

## DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES TELLING THE PAINS

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### ABSTRACT

*An autobiography is a tale of self analysis and experiences. It is deeply rooted in the most memorable as well as the toughest moments of life. Focusing on Dalit literature, it is beyond imagination that the problem of the Dalits treated as outcasts was major in the history of India. People like Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar worked with the straightforward attitude to emancipate the Dalits. There are multiple authors who are worth mentioning for their writing for Dalits. Siddalingaiah is also one of the India's foremost Dalit writers. He has written Ooru Keri first in Kannada language as an article in the Kannada magazine Rujuvatu; Sharan Kumar Limbale's The Outcaste is about an untouchable family in general and community struggle. Thus, this article is targeting some prominent aforesaid authors for throwing light on the plight of Dalits in the past and in the present.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Upper Caste, Lower Caste, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, Endogamy, Leather Worker, Lavatory Cleaners, Rickshaw-Pullers, Peasants, and Cookies*

### INTRODUCTION

“Autobiography seems to depend on actual and potentially verifiable events in a less ambivalent way than fiction does. It seems to belong to a simpler mode of referentiality (...) but are we so certain that autobiography depends on reference, as a photograph depends on its subject? (...) We assume that life produces an autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest with equal justice that the autobiographical project may itself produces and determines the life. Whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined in all its aspects by the resources of his medium?”<sup>i</sup>. An Autobiography is a self-told story and reflects the personality and administration of a person. While studying about a particular subject, especially Literature, it plays a significant role to create an understanding of the subject. According to the Webster's dictionary, the origin and definition of Autobiography is 1) ‘The art or practice of one's own biography or 2) The story of one's own life written or dictated by oneself. “Origin of autobiography: Auto+ biography: coined in 1809 by Robert Southey”<sup>ii</sup>, but it is said that in 1797 William Taylor used the word ‘Autobiography’ first time in ‘The Monthly Review’. After the use of this word by William Taylor it is suggested that the word is appreciated as a hybrid one but condemned with its “pedantic” use. However, its next recorded use was in its present sense, by Robert Southey in 1809”<sup>iii</sup>. Autobiography is subjective and personal. The author recalls the self-history. The author gives the ability to create self-history in an autobiographical writing. Many times, we find author's story written in the autobiography is not real. Autobiography is a self-analysis and interpretation of the self – experiences. Through autobiography, a human gives hope, desire, fear, and aspiration. James Baldwin commented on autobiography, “One writes out of one thing only is one's own experience. Everything depends on how

relentlessly one forces from this experience, the sweet and bitter, it can possibly give. This is the only real concern of the artist to recreate out of the disorder of life in that order which is art.”<sup>iv</sup>

Thus from long back, the art of autobiography has become a new area for research. The author expresses self-identity, self-struggle, and inner thought. “An autobiography is a review of a life from a particular moment in time, while the diary, however reflective it may be moving through a series of moments in time.”<sup>v</sup> W.J. Haworth has described autobiography “To write one’s autobiography is at least a strategic beginning, whether a part of a master plan or born of frustration and person anxiety”<sup>vi</sup>

According to Advance Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, the word ‘Autobiography’ means “The study of a person’s life written by that person”<sup>vii</sup>. Modern autobiography defined by Bruce Mazlish is interpretation through the psychoanalytical process “a literary genre produced by romanticism, which offers us pictures from a specific viewpoint of a coherent shaping an individual’s past, reached by means of introspection and the memory of a special sort, wherein the self-links with knowledge of the external world, and both together provide us with a deep and true grasp of reality”<sup>viii</sup>

According to Michael Mckeon, “Life and literature are inseparable from each other. Literature is not only a reading material but also a part of good quality life that one would like to live along with this proportion and relationships which one would like to share with others. Autobiography turns biography inward”<sup>ix</sup>

Autobiography has become the main part of Literary Art. It is roughly divided into four parts: Firstly, Spiritual autobiography- Spiritual autobiography is a ‘religious autobiography’ in which it describes struggle and journey towards God of the author as the author want to get the divine spirit. The religious autobiography stays connected to the account of the church, priest, Christian majority, and relationship to God. Augustine’s “Confessions” is a good example of spiritual autobiography, and "An autobiography" written by Mahatma Gandhi is an Indian religious autobiography in the context of India. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, some best example of religious autobiographies can be found; for instance: *A True Description (1663)* by Edward Borough, *Heart Opened by Christ (1654)* written by Richard Farnsworth; John Peters wrote a beautiful account in “*A Brief Narration of Life (1709)*”. “*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*” has been written by John Bunyan in 1666, it is the year of the great fire in London. In comparison to an autobiography, it is found that a Memoir is different from an autobiography. An Autobiography only focuses on a person’s life and the time span but a Memoir includes emotions, feelings, and memories too. Sometimes the author also describes the public exploit in the memoir; such type of autobiography is generally written by a political leader or by a military leader as they generally describe their life experiences in it; Thus this is the second type autobiographical work; for instance Julius Caesar’s “*Commentaries de Bello Gallico*” is a find example of it. The Third category is Fictional autobiography; it is a kind of novel in which a fictional character as a first-person narrator tells the story of his and her internal and external life experiences. Charles Dickens’s “*David Copperfield*”, Daniel Defoe’s “*Moll Flanders*” and *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger are some good examples of modern fictional autobiography.

The most modern and famous Indian autobiography written by an Indian is “*The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*” in 1951 by Nirad C. Chaudhuri; Jawaharlal Nehru also wrote “*An Autobiography*”; Babur represented himself in “*Baburnama*” in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; Santabai Kamble wrote ‘*Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha*’ in 1983; Vijay Kumar Singh wrote “*Courage and Conviction*” in 2013. Kamala Surayya’s “*Ente Katha*” in 1973. Satyajit Ray’s “*Jakhan Choto Chilam*” in 1982; Sachin Tendulkar wrote “*Playing It My Way*” in 2014; Milkha Singh wrote “*The Race of My Life*” in 2013;

Jahangir's work *Tuzk-e-Jahangiri* was written in 1863; Sir A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's "*Wings of Fire*" in 1999. Khushwant Singh's "*Truth, Love & a Little Malice*" 2002. Saniya Mirza also wrote a wonderful autobiographical note '*Ace Against Odds*' (2016).

The social system of India is different from the world. As the Rule of social structure is very strict in Hinduism, it is divided into four Varna –Brahamin, Vaishya, Kshatriya and Shudra. They were based according to their profession but gradually with the passage of time this system has been lost. After this, the society is generally divided into caste and sub-caste. "*The Origins of the Caste system* tells the long-held theory about the origins of South Asia's caste system, Aryans from central Asia invaded South Asia and introduced the caste system as a means of controlling the local populations. The Aryans used to define the key roles in society, and then assigned groups of people to do it"<sup>x</sup>.

The caste system has control on Indian population like social, political, religious, and economic life. The caste system is very complicated in India. A man is known by caste not by successes and failure. The caste system is permanent because of the social unity and the rules of religion. Ketkar gives a description of the caste - "A caste is a social group having two characteristics- First Membership is confined to those who are the born members of a group and the second is that the members who are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group. According to Bettrille- "caste is a small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit of the tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system".<sup>xi</sup>

'Caste' is a very important element of Indian society. As soon as a person is born, 'Caste' determines his or her destiny. Being born is not under the control of a person. If it were in one's control, then why would I have been born in a Bhangi household? Those who call themselves the standard-bearers of this country's great cultural heritage, did they decide which home they would be born into? Albeit they turn to scriptures to justify their position, the scriptures that establish feudal values instead of promoting equality and freedom.<sup>xii</sup>

Majumdar writes about caste, "If a member of people constitute a group, not because of physical togetherness but because they have some common interests and common ways of doing things, as a consequence of which stratification of society in to higher and lower groups emerges, then these groups may be called status groups..... that is, if anybody can become its member by fulfilling certain prerequisite conditions, like obtaining a degree, or paying an admission fee, or learning a particular income, the status group may be called a class. The restrictions of the term class are to mean an income group which has no sociological sanction: such group is properly called an economic class. If the recruitment is not free, that is, a status group is not open to anybody, but only those who are its member have certain ascribed attributes which cannot be acquired by others, then it is called caste".<sup>xiii</sup> G.H.Ghurye defines caste and describes six characters of its.; "Endogamy, Hierarchy, Restrictions on consensual relations between castes, Restriction on choice of occupation, Civil and Religious disabilities and privileges of certain groups, and the social vice of the concept untouchable. It follows that membership is fixed for life because the individual cannot alter his caste by any effort of his own. Further, he makes a distinction between caste societies and class societies by arguing that the status of a person in a caste society depended not on his wealth as in the classes of modern Europe, but on the traditional importance of the caste in which he had the luck of being born."<sup>xiv</sup> J.H. Hutton points out that "caste provides the individual members with a fixed social milieu, a prominent body of association which controls almost all his behavior and contacts".<sup>xv</sup>

Dalit Literary movement is not just a literary movement. It is also a cultural and social movement. Dalit society has been imprisoned for a thousand years in the dark mist of ignorance, deprived of knowledge. Dalit literature is the portrayal of the wishes and aspirations of these oppressed and tormented Dalits<sup>xvi</sup>.

Daya Pawar is the first Dalit autobiography writer in Indian Dalit Writing. He wrote '*Baluta*' in which he presents stigma of untouchability and tyranny of caste. He feels himself that the caste system is not good for human beings. '*Upara*' is the best autobiography written by Luxman Mane where he shows poverty of the Kaikadis communities. Laxman Gaikwad is prominently a great Marathi Novelist. He presents his life story through his autobiographical novel '*uchalaya*' also known as Ucalaya. He described Bamta community and poverty and political hunger;

"But at home, we nearly were starving. Sometimes, there was no food in the house for four or five days. Sometimes we cooked broken or coarsely ground grain, but mostly it was grain and there were many mouths to feed. At intervals, we bought a kilo of milo from a ration shop. It was full of worms and insects, but we were so hungry that we greedily drank that hot, insect-ridden gruel without ever bothering to filter out the bugs. Each of us received for large spoons of that thin gruel. I used to drink my gruel and also some of the shares of Anna and Bhau. Hence I never sat for meals without them. I would keep watch when Anna and Bhau sat for their gruel I sat with them. My sister –in –law did not like this –they got angry because I ate their husband's shares –but still, I sat with them like a shameless fellow. When Bhau and Anna did not give any of their shares, I would rub my plate and lick my hands, and then lick the plate with my tongue. I used to stare at Bhau's and Anna's gruel greedily, so even when they were hungry they angrily offered me some of theirs, muttering, 'Lakshimanya is like a curse'. Even then my hunger would not be fully satisfied; I would scrape whatever was stuck of the bottom of the pot and eat that, too. I never got even a single full a day.

Example of the women writer Baby Kamble's *Jin Amuch* (such is our life). This not only describes the life but also describes 'social epiphanies'. The canvas depiction of the social, cultural, political process of marginalization is wide enough. Another famous Dalit woman writer Bama presents her life experiences from the early childhood in '*Karukku*'. She tells pain and suffering of a Dalit woman. A woman is tortured by gender, caste, and religion. Other modern Dalit authors who wrote autobiographies are Narayan surve, Namdeo Dhasal, and Daya Pawar who wrote poetry. There were Marathi poets and Marathi poetry was written in a new tone and power. We can say that the Dalit literature established through Marathi literature. It is clear that we find Dalit experience and expression in Marathi literature. Arun Kolatkar, Dalip Chitre, and Balchandra Nemade were poet and novelist and presented the little Magazines. After publishing many autobiographies, Sharan kumar Limbale wrote a best autobiography '*Akkarmashi*' in 1984.

Limbale wrote an article..."Chronicle of a Fatherless being". "I have sown the events, incidents, and experience from my life of twenty seven years...This is the story of my life, an expression of my mother's agony and an autobiography of a community. Being fatherless is as much my fate as it is to be in a general ward (in the hospital) of suffering."<sup>xvii</sup>

In the preface to the first print of *Akkarmashi*, He wrote:

Every time the dominant classes attack and exploit the weak, they violate their women. They sexually exploit the men among the wicked exploiters draw legitimacy from their authority, wealth, society, culture and religion. But what of the exploited woman? She has to carry the rape in her womb. That rape has to be borne, fed and reared. And this rape acquires and lives a life. My autobiography holds in it the agony of such a life. My experiences are my words. What will remain there if you take the experience away from a life? A living corpse.<sup>xviii</sup>

An Autobiography of the Sharan kumar Limbale is compared to the Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or Jean Genet's *A Thief's journal*. "The autobiography concludes with these questions: 'why has this complex of moral establishment been created at all ? Who created morality and immorality? If my birth and life are being branded as immoral, what morality do I follow?'"<sup>xix</sup> The author is searching these questions for which he couldn't get the answer. For the present study, Four autobiographies have been selected through 1)Narandra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir*;2)Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri*; 3)Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, and 4)Sharan kumar Limbale's *The Out Caste: Akkarmashi*.

The novel *Outcaste: A Memoir* by Jadhav is a dramatic piece of writing that forces to acknowledge the inhumanity and injustice of a social order that treats people worse than an animal. It is an expanded version of Narendra Jadhav's best-selling Marathi novel *Amcha Baap Amhi*, meaning '*Our Father and Us*' written in 1993. In the novel by Jadhav, the author examines the issues, which are so deep and penetrating in a manner, which is poignant. From one angle, it is an attack on the social structure of Hindu society. If this study with a different angle we find, it is a call made to unite all the oppressed and humiliated people to empower themselves by devoting themselves to education and finally to stand as one nation of brotherhood to fight against tyranny, subjugation, slavery, oppression and those who perpetuate and sponsor the notion of birth defined elitism which is not only irrational and illogical but also ridiculous.

Regarding *Ooru Keri*, it is true that *Dalits* have not escaped from the clutches of the blind faith. They are not God-loving but a God-fearing people. The sufferings and humiliations are an integral part of the *Dalit* struggle. As a result of this, Siddalingaiah is forced to live a neglected life and carry out the traditional roles without proper welfare.

*Joothan: A Dalit's Life* is an autobiography of the untouchable by a untouchable and yet not merely for the untouchable but for everyone's reading. Valmiki's narrative voice in "*Joothan: A Dalit's Life*", brims with a sense of outrage at what he had to endure himself as a human being.

**Sharan Kumar Limbale's** *The Outcaste* is about an untouchable family in general and community struggle. The innocent Dalit couple Kamble and Masamai are discriminated and exploited. They work for Hanmantha Limbale who ruins them and the couple gets separated. Kamble leaves with his two sons and remarries a widow, whereas Masamai stays back as a keep of Hanumantha and gives birth to Sharan Kumar. Limbale states that to be born beautiful among Dalits is a curse. As Masamai was beautiful, she was lured by Hanmantha. She was separated from her husband and suffered greatly in her post-widowed life Limbale says,

"Only a mother and the earth can accommodate and stomach everything."

## CONCLUSIONS

Though it seems that the matter or any issue related to the outcastes is not new, but it is still very serious as per the details given by some of the renowned authors. It is sensed that there are several hidden issues related to caste discrimination which still exist in the society and need attention for further improvement.

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