autobiography in Punjabi literature. Dr. Satindar Singh Noor in his paper "Balbir Singh Madhopuri di svayjivni Changiya Rukh da Sahitik- Samajik Mulankan" says:

Changiya Rukh by Balbir Madhopuri is the first autobiography that presents the Dalit reality without self-exhibitionism. For the first time this autobiography presents the ideological basis for the analysis of the lot of Dalits in Indian societal-structure, its struggle and development...it challenges our critical faculties. This autobiography has promoted the understanding of Dalit literature and criticism. Its value for the coming ages also lies in the fact that it will be an important text for providing clues to the evaluation of Dalit literary texts. (Qtd in Ram 210)

Another prominent Punjabi Critic Dr. Karnail Singh Thind says about this text:

Changiya Rukh brings out the human corruption that discriminates the Dalit fraternity. It begins and ends with the critique of religion, castism and Untouchability. (Qtd in Madhopuri 200)

Caste based distinctions usually also have a religious base. From religious point of view, everybody occupies the same place in all religions without any difference. It is often said that religion joins/binds and not separates. But real life experiences tell a different story. Madhopuri has talked about biased religious practices in his autobiography as he was a victim of these biases. Dalits faced

discrimination even at the Gurdwara sahib of Madhopur. The inequality was there even in the presence of religion. The priests of the higher caste did not behave well with them. Narrating such an incident, Balbir Singh Madhopuri writes:

‘Give these Chamar brats a shout and drive them off,’ the Jat bhai of the Gurudwara would say to whosoever stood near him on the occasion of sangrand- the first day of the Indian solar month- or our Gurupurub- the birthdays of the Gurus, when he saw us standing on our toes and clinging to the bars of the window, as he distributed the Prasad to the congregation. (11)

Some ethics of life get mingled in our blood in our childhood. The things which we see get inscribed on our minds forever. Sometimes we cannot omit them against our wishes also. Social discrimination is faced not only by workers at work places and educational institutions but is faced everywhere. Even religious places are also not free from discrimination. Madhopuri and the entire Dalit community have to undergo this pain and suffering throughout their life.

Sometimes if the upper caste offspring felt like empathizing with Dalit children, their parents did not allow them to do so. The writer thus began to differentiate them from himself. Kids can understand the difference of colour and clothes, but were not able to understand the age long tradition of Untouchability:

Whenever I was alone, my thoughts would wend their way to the Gurudwara and stand there, like a supplicant, whose silent voice was unheard by all but me. The only difference between the well- dressed girls and boys inside the Gurudwara and me was that I had only one pair of shorts to cover my nakedness, and I was darker than them. (12)

The writer here has penned down the miseries of his fore fathers and of Dalit people in general. He states explicitly how a place stepped on by Dalits is considered to be contaminated and the so-called upper caste people wash that place thoroughly. *Changiya Rukh* portrays the discrimination and humiliation suffered by the writer since childhood. When children mock at his ancestors' work and regard it as dirty, it pierces his spirit, but his position does not allow him to retaliate. They were made to realize their inferiority, which hurts their feelings to the core:

I had often noticed that whenever we used the tap, any Jat child who used it after us would wash the tap thoroughly before drinking from it. This often made me wonder what was wrong with my hands that others had to wash a tap after I had touched it. Was it because I had touched the animals? They, too, had often twisted the tail of the same live animal! (Madhopuri 25)

The autobiographies of Dalit vividly portray the discriminatory behaviour that they have to bear in caste-based society. They are not even considered humans and put under the separate category of '*Chamars*'. Therefore, they were not even allowed to make use of public water tap and were subjected to derogatory remarks on their caste:

One day when I was drinking water from a public tap, a mistari woman came from behind and started whispering. "You would remain a chamar after all, whatever you do," meaning I can never be like them though be allowed to use public services with equality. (Dil 36)

The concept of rich and poor is prevalent in society like the two sides of the same coin. Human beings are trying their best to get escape from poverty for making their lives consequential. Caste is like leprosy, which never leaves Dalits in alienation even if they work hard to make their lives a success. Madhopuri said that they were maltreated like cats and dogs. They were shown as low bred when they went to work at landlords' homes and fields. They had to take their utensils along with them:

Defilement – I had confronted this word time and again, the way the rope in our well had frayed by constant rubbing against the wall. My thoughts would suddenly grow wings like the ones insects sprouted during the rains. I would think of the care the zamindars took of their animals- scrubbing and bathing, and tending them tenderly. Their dogs roamed freely in the courtyard and even entered the kitchen. Their children petted the cat all the time, feeding the kitten milk and...and...Bhaia and others like him have to carry their own tumblers and bowls from home, work hard for them the whole day, and still their animals are treated better than we human beings! (Madhopuri 33-34)

Madhopuri says that sometimes the Zaildar thrashed them without any reason and gave them everlasting, treacherous wounds. After being beaten, the Dalits would come to know that they have been humiliated because they are Dalits. The henchmen of English people too took illicit advantage of their designation:

Once, Achchan Singh, who was the Zaildar of village Laroyia and nambardar Sher Singh were passing through here. We were all busy at our looms. Suddenly, the Zaildar got off his horse and started beating Chacha Chajju with his stick, saying, "Why didn't you hold the bridle of my horse!" Chacha pleaded with him—"Sardarji, I didn't see you...else I would have held your bridle!" The Zaildar cursed whole Chamarli. Dharam naal, we left our looms and stood trembling. (145)

The divisions of the society in upper and lower caste are made for lower class people only. The meanings of these words are changed for upper class people with the change of situation. The writer says that if Dalit boys talk to the upper class elderly people, they address them as "Sardar ji". But the daughter-in-laws of upper class address the aged persons of lower class by their names. The effects of these tormentations on the bearer are never realized, "only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches":

My mind immediately started a web. Tai Taro and her Jat women called my grandmother (who was nearing a hundred years), by her name. My classmates all addressed members of my community by their names, and in response they were called, Sardarji'. To us, every villager was uncle, aunt, or baba, and these people would call us by our first names, without any thought or hesitation. It also occurred to me that perhaps arrogance of caste and ownership of land lay behind this. (41)

While talking about the social phenomenon, the writer says that the Hindu people are always placed on the higher position in the context of the division of society and they treat the Dalits very harshly. According to Manu Smriti, people has been divided into four classes. Brahmins are always placed on the top and assign Dalits no category in the scheme of things for they are considered to be even inferior than animals. Dalits are made to wear the chains of slavery and

made to bear the pangs of mental and physical distress. With the help of pen and paper, Madhopuri portrays the self-experienced pains of his parents and his own: They have divided society into castes. It is these crafty people who are blasphemous. As if, men have any castes! They worship stones and animals, and take us to be even lower than them. ... they want us to keep away, because our touch will defile them. If someone were to ask them, do you have anything we do not have? (46)

The lower caste has been divided according to their work division in the society. Even the lower caste further gets divided in two different categories. Before independence, Dalits were made to work in accordance of their caste and were given grain twice in a year. *Chuhras* and *Chamars* were placed at the lowest rank and were given the dead bodies of animals as their wages. Against the tenets of human rights, they were given bodies of dead animals because they were workers belonging to so-called lower caste. The writer in his autobiography talks about the palanquin- bearer who cleans utensils and serves food on marriages and death ceremonies.... In return, of this he is given a container of wheat on each summer and winter harvest:

'I am not going to wash dirty utensils after today! What will we lose if we don't do this sort of work! One container of grain after the summer harvest and another after the autumn harvest! If they have four guests, we have to cook for them! We cook and wait on them during their celebrations and sorrows! And it is we who fetch all they need for the feast, from Bhogpur!'(50)

Famous writer Bachint Kaur says:

Changiya Rukh is the first autobiography that depicts the real-life experiences of village labourers of Punjab in a truthful and lively manner. (Qtd in Ram 210)

In villages, life has been divided according to castes. The houses of upper and lower castes are not common. The things of necessity are also divided in categories. Religion, in true sense of the word, propounds equality, whereas, these religious places are divided according to castes. On the occasion of *Gugga Nouvi* all inhabitants of the village do not bow their heads at one place, Dalit women and Jattian bow at different places:

The two-wheeled well stood on the eastern edge of the village, and only the women of Jat, Brahmin, and goldsmith communities went to this well with their offering of sawain... Dressed in beautiful new clothes, they walked confidently, compelling me to calculate and permutate, multiply, subtract, add, and divide all sorts of things. The pitiable conditions of the women of my community with their dirty, tattered clothes flashed through my mind. Their listless faces flickered before my eyes. Their different walk held none of the confidence and arrogance of the high-caste women. Barefoot, a hoe in one hand, supporting a bundle of grass or clothes a bundle of grass or clothes on the head, collecting garbage, dry dung pats, or beating their children with the other-that was the picture. (63)

Since times immemorial, the officer in-charge takes undue advantage of his designation. Before independence, this social exploitation was immense. Physical exploitation heralded the crisis of low wages also. They were forced to work and were not given proper wages. Dr. Jagbir Singh aptly remarks:

The autobiography of Madhopuri along with presenting his personal experiences also analyzes the sociological-structure of Punjabi and Indian society. It not only presents the ground reality of Dalits, but also depicts the emergence of the feelings of revolt and anguish in Dalit minds. So, it can be called an important text illuminating Dalit consciousness in contemporary Punjabi society. (Qtd in Ram 210)

Madhopuri in his autobiography has described the incident of his father, that before independence, the Jailor was very cruel towards Dalits. Dalits were made to work extremely hard and if they dare said anything they were treated like cats and dogs. The people on the higher echelons of the society not only demanded unjustifiably hard work from the lower class people but also did not even believe in paying them their dues:

The sergeant of Bhogpur police station had come to the looms. Dharam naal, he was very handsome and virile, that one! He told Dhanna and me to come to the police station the next day with rolls of material. Both of us took a number of rolls, and went to the police station. He selected a roll from the lots both of us had taken. We waited for him to give us some money for what he had brought. But

he abused us to run off and not to expect anything from him.
(Madhopuri137)

The social scenario is changing with the passage of time, but some traces of inequality we get in our inheritance are still the same. Madhopuri has written that his parents often remember Ambedker as their apostle. Madhopuri says that although his relatives are on privileged posts then Jatts but the stigma of caste always keeps them in inferior frames. They consider themselves to be at a lower level than even animals. In his work, the writer very well brings to light the double face of the so-called custodians of religion:

This Inder Singh threatened me the other day. He told me to advise my brother-in-law (Gulzari Lal) not to drink straight from the pipe carrying water from the Persian wheel, but only from a lower level, or else he'd teach him a lesson ... this from the man who's spent his whole life playing the cymbals and dholak in the Gurudwara! (62)

To comment on one's caste has become a part of modern way of life. When writer went on daily wages to the fields, an old person always insult them on the time of giving them tea by comparing tea to chuhre and chamar:

Chah (chai) choori, chah Chamari, chah neechon ki neech Poorn Brahma paar the je chah na hundi beech! I was shocked. Only one who has experienced life in this region would understand this vile verse. Tea was the low-caste's drink while the upper castes drank milk. That by itself made tea an inferior drink. Therefore, as long as low castes did not drink milk, they could never hope to attain heaven/Brahman/moksha. It was difficult for me to swallow the tea poured into my glass. I felt like throwing my tea back at him and clawing his grisly grey beard, teach him how to speak properly, and also understand that it was the mind more than the body that found such treatment intolerable. (163-164)

The society always uses two-fold approach, and Madhopuri has described this in his autobiography. The social structure became responsible for his loss of faith in Hindu religion. The word 'Chand' in his name seemed like carrying the entire burden of Hindu religion with him. This aversion towards Hindu religion forced him to affix the name of his village:

Right through the time I spent in college, I liked the meaning of my name-Balbir. To me, it seemed in the style that the Sikhs used. There was also a hidden challenge in it. More significant was the fact that it had no caste undertones. The latter part of the name 'Chand' however, echoed with Hindu beliefs, a system which still held us captive. There was an odour of abasement and humiliation in it which was all pervasive. (167)

Changiya Rukh portrays abject poverty in Punjab. People below poverty line are notable to meet their daily needs. People work for their basic needs for the whole of their lives but to lead life miserably has become an integral part of their lives:

'Where should I go and hang myself! I have told you hundreds of times that I have not been able to get any money. But the same fight every day, complaints and abuses the whole day. Do the children belong to you alone?' The sadness in his voice expressed his deep helplessness. (35)

Poverty is that stigma which is responsible for the mental distortion of poor people and life seems nothing more than trifles to them. Madhopuri's family also passes through these conflicts and life becomes more miserable in those tough times:

'Should I steal from somewhere? I have asked, but no one is ready to give even a paisa.' Bhaia replied angrily. Then something came over him, and he said, 'I work very hard yet nothing seems to come of it! Saali our fate is like this. Who knows what sins we are being punished for! It would have been better had we not been born. It would not have been a loss to anyone, and then, on top of all this, you!' (35)

Before independence, social facilities were out of the reach of lower class people. People could not meet their basic needs. Balbir thinks that his father worked hard day and night, but his aspirations were out of his reach. When the writer tells his father about electricity poles, his father tells him that these will be valuable for us if we will get lights in our homes also:

I told Bhaia about the electricity poles, and he said, 'only if the darkness in our homes lifts will we know that something has been

done! All this is for the rich! For us, even the coming of freedom has made no difference. (49)

Weather too has different implications for the different strata of society. Poor people are victimized by the atrocities of weather too. Draught and flood both are harmful for the poor people. It means excess of everything is bad. On the one hand, where every year rainfall caused harm to the writer's house and many people of his community were facing starvation, on the other it was a joyful occasion for Zamindars because their crops are free from the fear of draught. They had a reason to celebrate, as good rainfall was favorable to the production of large amount of crops. Their only fear was that of their animals but the miserable man was struggling hard day and night for his survival in difficult situation. The writer's father was depressed by the merciless behaviour of the elite classes who were worried about their animals more than human beings were and not concerned whether they were dead or alive and paid no heed to the critical condition of poor. This disease was wide spread like leprosy in Madhopuri's family. In the rainy season, the leak of roof and the fall of roof and wall were common in every year. Although a common activity every year, but for Madhopuri's family, the trouble was unbearable:

There was a sudden noise of a crash, dhramm..., which cut off in mid-sentence. Who knows what else he would have said! More than half the kitchen wall and courtyard had collapsed outward, obstructing the water as it rushed into the lane. The water in our courtyard was ankle high, and the difference between water from gutters and the lane had already blurred. (55)

The winter season becomes more difficult for poor people. Poverty is that annoyance, which cannot be kind to poor people. Madhopuri's family also had no escape from the convolution of poverty. The whole family lived in single room and the cot of his grandmother was always placed with animals. The dropping of goat, animal dung, the smell of stagnating urine made life a hell. They led their lives drinking "the impure scum that collected as cream in cane juice boiled in the making of jaggery or brown sugar." The boys of the jat family made fun of him by saying that his food (brown sugar) gets reflected in his colour:

There was acute scarcity of grain during the winter months, right up to March and April. We were left with no option but to drink the

impure scum that collected as 'cream' in cane juice boiled in the making of jaggery or brown sugar. Either my elder brother or I would fetch this impure juice from the cane crushers of Mantris or Tajrabias; something the two of us went together. (79)

Madhopuri did his household works also along with his studies:

I thought of what my life had become. Walking a distance of 4-5 km to the middle school in Geeganwal, and on my return, I would often carry two bundles of fodder for the animals, and sometimes a load of millet or barley. I would also help Bhaia and my elder brother scrape the sugarcane, and also fetch twenty kilos of flour from the flour mill. What more could I do? (111)

In *Changiya Rukh*, Madhopuri describes how poverty forces an individual, irrespective of the high clan he belongs to, to bow before whomsoever, and live on just a loaf borrowed for their survival. Madhopuri's father said that when they used to go to Ganganagar for harvesting of wheat, the jats used to ask their caste before giving them water and now the reverse has happened:

'Look, now hunger has driven these strong and honourable people, who call themselves Rajputs, to beg! They know about our bastis! They never permit us to sit near them. When we go to Ganganagar during the harvest season, and ask for a drink of water, the first thing they do is ask what caste we are! And now they are begging at our door! (101)

Madhopuri felt deprived of the normal joys of childhood too. The school holidays were also problematic for Madhopuri. His friends went to their relatives, but the writer had to go with his parents to work in fields. In the peak afternoons of summer, the sowing of paddy seemed life denying to him:

The school vacations had come with a load of trouble for me. Troubles do come at a strange time! A blistering sun over one's head and feet immersed in warm water the whole daylong! Many of my classmates were away visiting their uncles and aunts! But here was I waging a continuous battle against deprivation and poverty! The thoughts brought tears to my eyes. (104)

Madhopuri brings to light the sad tale of the Eastern part of Uttar Pradesh where Dalit daughters and daughter-in-laws are disowned before their own family,

and Dalits cannot revolt against it. The weaker section not only has to bear physical exploitation, but sexual harassment too. They do not have a say even in protecting the dignity of their families:

‘... What can we tell you, ThakarDas! The conditions in eastern Uttar Pradesh are deplorable-the doli of the bride still goes directly to the Thakurs. They send for our daughters and daughters-in-law whenever they feel like...’ one of the men from the east was relating his woes. (72)

Lal Singh in his *Dastaan* (autobiography) also maps the feudalistic lords of Samrala who exhibit their power and riches to make use of and instill fear in the Dalits:

These crooked people kidnapped a woman on the way and put her in their car, roaming far and wide to terrorize Dalit people. (37)

Education is a means of enlightening and enriching one’s life. One gains no recognition without education. Education proved a guiding light for Madhopuri too and he started voicing the anguish of Dalit people. His father played a pivotal role in his education. He guided his children to get educated to avoid the chains of Zamindaras, and to make their distinct and different identity:

I am no astrologer, but I can tell you something, that the son of grass cutter if he can get an education should not remain a grass cutter. Therefore, study hard whatever way you can and you will not have to slave all your life for the landlords! (Madhopuri 49)

Education is a means of upliftment. Madhopuri’s attitude was completely changed by education. He developed a keen understanding of literature, especially Dalit literature which talks about his feelings. This literary sensibility of the writer led him to read Lenin, Marx and Russian literature in the seventh class. He was greatly inspired by the Marxist philosophy, which made the writer an activist. Rather than feeling happy, his father used to scold him for his habit of reading literature:

You read foreign books that you get from the library! How will you help us, if you turn philosopher yourself! (108)

For Madhopuri, books offered a kind of solace and kept him enthralled for so long that he could not think of any other diversion. This led him to do away with household things and he developed a strong inclination towards books:

Maxim Gorky's Mother and his biography left me shaken. I read out some parts of it to my family and my uncles and aunts. Sometimes, I was so moved by the books I read that I would cry, and at other times, feel elated at a man fighting so successfully against the heaviest odds. (171)

Madhopuri has described those incidents of his life when his father bore the atrocities of Zaildar. The writer poignantly portrays the miseries, pain and tormentations faced by his father. His father even believed that education is a means of banishing caste system from society:

I had often seen this pro-British zaildar near the Bhogpur thana. I had also seen him later when he was leading a miserable existence. But the plume of his turban and the proud tilt of his head proof enough of his arrogance. Bhaia went on, 'This was our lot! You must get some education; you bastards, then alone can you make something of your life. Things are not the same today.' (145)

Nothing can be achieved without hard work and struggle. Madhopuri had to face a lot of challenges in pursuing education. Sometimes caste and at times poverty created a lot of problems on his way to success. And poverty left them with no choice but to remain content:

We would first stretch out icy feet to the fire to warm them, and then run towards the school building. We were all barefoot. On the other hand, the children of landlords would each be wearing two jerseys. I would think if only someone were to give me even one sweater, it would keep me warm. (24)

Ironically, school too, considered to be a temple of learning, was engaged in exploiting the poor. There was no respite for this section of the society anywhere under the sun. Madhopuri was forced to do personal work at his teacher's house. In such a situation, Dalit people who are already denied the basic rights of life cannot revolt at all:

'Gudd, you and Roshi (Roshan Lal) go home and cut some fodder and chop it up!' ordered Master Sodhi, suddenly coming out of his opium haze. Talking a pinch of snuff from a long, round iron box, and sniffing it, he added, 'Go quickly! The buffaloes must be hungry and bellowing away. Wash them also.' (69)

School is one such place where the character of a child is formed. It is detrimental for the psyche of a child if he is made to realize the distinction of his caste at such a place. Instead of humanizing one's way of thinking, it teaches them the rules of untouchability. *Changiya Rukh* shows the intricacy, which uprooted his self-respect:

Going to school was painful for I was always apprehensive of what Master Kishan Chand might say. ... After prayers he would often call out, 'All those not in uniform- stand up!' About a dozen of us, boys and girls, would stand up. I would be on the verge of tears, my long, thin neck bent with shame. I wanted to sink into earth! (112)

Sarcastic annotations are an integral part of a Dalits life. They are not allowed to live their life by their own. The tag of being a Dalit gets inscribed on their name during their life and it remains after their death also. It is very difficult to erase inequality from their lives. In *Changiya Rukh*, the writer has revealed how uneducated high class people felt obnoxious on the Dalits receiving education. High-class people felt restless because they thought that if these lower class people get educated then who will work for them in their fields:

'All the chamars have started studying and are growing swollen headed! If they all get jobs, who will work in our fields? (163)

Madhopuri's departure for Delhi and his subsequent realization of the caste based discrimination in both villages and cities, while having multiple differences affirms the deep-rooted Castism of Indian society. He is astonished to see that even the metropolitan cities like Delhi are firmly grounded in Castism. The struggle that he has to undergo for a rented house not only depicts the difficulties of Dalits in the national capital but also throws light on the shackles in the feet of mother India that has nourished the dreams for being a world power. Village or city all are in the clutches of the monster of Castism. Most thinker neglect the presence of Castism in the cities but Madhopuri has brought forth a neglected area (Ram 210).

Struggle is a part of one's life. If a person does not adhere to the orthodox conventions of society he lives in, he ought to raise a voice against it. Education gave Madhopuri this voice, and in turn he became a crusader of the many voiceless:

I realized that life was a struggle and there was no escape from it. If I wanted to expand my horizons, I needed to put all the tumult within me into my writings. (209)

Dalits have been subjected to many hardships. *Changiya Rukh*, a history of humiliations, maps the partiality and discrimination met out to Dalits. Autobiographies are also the most prominent and saleable genre of Dalit literature. This book is a reflection of Indian society, rituals and social order. It is not only a Dalit autobiography but it also depicts human suffering. It explicates the notion that caste is determined by birth and does not end with death but passes from generation to generation. “Changiya Rukh is the story of Dalit angst, of deprivation, social exclusion and humiliation, as well as of resistance, achievement and hope” (Bhushan2). *Changiya Rukh* is a powerful comment on the Indian society. It describes the social history of the Dalits in Punjab, the caste conflicts and inequality. This is a real life story, a saga of victory emerging from humiliation, social exclusion, as well as a tale of resistance, achievement and hope.

The work is a testimony of the suffering and the internal anguish of the Dalit community of chamars in Punjab. It is not an individual person’s representation but it represents the entire lower community. Madhopuri’s narrative of his life struggle is not merely a record of the subjective perceptions of a Dalit. It also describes the social relations that have been changing after India’s independence and the objective conditions that existed in the past. Jaspal Singh says:

This autobiography appears at a time when a lot of social churning is taking place with far-reaching political consequences. Madhopuri in these 200 pages presents a short history of the Dalit situation in Punjab. (2)

The autobiography *Changiya Rukh* raises questions like, if being educated and knowledgeable makes us more tolerant towards these marginalized communities? Despite being a well-read intellectual, did the writer not have to change his house six times trying to escape the specter of castism? Our society has learnt a lot from western culture but has it actually been able to free itself from the clutches of castism? Is it not the case that the evil discriminating mind always rules over the kind notions of humanity in our society?

Works Cited

- Bhushan, Ravi. "Balbir Madhopuri's Changiya Rukh - A Critique of Dalit Identity and politics." *Language in India* Vol.11 (3 march 2011): n.pag. Web. 24 July 2011.
- Dil, Lal Singh. *Dastaan*. Ludhiana: Chetna Parkashan, 2009. Print.
- Madhopuri, Balbir. *Changiya Rukh*. Chandigarh: Lokgeet Prakashan, 2004. Print.
- Ram, Ronki. *Dalit Chetna: Sarot te Saroop*. Chandigarh: Lokgeet Parkashan, 2010. Print.
- Jaspal Singh. "Dalit's passage to consciousness." *The Tribune* 28 Sep 2003. Web. 25 July 2011.

Chapter III

***Joothan* – Fight against Injustice**

Omprakash Valmiki (1950) is a famous personality in Hindi Literature. He was born at Barla, Muzaffarnagar, UP in a poor family belonging to lower caste (Chuhra). Valmiki is best known for *Joothan*, his autobiographical account of growing up as a Dalit. It contests the claim that caste based discrimination is not prevalent in modern India.

Joothan, the first autobiographical account of schedule caste (Dalits) in Hindi literature not only represents the voice of the Dalits of Uttar Pradesh (UP) but also captures the anguish and pain of this marginalized community very poignantly. Valmiki's work exposes the social system, which has been responsible for inflicting pain on Dalits since ancient times and represents the gruesome reality of poverty in which a man cannot heave a sigh of relief. Gyan Prakash Vivek feels that illiteracy, superstition and poverty are like a disease:

In autobiography there are clouds of anger, fog of superstitions, and mental torture of inferior feeling. And poverty is spread like a disease. (Qtd in Bechain 164)

The word '*Joothan*' means scraps of food left after a meal. The title represents poverty, pain and humiliation of a lower class community and represents the gravity of the socio economic and cultural rift between the upper and the lower castes in Indian society. The writer uses the word '*Joothan*' as a metaphor for the deprived lower caste. It depicts the exploitation of Shudras. Valmiki states how people of his community have got used to collecting '*Joothan*' on the occasions celebrated by upper castes, of which they are never a part.

Valmiki's mother denies this and raises her voice for her right. She places the box full of scrape food in front of Sukhdev's house and walks away. After this incidence, this ritual of demanding food from their house stopped. '*Joothan*' awakens the expression of revolt in their community.

That night the mother goddess Durga entered my mother's eyes. It was the first time that I saw my mother get so angry. She emptied the basket right there. She said to Sukhdev Singh," Pick it up and put it inside your house. Feed it to the bridegroom's guests tomorrow morning." (21)

In this autobiographical work the writer presents a true and soulful picture of the life of outcastes. It raises the question, why more than 60 years after independence, untouchability is alive and thriving? Why Dalits are denied access or have restricted access to even the basic amenities of life, like water, shelter, food, education, etc? They work day and night, but in return they are faced with economic deprivation, violence and ridicule. Recalling his early life, Valmiki writes: The children of the Tyagis would tease me by calling me 'Chuhre ka' sometimes they would beat me without any reason. This was an absurd tormented life that made me introverted and irritable. (13)

The author in other words was tagged with a sobriquet 'Chuhre ka' which stayed with him his entire life.

Joothan presents a deplorable picture of social atrocities, narrow mentality and explores social harassment. The position of Dalits was worse than the animals. Valmiki compares the attitude of upper caste towards animals and lower castes. Telling about this discriminating behaviour, he writes:

Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, if one happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhras were not seen as human. They were simply things for use. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and then throw them away. (12)

As these prejudices were deeply imbibed in common man's mind, so even government initiatives to reduce untouchability were of no use. The country had gained independence many years ago and Gandhi's upliftment of the untouchables was resounding everywhere. On the official front the doors of the government schools had begun to open for untouchables but the mentality of the ordinary people had not changed much.

Valmiki's father had to literally beg Master HarPhool Singh for getting his son admitted in his school. But receiving education for Valmiki was not that simple. Students and teachers belonging to upper caste teased him. Sometimes they would beat him up and the teachers punished him for no reason at all. Valmiki says if they ever went out wearing neat and clean clothes, they had to hear their taunts that pierced deep inside like poisoned arrows. 'Abey, Chuhre ka, he has come dressed in new clothes.' If one went wearing old and shabby clothes, then

they would say, 'Abey, Chuhre ke, get away from me, you stink.' (3) Untidy environment, narrow lanes with foul smell come to be associated with Dalits.

It was not only the urban class but within the community also Valmiki had to tolerate abuses. Valmiki's own community too did not approve of their children receiving education. Valmiki talks about an incidence of Morna village in this text. When he goes with his father in Hiram Singh's Baraat, there a woman expresses her astonishment on education and learning of Hiram and Valmiki and believes that caste does not change on receiving education also:

The Chuhras progeny also study in the school? She said in surprise. 'How so ever much you study... you will still remain a Chuhra', she said, talking out her frustration, and went in. (43)

Valmiki's village, like any other was also divided on the conservative lines of caste system. In a sense education cannot wipe off the harm what years of cultural conditioning has done to engrain the negative tendencies in the minds of the people. The educated urban class too looks down on Dalits and cannot bear their proximity. Valmiki too, when he grew up, had to tolerate abuses at the hands of educated urbans. He along with his friend Kureishi felt humiliated at D.S.C. bungalow. The commandant who otherwise was in a good humour, stopped at once and grew silent on hearing the name "Valmiki",

Commandant Saheb met me with great warmth. He was delighted when he heard that I was from Barla. Before we had even sat down, he asked, 'Barla is a Tyagi village. Which caste are you from?' I looked at Kureishi whose face had changed colour. The moment I said that my caste was Chuhra, he became uneasy. Suddenly all conversation stopped, as though there was nothing left to talk about. (139)

Valmiki had to face vitriolic comments in his life from time to time. In childhood he had to face mental and physical torture often and at service he felt insulted. After completing his training of one year when Valmiki applied for a job, a high official who had good knowledge about 'Valmiki caste' was very upset and expressed his annoyance. But sensitive writers like, Dr. Sunita praises the author for using the word 'Valmiki' with his name because it is not an insulting word but it stands as an icon for one's own identity. She says:

Om Prakash Valmiki's autobiography- Joothan presents many heart touching contexts by which we know that what type of horrible troubles he faces during his schooling. (44-45)

Caste discrimination is prevalent everywhere. It was endured by the writer at his own home too. The author's real niece refused to acknowledge him in the class because of his surname Valmiki. It was enough to reveal his caste and she did not want everybody to know about this. A person remains the same irrespective of his surname but society does not show tolerance towards all castes:

If I had acknowledged in front of everybody that you are my uncle, then my classmates would know that I am a "Valmiki". You may be able to face it, I can't. What is the point of going around with the drum of caste tied around your neck? (153)

Even his wife had problems with his surname; she said adamantly, 'if we had a child, I would definitely have made you change your surname (151).' There are so many incidences in the writer's life responsible for causing disrespect and agony. Some of the writer's friends used to tease him by calling him 'educated fool':

He regards me as no better than an illiterate person because of my holding onto my surname. It is his contention that I am knowingly immersed in the 'Brahminist' swap. (156)

Valmiki deliberately used his caste as his identification mark. For this, he had to face confrontation from so many people. Everyone at school, college, his classmates, teachers and relatives teased him about the word "Valmiki".

What is so brave about that? After all he is a Chuhra. His surname spares us the hassle of asking what his caste is. (149)

Literary society that is meant for expressing emotions is itself bound in the chains of caste. Even literary scholars like Mohandas Naimishrayji hide their identification and insisted upon Valmiki to do the same. That means people are far from adopting the tenets of equality preached in literature. Valmiki narrates an incident when Naimishray asks him to be quite about his caste, so that they both can pass off as members of higher caste:

As we were climbing the stairs to the house, Naimishrayji said, 'How about introducing you just as "Omprakash"? I felt a jolt as I heard

him. I asked, 'why?' he does not know too much about me... he seems to be a good man... respects me a lot...still...Naimishrayji tried to clarify. (153)

Valmiki relates an incident, when he sent his story 'Jangalki Rani' based on tribal men background to a famous magazine. But the story did not get published in the magazine even after ten years, which means that castism exercises its sway over literature too and crushes the spirit of many new promising writers belonging to Dalit community:

Both copies of the short story came back to me in 1990 with a typed letter which said that we haven't been able to publish your story so far, but please send it back if you are willing to wait longer. (147)

In *Joothan*, Valmiki talks in detail about religion. He believes that religion is responsible for creating low self-esteem in a person and he grew averse towards religious chores. Although he made no arguments and used to keep quiet in front his father, but his heart brimmed with questions like, why should he worship that religion which never gave him an equal status?

But something came to a boil inside me, and I wanted to say, "Neither am I a Hindu." If I really were a Hindu, would the Hindus hate me so much? Or discriminate against me? Or try to fill me up with caste inferiority over the smallest things? I also wondered why one had to be a Hindu in order to be a good human being—I have seen and suffered the cruelty of Hindus since childhood. (54)

The custom of sacrificing innocent animals in the name of religion seemed inhuman to Valmiki. As his community was assigned the task of killing and clearing animals as per the requirements of upper castes, so he even had to kill some animals himself when he was forced by persons belonging to upper castes. This disturbed him mentally a lot. Contemplating on these rituals, Valmiki writes:

In the light of contemporary perspectives on animal sacrifice, how do such rituals supposedly promote religious exaltation? That the same thing should happen in Uttarakhand, called the land of the gods? For me, animal sacrifice is a symbol of a terribly inhumane and violent mind-set. (99)

Unlike Hindu religion, the society to which Valmiki belonged accepted widow remarriage. Valmiki since his childhood learnt to ignore the hopeless

principles of religion: “In our community widow remarriage was an accepted practice. Unlike the Hindu tradition; we did not see widow marriage negatively (22).” Such issues and the miserable experiences of his childhood turned him into an introvert and brought him face to face with the various aspects of life which made him lose all faith in any religion. “I would be alone, lost in myself, looking for myself in the deep layers of darkness. I became quiet and introverted (54).”

There are many instances in the autobiography which tell how small but unnecessary customs force Dalits to feel subjugated. One such custom was of ‘salaam’, where during marriage, Dalit bride or bridegroom had to go to houses of upper caste people where there in laws worked and they were given some food or money in return. This was a very humiliating practice. Valmiki had a first-hand experience of this degradation. Abuses gunned down on Dalits on occasion of “salaam” in Hiram’s marriage moved Valmiki internally. After this, he and his father committed themselves to stop this ritual/tradition. They stopped going to different houses for “salaam”:

Pitaji really broke the custom in our house. My brother Janesar and his wedding guests went to Rajopur, near Luxor. Pitaji refused categorically, saying, “My son will not go salaaming.” (44)

Caste based discrimination is not only prevalent in upper castes, but in lower castes also, different castes have different standing and treat each other as per that hierarchy. Omprakash Valmiki writes that there are so many categories in lower castes but Valmiki’s and Ramdasia’s caste are considered to be placed at the lowest. Even the washer man refused to press Valmiki’s clothes for the fear of him being considered an outcaste:

We don’t wash the clothes of the Chuhra-Chamars. Nor do we iron them. If we iron your clothes, then the Tagas won’t get their clothes washed by us. (28).

Valmiki says, in life poverty can be eliminated but ignoring caste is next to impossible for the mortal beings. The writer also brings to fore the traditional caste discrimination prevalent among Dalits. In Dalits also there are further sub-divisions and hierarchies on the basis of castes:

Babasaheb’s message had not reached the Mehtar *bastis* at all. Whatever little had trickled in had come packed in a casteist mold. Whenever I talked about it with a Mehtar, he looked at me in

surprise. Mehtars had respect for Babasaheb, but his followers had not been able to win their minds and hearts. They were Mehtars, placed at the very bottom of the social ladder. This feeling prevented them from joining the movement. They were suspicious of the Dalit leadership. (132)

Since high-low discrimination prevails, it becomes difficult for Dalits to be united on one stage. Valmiki raises this same issue that the problem of identification will persist as long as they do not unite on one level. In order that the ability and the works of Dalits get recognized, the educated Dalits began to write under pseudonyms, like Chanchal for Chandrail, Sood or Soodai for Sode, Parth for Parcha and Keswaal for Kesle. Behind all this, lies the pain of identification that is born due to inhumanness of castism. Their ability, wisdom is suspected which in turn cause them a lot of anguish and torture:

In these times of dire danger to our existence, when a man like me comes around with his caste-marker surname, all those people who want to hide their caste become wary. They feel that someone is letting out their secret. They find it easier to run away from the problem. But the truth is that change won't come about through running away. It will come about through struggle and engagement. (152)

In schedule caste (Dalits) people mostly accept their predecessors' profession and Valmiki also did so. But it was very dreadful for him to flay animals. He was filled with a deep disgust:

I skinned the bullock under Chacha's guidance. I felt! Was drowning in a swamp. I was being drawn into very quagmire that I had tried to escape from. The wounds of the torment that I suffered with Chacha on that hot afternoon are still fresh on my skin. (47)

Poverty is a very big issue which cripples a person. Many a times, persons have to leave their education due to poverty as they have no money to pay for fees and other expenses. Child labour also becomes a requirement to support the family. Valmiki himself had to struggle a lot for getting educated. His family was supportive of his ambition for study, but sometimes there was no money for this. At these times, there was big tension and dilemma about whether to continue the studies or to abandon it and look out for work. But generosity of one or the other

person in the family saved the situation. Valmiki narrates one incidence when his Bhabhi gave her anklet, which was part of very few ornaments that she had, to her mother-in-law for selling so that money can be arranged:

Ma was crying as loudly as ever. Bhabhi opened her tin box, took out the anklet and put it in Ma's hand. 'Sell it and get Lallaji admitted.'
(24)

Joothan, is a portrayal of abject poverty and its characters Dalits situated in it as mute and pathetic, unable to act or voice their anguish. The writer's colleagues commenting on his clothes used to disturb him mentally. It was very difficult to oppose the social atrocities inflicted on him and the only way out was to ignore it. He says,

I wanted to get away from them but they would not let me go. Some were pulling at my pants and others at my shirt. I entreated piteously, 'it will tear...please let go.' They laughed heartily at my rural accent. One of them asked, 'which village has your majesty arrived from?' their mockery stung me deeply. (85)

Dalit society and poverty go hand in hand. Wishes always get muffled in the wake of poverty. Valmiki's wish of getting higher education could not see the light of the day due to dearth of resources:

We had both gone and picked up the forms. But I didn't have enough money to pay the fees, and ended up not filling the form. Vijay had insisted, 'Come on, fill it out, I will borrow money from my father.' I had refused. So once again my ambition for higher education had come to naught. (104)

Life is an amalgamation of good and bad. The writer in his work presents a poignant portrayal of the hardships borne by the poor people in poverty. The writer describes how his family lives in a leaking house during heavy rains. First there was the problem of shelter and secondly they had to go without food for days:

That night a huge piece of our baithak had collapsed. Pitaji and Ma had not slept for a second. Many homes had fallen down in our basti. People were screaming and shouting. (31)

Poverty makes a man put on stake everything he possesses. In *Joothan* the incident of a woman compelled to serve her body to two men is beyond all comprehension and shakes us to the very core of our being:

The whole night was spent in this way. Sometimes Vedpal was in and sometimes his friend. How did that woman feel about it, I could not even imagine at that time... Did she come willingly? A woman surrendering to two men, even today my mind refuses to accept it. (69)

The writer by recalling these incidents and putting them paper once again has to relive endless number of miseries, torture and pathetic cries of people.

No doubt the writer shows admirable strength in tolerating the venomous attacks of the uncompassionate even years after it has happened. Once the writer fearlessly dons a sweeper's sweater after giving it a new colour, it is for the first time that he thinks of opposing the society:

The first day I wore it to college, the boys began to tease me by calling me a jamadar. Although the sweater did protect me from the winter cold, the taunts of the boys were even more piercing than the cold. (94)

Where untouchability is very effective, ability of a man is of no consequence. From a very early age members of this marginalized community are made to understand their position in the society. In school he was very intelligent but could not participate in cultural programs:

I was kept out of extracurricular activities. On such occasions I stood on the margins like a spectator. During the annual functions of the school, when rehearsals were on for the play, I too wished for a role. But I always had to stand outside the door. The so called descendants of the gods cannot understand the anguish of standing outside the door. (26)

The autobiography of Lal Singh also portrays similar conditions through which he has to undergo. The discriminatory behaviour borne by Valmiki at a cultural program is faced by Lal Singh Dil too. He was also sidelined in these cultural programs for his Dalit identity: "the day, drama was to be performed, I was left out" (28-29)

Valmiki in his work brings to fore the relationship of the teacher and the pupil. Valmiki's teacher often admonishes him for everything for that matter. One day when Valmiki questions the teacher as why the writers did not a single word on Dalits, he gets caned. Thus in our society Dalits are taught to remain

suppressed and silent. If one ever dares raise his voice he has to pay for that. Rajat Rani commented on *Joothan*. This can be prominently seen in *Joothan*, when Valmiki's father goes to the school and calls the headmaster a Dronacharya, and he links the twentieth-century caste relations to those that prevailed two thousand years ago.

A teacher plays an important role in the life of students. Student is like a raw soil that can be shaped in any mold and it all depends upon a teacher that what quality of education he/she imparts. There was never an ideal teacher in Valmiki's school life. He always encountered teachers speaking abusive language. Headmaster Kaliram punished Valmiki several times and abused him so as to make him realize his low status,

One day the headmaster Kaliram called me to his room and asked: 'Abey, What is your name?' Chuhreka? Headmaster threw his second question at me.' 'Ji.' All right...See that teak tree there? Go. Climb that tree. Break some twigs and make a broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is, after all, your family occupation. (14)

In our society, where Dronacharya award is given, it is expected of a student to be as obedient as casteless Eklavya. Instead of demanding the student's thumb in fee like Dronacharya the teacher compels Valmiki to perform toilet work. It means right from Dronacharya's time lines of division of caste were created. Even in our society, they confer Dronacharya award on a mentor of high stature, but the irony is that the teachers after inflicting all sorts of atrocities on their pupils compare themselves with Dronacharya when it comes to exploiting the low-caste pupils:

You illiterate boorish people, what do you know? Knowledge is not gained like this.' 'Hey, if he asked a Chuhra's progeny to sweep, what is the big deal in that?' 'He only got him to sweep; did not ask for his thumb in the *gurudakshina* like Dronacharya.' (16)

Where teachers are enclosed in narrow and limited boundaries, their students belonging to higher castes also follow the same tradition. Because of low-caste, Valmiki tolerated abuses from his class-mates. They made fun of him even if he dressed properly, and abused badly if anyhow found not dressed properly. His college life was also same full of caste based abuses. In his initial days of

college, his class mates used to tease him. But to how much extent, they can speak in front of writers' strong will:

Many boys in the class would make fun of my country looks. Since I was new in college and unfamiliar with its ways, I kept quiet. Even otherwise I was quite used to taunts and neglect. I feel amazed when I look upon those days and things I learnt to tolerate. How much my ability to tolerate hurts flung at me has taken out of me! (85)

In educational field, for the overall development of the student, free and calm mind is a basic requirement. But in reality, lower caste students are always under pressure. As their economic condition is usually very poor, so they are unable to get proper books, uniform etc. and for this they have to suffer public humiliation in front of their class mates. Their belonging to lower caste increases their problems manifold. In class Valmiki was continuously made to realize that he is a Dalit. In one instance, he was not permitted to give practical and because of this he failed. He writes:

When the results were announced, I was among the failures. I had good marks in all other subjects except chemistry. I had failed the lab tests. (81)

In spite of the education system harbouring caste prejudices among its students and making learning a rather humiliating experience for Dalit students, writers' father comes out as a heroic figure in imparting knowledge to his son against all odds. According to him, education imparts new understanding to an individual and it escapes from the boundaries of discrimination. His father protested firmly when a teacher threatened Valmiki for coming to school. His father challenges the teacher by saying that his son would study and that too in the same school:

You are a teacher... so I am leaving now. But remember this much, Master.... This Chuhre ka will study here...in this school. And not just him, but there will be more coming after him.'(16)

Valmiki says his father always instructed him. "You have to improve the caste by studying" (29).

This is like a mockery of the educated class confined in narrow thinking and the uneducated people on the other hand keeping the doors of their mind open to welcome new thinking and understanding. Many people tried to change

Valmiki's father's mind by saying that his son will become useless after education. But it was his father's belief, that education brings improvement in caste: "Pitaji had a different mindset. He wanted me to get an education. He had only one thing on his mind; improving the 'caste' (74)".

Valmiki talks about a section of the society which keeps Ambedkar far from the literary vision on the social level because if Dalit fraternity becomes aware about their life then they will also strive for a change. This same thing was present at Barla village of Uttar Pradesh, as there was no single book on Ambedkar in library, not in their syllabus, even none of any teacher ever talked about Ambedkar in class eleventh:

One day, when I was sitting in the library, looking at some books, Hemlal put a small book in my hand. As I was flipping its pages, Hemlal said, 'You must read this book.' The name of the book was *Dr. Ambedkar: A Biography*. Its author was Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu. (88)

Still, there is a feeling of hatred among the high class for Ambedkar. In *Joothan*, the writer explains about the incidence of the year 1984 of the village Malkapur in the Amarawati district, and this incidence is a symbol of narrow mindedness. It is narrow thinking of a teacher which compels him to order his students to detach chapter of Ambedkar from Marathi book. Although order was followed by the students, but it ended in a spark of revolt among the low caste students when they discussed about it outside the school:

In a Marathi textbook meant for class seven, there was a lesson on Dr. Ambedkar. All the students ripped out the lesson on the orders of a Brahmin teacher. The class had some Mahar students and they had felt that ripping out the lesson wrong. (135)

Joothan, the autobiographical work explores the inequality and narrow thinking prevalent in the society there is no such occasion portrayed where Dalits are being honored. The upper caste people, whether educated or uneducated, show indifference towards Dalits.

Joothan is a narrative encapsulating the Dalit trauma. It serves as a case study to explore the questions and issues left unanswered. It also explores the somatic dimension of trauma, atrocity and oppression. Valmiki takes the caste

system to be an assault on the body. He contradicts the usual opinion of upper caste who call India, a land of spirituality and varna system a blessing,

The stench was so overpowering that one would choke within a minute. If the people who call the caste system an ideal social arrangement had to live in this environment for a day or two, they would change their mind. (Valmiki 1)

Omprakash Valmiki aims to merge his autobiography with a combined voice of Dalit literary movement. It presents an important paradox of modern Indian life. *Joothan* describes the harsh realities and the degrading values of the upper caste:

The caste system is a burning reality of the Indian social system and has made a large number of people the victims of inhuman exploitation and persecution. Dalit writing aims at eradicating social discrimination and ushering in an egalitarian and democratic society and Valmiki's writing is a powerful thrust in this direction. (Dev, Tiwari, Khana 322)

It is because of caste that Valmiki, loses his first love, which is a big jolt to his heart. This type of cultural prejudices, instead of strengthening people's faith in each other and bringing them close, create a rift between them and severes the emotional bond. Everything is fine between Valmiki, but when his friend comes to know about his caste, her behaviour changes suddenly:

She started to cry, as though my being an SC was a crime. She sobbed for a long time. Suddenly the distance between us had increased. The hatred of thousands of years had entered our hearts. What a lie culture and civilization are. (119)

Valmiki's autobiographical work breaks a new ground and maps a new territory by assigning a place to the untouchable characters in a literary representation. The work brings out the pathos and anguish of the voiceless caste. The people of his caste did try to raise their voice on demanding their wages but were savagely beaten up by the people of upper caste. They even use government machinery to create fear in the minds of poor people, so that no one could have the courage to raise his/her voice against higher caste. Remembering one such incidence of public humiliation, Valmiki writes:

Those who had been captured from the basti were being made to stand like a rooster; a very painful crouched up position. Moreover they were being beaten with batons. (50)

Physical abuse against lower castes is a very common one. Even in the school, students belonging to lower caste are beaten mercilessly. Valmiki in his autobiography given many examples of upper caste cruelty. He criticizes the behaviour of some teachers who acted like executioners. Narrating such an incidence, he writes that at one time a number of students laughed in the class. But teacher tortured Surjan only because he belonged to lower section of society and was unable to oppose:

A comment he made that day is still etched in my mind like a scratch on glass, 'Abey brother-in-law, progeny of a Chuhra, let me know when you die. You think you are a hero. Today I am going to draw oil from your tresses. (61)

These downtrodden people have to suffer humiliation at every step of their life. They worked very hard in the fields, but in return, they were given very meagre wages. They try to resist and demand for higher wages, but due to absence of collective leadership and lack of awareness, usually they were forced to remain silent. At harvesting time, little quarrels over proper was a usual issue, but it resulted in nothing and there was no improvement in the condition of these helpless people:

The harvesting would often lead to arguments in the fields. Most of the Tagas were miserly when it came to paying wages. The reapers were helpless. (18)

Omprakash Valmiki acts as the mouthpiece of the victimized community in which he is born and records their travails and tormentations from an insider's point of view. He explains their humiliation and persecution in the society. According to the writer the pangs of day to day living in a Dalit's life are irresistible and painfully empirical. Valmiki says:

Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creations. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel and inhuman. And compassionless towards Dalit. (7)

Works Cited

- Bechain, Chobe. *Chitan ki Parmparaaur Dalit Sahitya*. Delhi: Navlekhan Parkashan, 2000. Print.
- Dil, Lal Singh. *Dastaan*. Chetna Parkashan: Ludhiana, 2009. Print.
- Namishray, Mohandas. *Dalit Patrkarita Sahitik evm Sanskritik Chitan*. Delhi: Shri Natraj Parkashan, 2008. Print.
- Nayer, Parmod.K. "Dalit Writing, Cultural Trauma and Pedagogy: The Testimony of Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan" *Academia edu* 2008: 51-65. Web. 25 May 2011
- Sunita. "Sahitmein Dalit ChetnakaVisphot". *Aajkal*. 2009: 45-46. Print.
- Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan*. New Delhi: Radhakrishna Prakashan, 1999. Print.

Valmiki shares his mental anguish and his emotional terror on several occasions with the readers. This is a result of one's firsthand experience of witnessing physical suffering. Pang moves from the external to the internal and Valmiki elucidates on it on a number of occasions. Valmiki's Joothan moves swiftly and constantly between individual and collective identities and trauma. Dalit writing is born out of brutal experiences. These are experiences shared by many Dalits across India,

What is important is that in the case of Dalits, there has been no visible self – representation of their trauma. Dalit trauma has always been represented by others, while the victims have themselves, always been silent. That is, there exists a gap between event (atrocities) and representation. Joothan is a stage in the representation of cultural trauma. Cultural trauma becomes visible when the persons who compose these oppressed/ injured put forward characterizations and representations of ongoing social events. Joothan brings to visibility the life of a Dalit lived-in rural and semi-urban India, where caste is the single dominant factor. (Nayer 4)

In Indian society a guest is revered and treated like a God. It is a great sign of Indian tradition. But the society excludes this marginalized category from any humane rule as Dalits are not even placed in the category of human beings. Asked about caste, if a Dalit speaks the truth then he will land himself in a big problem. Valmiki says that after hearing the word 'Chuhra', the old person feels aggressive and he gets up from the bed and starts to oppose. Times have changed but the mind set of people regarding caste have not witnessed any change:

I answered his question, 'We are of the Chuhra caste.' Both exclaimed together, 'Chuhra?' Lifting a heavy stick from underneath the charpai, the elder hit Bhikhu Ram on his back.(65)

Work assigned to lower castes under the varnas system is an indirect form of slavery. These persons are forced to do all kinds of chores without any sufficient payment. Even their children are forced to do work in the houses and fields of upper caste villagers. Omprakash Valmiki has a first-hand experience of this type of forced/bonded labour. During one of his examination days, he was forcefully made to work in the fields, but he could not do anything:

'Study at night... come with me. I have to sow cane.' Fauza ordered. I told him repeatedly that I had to study for my paper tomorrow, but he was adamant. He held me by the elbow and dragged me to his field. He threatened me to do the work or else. My mind was set aflame by his swearing. (72)

Valmiki suffered a lot because of being Dalit. Fauza Singh forcibly took Valmiki along with him to his fields for *begaar* during his exam days. As though this torture was not enough, another humiliation occurred at lunch time. At noon, mother of Fauza Singh placed food on Valmiki's hand from some distance so that her hands should not touch his hands. Her manner hurt Valmiki very much. He became very angry, threw his food and came back. This incidence not only affects him, but also affects his community members. They start to think about ending this type of humiliation and they start to refuse to perform *begaar* :

The incident affected the entire *basti*. People had started to refuse wage less work. Something was simmering, a change was about to take place. (73)

Leading life, in itself, turns out to be a formidable experience. According to Valmiki, literature cannot portray the poignancy of Dalits; only an insider can truly bring on paper the anguish which he alone can feel:

Literature can only imagine hell. For us the rainy season was a living hell. This terrible suffering of village life has not even been touched upon by the epic poets of Hindi. What a monstrous truth that is. (35)

Cruel form of social exploitation is clearly visible in *Joothan*, where humans no longer remain human, but are treated as animals. In literature, beautiful pictures are developed on rural life, but Valmiki portrays the other side of the story. Valmiki has elaborated on the ground reality drawn far away from the imaginary picture in his literature. For this reason he talks about Dalits' beauty instead of literary beauty:

The poem by Sumitranandan Pant that we had been taught at school, "Ah, how wonderful is this village life"—each word of the poem had proved to be artificial and a lie. What happened that day caused a storm inside me. Perhaps the seeds of Dalit poetry were germinating inside, preparing to sprout at the right time. It was

experiences like these that made me write the poem “Thakur ka Kuan” (The Thakur’s Well). (51)

In student life, when Valmiki got a chance to learn about Marathi Dalit literature, it imparted a spark to his thoughtful expression, “My reading of Dalit literature was beginning to change my notions about what is literature (111).” Thus literature has an important role to play in creating the awareness and consciousness among oppressed people.

On the whole, Omprakash Valmiki's biography *Joothan* is a conscious effort to put on paper, the pains and sufferings of the economically and socially weaker sections of the society. They are being discriminated in almost all spheres of life. Education system is also influenced by these prejudices and lower caste students have to face a lot of harrasment at the hands of their peers and teachers. In social life also, they are harshly treated. As per Valmiki, even educated and well-doing people are not free from this caste based narrow-mindedness. So, Valmiki provides a valuable critique of the social system of India which examines all aspects of social life.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

On the basis of detailed study of two Dalit autobiographies in the previous chapters, it can be said that autobiography is an important literary genre, especially for Dalit writers. Through essentially it is a story of an individual life and experiences, it often depicts the overall social conditions of a particular time and place. These social conditions begin their influence on a person from birth itself and continue to mould him/her till his/her death. On the other hand, individual also continuously strives to change his/her surrounding environment as per his/her ambitions. It is a continuous struggle between individual and society, which helps in the overall development of human civilization.

Reading of Dalit autobiographies suggests that all individuals do not get equal chance to participate in the society. In the Indian society particularly, a large number of individuals are discriminated against and are treated badly on the basis of caste and creed. Even after Independence, situation of these oppressed persons has not improved much. Majority of them are still at the margins of the society, unable to reap the benefits of free independent India. But their struggle to get their just place in the society is going on and there are many individuals who have overcome these obstacles in their different ways and are trying to change the course of history. Omprakash Valmiki and Balbir Madhopuri are examples of this type of individuals.

Omprakash Valmiki and Balbir Madhopuri both belong to the so called lower castes. With their force of determination, will to succeed and with the support of their community, they have risen from very inhuman conditions in their childhood to get past the caste barriers and have made a place for them in the society. They have written their autobiographies for sharing their struggles and to show the evils and prejudices of the society. These autobiographies show the miserable life of lower caste suppressed people and act as a critique of the prevalent values of Indian society urging for a change in the mindset.

Poet and critic, Omprakash Valmiki was born in 1950 in Barla village of Uttar Pradesh. His family belonged to *Chuhra* caste, considered untouchables by the higher caste *Tyagis*. He was the first boy from that outcaste colony who not only had the privilege to go to a school, but also passed high school examination. Later he became an engineer in an ordinance factory. By writing his autobiography *Joothan*, he has fulfilled his wish to narrate the painful experiences of a Dalit's life.

Poet, writer and translator, Balbir Madhopuri was born in 1955 in Madhopur, District Jalandhar of Punjab in a poor family belonging to *Chamar* (cobbler) caste. Facing immense difficulties, he managed to finish his education and found employment in the government sector. But, even then, he had to face lot of difficulties due to his lower caste. Title of his autobiography *Changiya Rukh* metaphorically signifies the feeling of helplessness felt by the most members of weaker sections of the society.

The present social system is in many ways unfavorable to Dalits and other marginalized communities. So both these writers use autobiography as a means to critique the prevalent social structures which are discriminatory. This discrimination starts from the very beginning of human life. In their early years, children do not know social boundaries and treat each other equally, but older people with their prejudiced behavior turn them into biased human beings.

Criticizing the prevalent caste discrimination in the education system, Valmiki remembers his school days when his teachers were fully under the grasp of casteism. They made every effort to stop his education. Even when Valmiki was allowed to enter the school, he was made to sweep the whole school with a broom. It is only with the persistent efforts of his father that he could continue his studies. Similarly, Madhopuri and other Dalit children were forced to do the household chores of their teachers while children of higher castes continued their studies.

This discriminating behaviour was not confined to school only. In the everyday life, people of higher caste did not approve education of lower caste children. They were worried that if all these lower-caste people get educated, then who will do their chores and that too without any payment? Valmiki was forced to do hard labour in fields even during his examination days. This shows that social evils have very deep roots and only constitutional provisions or laws cannot prevent these things. The mindset of people needs to be changed.

Hinduism is the dominant religion in India and caste based division is generally contributed to Hinduism, in which the people were divided into four *varnas* and Dalits were considered lowest of the low, untouchable and outcastes. In both these texts, there is a strong critique of Hinduism. Valmiki compares and criticizes the various practices associated with Hindu tradition. Similarly, Madhopuri clarifies in the beginning of his autobiography that his community does

not believe in horoscopes or giving of alms. In this way, he identifies himself and his community as different from Hinduism.

Modhopuri also criticizes the behaviour of Gurudwara managements. Sikhism does not endorse caste biases, but in reality, as Madhopuri shows, *granthies* (priests) of Gurudwaras treat people of upper and lower cast differently. Dalit children are not allowed to sit with others in the community kitchen, *langer*, and they are usually told to wait outside.

Poverty and Dalits are almost synonymous for these two authors. Dalits are denied equal rights to compete for education and employment. They do not have any other stable means of livelihood like land or business. So, most of them have to suffer the brunt of poverty throughout their lives. As a result, desire for good food, clothes, shelter becomes very prominent in Dalit literature. Both these writers remember their early days when they had to accept and eat 'joothan' or the left-overs of higher castes. As they were mostly forced to work without wages in social functions and other events, their only earning was usually leftover food. Though Dalit children cherish this leftover food to fulfil their hunger, they and their parents are degraded everyday by upper caste people for accepting and eating this food.

So, 'joothan' become a means to highlight the caste biases, and guts to resist this food become an important symbol of resistance. Valmiki's mother throws the leftover food given to her and Valmiki considers it a very important step in the direction of revolt. Similarly Balbir Madhopuri remembers his childhood days when he and his community members had to eat remains of sugarcane which was actually a waste product.

Question of identity is also a very important one in a caste based society. Relationships with lower caste cause lots of problems for Dalit people, but hiding caste identity is also not an option for lower caste people. Caste system is deeply involved in the social web of Indian society and curious people always find out about the caste. On the other hand, caste also provides some strength and power if used appropriately. So, Dalits are always in the dilemma of choice between these two options, whether to hide their identity or to prominently display it.

Omprakash Valmiki displays it prominently by suffixing his cast as his last name. For this, he has to face the anger of his family members also. On the other hand, Balbir Madhopuri sometimes adopts the middle path, where he and his wife try to hide their caste based identity for getting proper accommodation in the city,

but he also feels bad about it and wants to tell the truth. There are also examples of persons in his autobiography who have hidden their identity successfully.

Caste based discrimination and prejudices are not only confined to lower class or uneducated people. Criticizing the behaviour of so called social reformers or activists, Valmiki reveals the inner prejudices which come to light now and then. When people come to know about the lower caste of these people, their behaviour immediately changes. They also do not attend family or social functions organized by these lower caste people.

Social critique is not only about showing negative tendencies of a certain social system. There should be some roadmap, guidelines or directions in which society should proceed so as to become a better society. On the basis of analysis of these two autobiographies, it can be said that education has a very important role to play in the growth of marginalized people. They have to face a lot of difficulties, but ultimately they are able to break the caste barrier and also become free from the traditional work assigned to a particular community.

On the basis of education acquired, Omprakash Valmiki got a good employment. He also came across the writings of social reformists and became aware of the inherent problems and partialities of Indian caste system. Similar is the case of Balbir Madhopuri. He becomes a literary figure and becomes editor of a reputed magazine. Although, mostly it is their individual progress, but they also become a symbol of hope for their community and work for their community by giving voice to their feelings.

Role of certain individuals/family is also very important in this unending struggle against society. From the autobiography *Joothan*, it can be inferred that Omprakash Valmiki's parents had a great role in his life. From the beginning, his father emphasized the importance of education so as to improve his status. Similarly, Madhopuri's father motivates him to study so as to remove the poverty of his family. Small but significant fights against inequalities and injustice are also fought by their parents and every change had a considerable impact on the whole community of their village. Valmiki's mother rejects '*joothan*' given to her by upper-caste people in a contemptuous way. Valmiki's father stops the humiliating tradition of '*Salaam*' at the time of Dalit marriages.

So, on the whole, it can be said that Dalit autobiographies act as an important site of resistance. Dalit writers use their life narratives to foreground the

prevalent biases in the contemporary Indian society. Both *Joothan* and *Changiya Rukh* present a critique of the caste system based on first hand experiences.

References

Primary Sources

- Madhopuri, Balbir. *Changiya Rukh*. Chandigarh: Lokgeet Prakashan, 2004. Print.
- Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan*. New Delhi: Radhakrishna Prakashan, 1999. Print.

Secondary Sources

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Delhi: Akash press, 2007. Print.
- Anderson, Linda. *Autobiography*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- "Autobiography." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd Edition. 1989. Print.
- "Autobiography." *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of English literature*. Vol-I. 1953. 74.
- "Autobiography." *Collier's New Encyclopedia*. Vol.3. New York: P.F.Collier & Son Company.1962.
- Bagul, Baburao. *Dalit Literature is but human literature*. ed. Arjun Dangle. Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009. Print.
- Banerjee, Himadri. *Letter*. Ambedkar times.com. 20 march 2010. Web. 25 Dec. 2010.
- Beth, Sarah. "Dalit Autobiographies in Hindi: The Transformation of Pain into Resistance." *18th European conference on modern south Asian studies, at Lund 6-9 July 2004 Sweden*. Swedish South Asian Studies Network/Lund University. Web. 15 Dec. 2010.
- Betterton, Kathleen. *Teach Yourself to Write*. London: Hodder and Stoughton for the English Universities Press, 1942. Print.
- Bechain, Dr. Shoraj Singh, Dr. Devendra, ed. *Chitan Ki Parmpra aur Dalit Sahitya*. Bihar: Navlekhan Prkashan. Print.
- Bechain, Chobe. *Chitan ki Parmparaaur Dalit Sahitya*. Delhi: Navlekhan Parkashan, 2000. Print.
- Bhikhu, Parekh. *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*. New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1989. Print.
- Bhushan, Ravi. "Balbir Madhopuri's Changiya Rukh- A Critique of Dalit Identity and Politics." *Language in India* Vol.11 (3 march 2011): Web. 24 July 2011.
- Biasing, Mutlu Konuk. *The Art of Life: Studies in American Autobiographical Literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977. Web.
- B,Prasad. *A Background to The Study of English Literature*. Calcutta: Macmillian Childrens Books, 1969. Print.
- Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1967. Print.
- Chandra, Sudhir. "Metaphor of Suffering". *The first all India Dalit writer conference*. ed. Bojja, Tharakam. Hydrabad: A.P., 1994. Print.

- Coburn, Kathleen. *The Notebooks of S.T. Coleridge*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957. Print.
- Dangle, Arjun, ed. *Dalit Literature: Past, Present and Future in Poisoned bread*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1992. Print.
- Dev, Anjana Neira, Bajrang Bihari Tiwari, Sanam Khana. *Indian Literature: An Introduction*. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2006. Print.
- "Diary." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 7.1964. 365.
- Dil, Lal Singh. *Dastaan*. Ludhiana: Chetna Parkashan, 2009. Print.
- Gunn, Jannet V. *Autobiography: Towards a Poetics of Experience*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984. Print.
- Huddart, David. *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography*. London and America: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Khandekar, Tarachandra. "Literature of Revolt and Resurgence". *The First All India Dalit Writer Conference*. ed. Bojja, Tharakam. Hyderabad: A.P, 1994. Print.
- Kumar, Raj. *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2010. Print.
- Limble, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit literature: Histories, Controversies and Considerations*. Trans. Alok Mukherjee. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2004. Print.
- Mukherjee, Arun Prabha. "Joothan: A Dalit Literary Text." *Hindi Language Discourse Writing 4* (April-June 2010): 25-31. Web.
- Naipaul, V.S. *India: A Wounded Civilization*. Canada: Penguin, 1979. Print.
- Namishray, Mohan. *Dalit Patrkarita Sahitik evm Sanskritik Chitan*. Delhi: Shri Natraj Parkashan, 2008. Print.
- Nayer, Parmod.K. "Dalit Writing, Cultural Trauma and Pedagogy: The Testimony of Omparkash Valmiki's Joothan" *Academia edu* 2008: 51-65. Web. 25 May 2011.
- Mukherjee, Arun Prabha. "Joothan: A Dalit Literary Text." *Hindi Language Discourse Writing 4* (April-June 2010): 25-31. Web.
- Olney, James, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical & Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Print.
- . *Conditions & Limits of Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Print.
- . ed. *On Writing Autobiography: Studies in Autobiography*. U.S.A: Oxford University Press. 1988. Print.

- Pascal, Roy. *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960. Print.
- Ram, Ronki. *Dalit Chetna: Sarot te Saroop*. Chandigarh: Lokgeet Parkashan, 2010. Print.
- Ramana, Paramjit Singh. "Reading and Translating Gurdial Singh's Autobiography". *South Asian Ensemble* 2.1 (2010): 103-115. Print.
- Rakesh, Sheeba. "Translating Amrit Lal Nagar's Nachyo Bhut Gopal: Some Considerations - Casteist and Linguistic." *The Criterion* 2.2 (June 2011). Pdf.
- Rasila, Dr. Kadia. *Atmakatha: Swaroop Ane Vikas*. Amdavad: Sadbhav Prakashan.1985. Print.
- Rev. of *Joothan*, by Maggi Ronkin. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64.2 (2005): 504-505. Web. 24 May 2011.
- Robert, Elbaz. *The Changing Nature of The Self: A Critical Study of The Autobiographic Discourse*. London: Croom Helm, 1988. Print.
- Sayre, Robert F. *The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry Farms*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1988. Print.
- Sexene, Ravi. "The Dalit Question Reading Godan and Joothan as Narratives of Dalit Protest." *Punjab University Research Journal (Arts)* xxxvi. (Ap-Oct.2009): 90-112. Print.
- Shipley, Joseph.T. *Dictionary of World Literature: Forms, Criticism, Technique*. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2008. Print.
- Singh, Jaspal. "Dalit's Passage to Consciousness." *The Tribune* 28 Sep. 2003. Web. 25 July 2011.
- Sodhi, Meena. *Indian English Writing: The Autobiographical Mode*. New Delhi: Creative Books,1999. 20. Print.
- Sunita. "Sahit Mein Dalit Chetnaka Visphot". *Aajkal*. 2009: 45-46. Print.
- Waldo, H. Dunn. *English Biography*. New York: Dutton & Co, 1916. Web. 10 May 2011