Chapter IV: A Cultural Study of Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri*
4.1. Introduction:

Siddalingaiah is 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, and the English translation by Dr. D. R. Nagaraj [editor and critic] came out in the magazine section of Deccan Herald during 1995. With five parts of nostalgic memories, Ooru Keri was again translated by S.R. Ramakrishna [Founder and Editor, The Music Magazine] in 2003 and was published as Dalit autobiography. Siddalingaiah’s Ooru Keri portrays his life-long-struggles with poverty, hunger, and humiliations in the village Magadi of Karnataka. Ooru is the place (village, a town) where all non-Dalit castes- from the Brahmins and the land-owning castes to the service castes like the barbers- live, and it contains the settlement’s main temples. Keri is the place where Dalits live; it is geographically separated from the main body of a village; socially, it is set off from the mainstream society. Therefore, the principle aim of this chapter is to focus on the cultural study of Siddalingaiah’s Ooru Keri as a Dalit text. It can be interpreted and analyzed under the following points:

➢ A cultural study of siddalingaiah’s Ooru Keri:
➢ The life experiences of pain i.e. cultural assertion:
➢ Self-identity and roots of dalit’s humiliation and injustice:
➢ Rejection to traditional hindu culture and acceptance to buddhist culture:
➢ Summing up:
4.2. Cultural Study of Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri*:

Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri* exposes bitter truth, and anxiety of Dalits in Karnataka state. His autobiography portrays his life-long struggles, atrocities, caste discrimination and poverty. Thus, the present research has done cultural study of Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri*.

4.2.1. House Structure:

By traditionally, village has various lanes which have represented Indian caste system. But there was no place of Dalit in lane of village; they have thrown out of the village. In relation to this, Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri* begins with same view: ‘Ours was the last house in the colony.’ [Siddalingaiah: 2003: 1] His house was last in the village, its roof had collapsed. It was made by mud and slight high which shows that how Dalits are backward. He further narrates regarding to his house: ‘Our house was very small. It was not enough for four or five people to sit comfortably, lleave alone seep.’ [Ibid: 70] Due to economic troubles, his family migrated from place to place. Graveyard settlement was one of the migration places, where he lives out of house. It shows that Dalits have no firm address, they are migrate states.

4.2.2. Living and Thinking:

Living and Thinking is the state of mind and society. Dalits have no think tank like other community. They lives simply and wore old and torn clothes. Regarding to this, Siddalingaiah narrates: ‘Occasionally, Ainoru also give me some old, tattered shirts and pants that his son had discarded. I was younger than his son, and the clothes fitted me very loosely. Yet I wore them folded up, looking odd among my companions.’ [Ibid: 3] Dalits, thus, lives like animal which has no logical power.
4.2.3. Food:

Food plays a fundamental role in Dalit society. Once, Siddalingaiah’s father Dyavanna took him to an orthodox Brahmin house. Land-owner gave them previous night's leftover. Siddalingaiah never saw and ate a complete food like the leftover. Therefore, he narrates: ‘When Appa, Avva and I went town and stood in front of his house, he gave us the citranna and poori leftover from the previous night. I had never tasted these delicacies before.’ [Ibid: 2-3] Though he stood in the front of door, but his concentration was at leftover.

Similar incident can be seen in Baby Kamble’s The Prisons: We Broke, when Yeskar Mahar roam for collected a bundle of stale food and returned home, where everyone waiting to taste the leftover:

**When he stood at the door of the high caste house, he was forbidden to call out. He had to sound the bell on his stick thrice. . . . His entire family would dine on this food. . . [Kamble: 2009: 75]**

It shows that how Dalits state was worst. Siddalingaiah further describes the pitiable conditions of the Dalit community who starve for daily bread: ‘That was a time of drought everywhere. People had to struggle even for a morsel of food. Some threw ceremonial fests to appease the rain god. During fests, the Holeyas were made to sit in a corner. We were noticed only after people of the upper castes had been served. I felt contented with whatever little food came my way, and wouldn’t think much about the discrimination.’ [Siddalingaiah: 2003: 7]

Famine and natural disasters affect all people equally, but Dalits were considered the last beneficiaries. Due to famine, Siddalingaiah’s family moved to Bangalore and his father worked in nearby firewood depots to run the family. Siddalingaiah joined a government primary school where he admitted to third standard. By inspiring and given support to Andalamma, Brahmin teacher, he settled at a slum area called Srirampura in Bangalore.
and began to concentrate on his study. There everyone has his own problems and quarrels. One day, there was quarrel took place in between father and son. All of a sudden, son loses his temper and said: ‘Why did you father me if you can’t take care of me? his father would retort equally hotly, ‘If I knew a worthless fellow like you would be born, I would never have fathered you.’ [Ibid: 37] Regarding to wretched condition of Dalits, Siddalingaiah further narrates: ‘Some women would shout loudly to their husbands, why did you get married when you can’t bring home enough to feed us? Silence was the men’s answer. Some little children beat up their parents when they felt hungry.

A boy called Ramu hadn’t the least respect for his father. When people asked him (Ramu) about his father’s health, he would say indifferently, He isn’t dead yet. [Ibid] It means though Daits married but they couldn’t solved the subject of food. Siddalingaiah’s mother fixed the name to R. Gopalaswamy Iyer, a Dalit hostel in Srirampura. She herself works as a sweeper there. Every day after the hostel boys were served, the leftover was given to the workers. She used to take home the mudde, and saru (meal), it solves the food problem of Siddalingaiah’s family.

The food served at hostel was not enough to fill stomach. Therefore, there was quarrel takes place in between boys for leftover meal. In relation to this, Siddalingaiah narrates: If there was any mudde left, the practice was to serve all those sitting in line. They used to call his extra. Very young refused it. Older boys would rush in and reserve seats for younger boys.’ [Ibid: 47] In relation to this, Siddalingaiah wrote a bunch of poetry around this time. The quality of hostel food was cheap. Therefore, he has written a poem about it.

It began like:

\[
\text{Koduvaru namage jola, Kadime haakuvaru kaala,}
\]
\[
\text{Aaguttade rakta bedhi, Aadaroo kodallaru ragi godhi.} \]

[Ibid: 61]

It means hostel given them maize, and very little gram. Due to that blood goes in their motion, yet they refuse their ragi and wheat. However, Siddalingaiah’s self-survival and
progress show that he was a representative of Dalit people whose life is surrounded with poverty and struggle.

4.2.4. Occupation:

Siddalingaiah’s parents were uneducated and worked as farm labourers. Ainoru’s field was only income source for them. However, they worked in their land. They worked as cultivate the Ainoru’s land on the basis of sharecropper. When his parents went away to work, the work of Siddalingaiah was taken care of the house. At the evening, he would look for the hens and put them under the coop. He was to make a light in his house. His family belongs to farm labourers and gets low-income, sometime nothing. He grows up like any Dalit wanton boys- humiliated and unable to comprehend why his family was made to suffer. His early memories, he said, were of how his father was unable to find work in Magadi, causing the family to move finally to Bangalore. Being as citizen of Bangalore, his father worked in nearby firewood depots to run the family. His people used to go Shivanahalli tank and collected tuber, yams, and greens to make night meal. They are their main food. The people of his colony got into debt by Marwadi shop. Many times they even failed to pay the interest upon the debt.

In this way, Siddalingaiah’s father became a huge debtor. In spite of miserable poverty, Siddalingaiah attended free night-school. He began to realize self-respect and dignity from his teachers at the school. Siddalingaiah’s mother worked as a sweeper in a Dalit hostel in Srirampura. Every day, after the boys were served, the leftover was given to the workers. His mother used to take home the mudde and saru (meal). This leftover solved many of Dalits’ starvation. As soon as his appetite for food was fulfilled, he began to ponder over the thoughts of Ambedkar.

By his hard work and the influence of Periyar and Ambedkar, he got some transition in his poverty overwhelmed life. Similarly, Siddalingaiah read Ambedkar's books and gave
speeches. Thereby, he earned sufficient money and bought clothes and books. Sometimes, he sold the prize cups to get books. Besides, he narrates: ‘Once, when I was returning after emptying the garbage into the pit, someone recognized me and came forward to talk to me. Before he could open his mouth to say Aren’t you Siddalingaiah? I contorted my already grimy face and limped my way to the owner’s house. …I wonder how much of the book I understood then. But there was no limit to my joy I worked for three or four months here and bought good books with the money I earned. [Siddalingaiah: 2003: 70] Thus, he got the books for study by working in the house, factories, and by making speeches.

4.2.5. Custom, Rituals and Festivals:

As Maxine Berntson stated in the Introduction to Marathi version of *Jina Amucha* that, ‘The customs, rituals, festivals and the *Jatras* are indeed a source of unexplored treasure for a sociologist.’ [Berntson: 2009: VII] *Ooru Keri* talks about Dalits’ blind beliefs and superstitions. Both men and women possessed the evil spirit and considered it as the curse of God and Goddesses. There was a temple of Mari in Siddalingaiah’s colony, which was worshiped by old woman as a priest. They have celebrated the Mari festival in his colony. There was another Goddess named Jaldagere Amma, who worshipped by entire village. She had many devotees and therefore she becomes conscious in the village.

Siddalingaiah’s mother was one of the strong devotees of Goddess Jaldagere Amma. If something happened badly, *Dalits* go towards Goddess Jaldagere Amma and tried to make a solution from Godly figure, devotees of Goddess. She believes that Goddess come in her body and talk like common men. Siddalingaiah narrates: ‘When she greeted her teeth, making a *nore nora* sound, people trembled and broke out in a sweat.’ [Siddalingaiah: 2003: 4] Like this she makes the solution on family matters. There was a
A CULTURAL STUDY OF DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES IN INDIA

disease to dream a variety of dreams in his village. Dead human beings and relatives were goes in their dreams and teased them. A dead girl was so famous in their village to propagate by villagers. She could not wonder alone to the villagers. If someone walks alone, she will make a sound and confused them. He further said: ‘Go, I spare you this time.’ [Ibid] Due to this, crop of God and Goddess developed in Dalit society. It points out that Dalit society had totally sunk in the flow of superstition.

Siddalingaiah came to know that he has a separate God and gurus. Once, his mother said ‘our guru had arrived; our entire family went to the mulberry tree up the street. They fell at his feet and presented their offerings. He was in the lineage of Mentaswamy’s disciple.’ [Ibid: 8] Mentaswamy was his family deity which worshiped by entire village. Therefore, it was believes that to visit guru is nothing but to meet Mentaswamy. The Mentaswamy tradition was not a commen in Magadi but found in Manday and Mysore district too. Once, guru had come to his village by such a long way but, doesn’t come to Holeya colony. He was a higher caste guru and goes to only caste people. Siddalingaiah’s family felt grateful to that he had come at least mulberry tree. They had happy to meets him and feel satisfied by acquiring his bless.

Once, Siddalingaiah and his family went to Avverahalli, maternal aunt’s town. It was a beautiful and nature made village, where he experienced well rather than his native place. He narrates: ‘In the morning, peacocks came in clusters to dance at the foot of the hill across their house. A little way down, the Arkavati, river, flowed with a julu julu cadence. The river ran towards Manchanabele, narrator’s native place, striking the trees and meandering along the hills and mountains.’ [Ibid: 16] His aunts husband Kalingaih was a well known hunter therefore who tasted varied meats. Due to his uncle, he tastes the rabbit meat at his maternal aunt’s town. There was, once, a festival took place in honour of the village goddess.
On such occasion, a deity had posses someone and run away. Devotees of its deity have followed and stopped at the place where deity has stay. It was a tradition in this festival. There was also making a conversation in between deity and yajaana. To be possessed is a common phenomenon in Dalit society. It was a sheep deity, neighboring village of Siddalingaiah, who demands a sheep when possession took place. When sheep deity comes in human body, it would shout, ‘sheep, sheep.’ [Ibid: 20] The simple and mad devotees would ask humbly, ‘Which sheep, mother? [Ibid] Then, sheep deity says any sheep therefore priest and devotees make avail a sheep which would be expected to sheep deity and enjoyed sheep meal before the Goddess. It was a fear of God and Goddess to make sheep ceremony. It was not devotee’s desire to done but due to fear of Goddess they done like this.

Once, as usual, God possessed a priest and demands the sheep. By fearing devotees grabbed sheep and brought it before him, the Goddess said, ‘I don’t want this sheep. Bring me another. The crowd was astounded. Why don’t you want it, mother? [Ibid] Thus, there was no solution in dialogue between devotee and deity. But devotees understood the intention of priest to demands healthy sheep and therefore they beat him till he resembled a crushed coconut. It points out that on the name of God, religion and caste priest were tried to looted (exploited) poor people. Thus, regarding to the ritual, in an Interview with Bhartiraja S., K.A. Gunasekaran said:

India is a caste based society. Here, caste pride is sustained in marriage, election, festivals, and other rituals.’

[http://cantorion.org.archive.org/]

4.2.6. Superstitions:

Regarding to 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. Ghost is a common phenomenon of superstition. Siddalingaiah narrates varied ghost episodes, but he says
that he is an atheist now. Narrator’s father had three bits of land which was cultivated by his parents. Besides of his field, there was a mango tree land. No one can walk alone near to this mango tree. Everyone feel there was ghost who makes a terrified sound like tap tap. He said: ‘One evening, when I was returning home all by myself, I heard a clapping sound. I was aghast, and fled, stumbling and falling along the way. I caught my breath only after I reached home.’ [Siddalingaiah: 2003: 2] Not only ghost but also Hakmari, a Marathi word, meaning ‘caller’ plays a major role in Ooru Keri.

There was a Goddess Koogu Mari, who tried to shock the village. It was believed that Mari would stand in front of a house and call out the name of one of the women. If the woman answered innocently with an ‘O?’ she would vomit blood and die right there. Many women started saying, ‘I heard a call, but didn’t answer because I already knew about it.’ [Ibid: 4] They came to think that such women as being very intelligent. The villagers had ‘Come tomorrow’ incomprehensible on their doors, in the belief that Mari would read the message and go away. Some said the cause of all this was the sighting of a comet in the early morning sky. To see if this was true, people woke up early. They cited a comet, and ended up even more terrified. At this time, a holy man came to the village, and predicted that a rain of fire and a deluge would end the world within fourteen days. Such superstitious feelings can emerged in minds of uneducated people.

Being migrated from Magadi to Bangalore, Siddalingaiah joined R. Gopalswamy Iyer, Dalit hostel in Sirampura. Three hundred students can live at one place but ghost there too appeared. Ghost is not physical matter but a state of mind which has hammered on our mind from childhood. That is why; we could not live without the idea of ghost. It was believes that hostel has a huge sampige tree which was the home of ghost. Every student believes on ghost but not seen others. Once, hostel boys bathing at early morning, ‘a fire broke out in the field in front. The boys, shouting that it was a torch ghost, started running.’ [Ibid: 43] Being frightened, they wore clothes and come out to bathrooms.
It was a tradition to prayer to God at the morning after bath. All the students attended this spiritual ceremony at every morning. One day, a prayer was going on daily routine. Suddenly, a boy loudly said in Hindi, ‘Stop the prayer.’ [Ibid: 44] The warden stooped his praying and enquired about the problems of that boy who make loud. Regarding to this, Siddalingaiah said: That day, someone had said, ‘Get up and go for prayer. He had a flung aside his blanket thinking it was the warden, but it wasn’t. This man’s feet were on the floor, near the mat, but his head was high up, near the roof!’ [Ibid] Being understood it was ghost he make loud. Siddalingaiah once again experienced the ghost at dinner in hostel. All boys were sat in raw expecting dinner. There was a suspicious student sat with them, who never seen before at hostel. He looked at his face which seems normal. ‘His misgivings not put to rest, he glanced at his feet. They were not only three times the normal length but also flipped backwards.’ [Ibid: 45] Being understood he was not normal, he called, ghost, ghost. Thus, all boys were runs here there.

4.3. The Life Experiences of Pain i.e. Cultural Assertion:

Siddalingaiah was born at Magadi, Ramnagar district of Karnataka, where his childhood was submerged into poverty. In his article, Siddalingaiah’s Self Sprung Achievement in Ooru Keri- an Autobiography: A Study, S. Bhartiraja said: Siddalingaiah’s childhood was submerged into poverty. His family belongs to farm labourers and gets low-income, and sometimes nothing. [Bhartiraja: 2012: 76] Thus, these were not only life-long experiences but its journey of pain travelled by Siddalingaiah that is known as cultural assertion.

4.3.1. Episode of Ainoru:

The Ainoru was a land owner or head of village like patil in Maharashtra. He has a beautiful house with a huge well and a pump set cabin in his field, which prolonged 500 to 600 feet. The water from his pump set irrigated his land. It means he has wastage the water in land but couldn’t give to trusty Dalits from Magadi. Once, the narrator noticed a
strange incident when he climbs on squat walls. There was a man had fastened a yoke into the shoulders of two others, and was ploughing Ainoru’s land. It was an amusing picture two men who were work like bullocks and third one was swinging a whip and making them plough. It was a strange agony gripped him because of one of the men carrying the yoke was his father. Suddenly, a woman come and said: ‘What a plight has befallen poor Dyavnna (Father of narrator)!’ [Siddalingaiah: 2003: 2] It makes a agonize feelings in him.

Siddalingaiah’s parents were illiterate therefore they nurture flowers and vegetables from Sanjeevaiah’s garden. By selling it, they earned two annas (money) in Magadi market. One day, he go back to garden and stood on the near to the embankment tank. There was a crowd who buses in their work on the tank. Unexpectedly, a stranger has shouted therefore women, men and children were starting to run towards a Brahmin house. Siddalingaiah too runs like others and reached to Brahmin’s door. As a result of this, Brahmin had given leftover poori and chitranna. He was nervous to be the last get there, but was happy too by seen his parents receiving leftover.

4.3.2. Episode of Friendship:

There was a poor family besides narrator’s house in his native place, Megalahtti. There was always a quarrel in between husband and wife. The husband was short and lean, who smoked a beedi always. His wife was always argued with him and beats him. He had a close friend, which shows a figure of friendship for society. One day, both of them were went to photo studio and got themselves photographed together. It was hung on their wall of homes by giving a message of love and friendship. But the friendship could not go long therefore both of them had tore out the photograph. No one can guess about their broken friendship. Now there was only a glass which shows the single photo. It is the symbol of broken friendship.
4.3.3. Episode of Minister:

Megalahatti was a tiny place where narrator’s family lived. It has Manteswamy tradition which shows the culture of Dalits. Once, early morning was abuzz with a festive air. A thatched enclosure was erected and chairs lined up. The streets were decorated with garland of mango leaves. Every house had pooled in money for a public ceremony was saying, ‘The minister is coming today.’ [Ibid: 9] Being curious Dalit children want to see the minister and how he looks like. Therefore, they were at the road till sun rose to the middle of the sky, but minister doesn’t come. Everyone saw the crowd of women and children on the road. The hired chairs were sent back. It makes anger towards minister in Dalit society.

4.3.4. Portrayal of Accident:

There was a tarmac road which divides in two parts: one was a village and other was the Holeya colony. One side there were houses of caste people and other side were a houses of Dalits. Therefore, it was always seen a rush on the road, which makes horrible sound like pom...pom. One day, Dalit children were watching buses and made fun. The boys on the side were more adventurous, they were playing up and down on the iron ladders at the back side of the parked buses. A bus suddenly pulled backwards. The boys on the ladder fell to the ground with a dhap sound, and the bus ran over a girl. She was crushed. Everyone becomes emotional and search to driver and conductor. The driver has managed to escape from the crowd but conductor couldn’t escape. The crowd caught hold of the conductor and thrashed him. Finally, other side crowd too thrashed him till he couldn’t get unconscious. Someone from crowd said: ‘The conductor is also dead.’ [Ibid: 10] It was heartrending to the narrator.

4.3.5. Portrayal of Sheep Delivery:
Siddalingaiah had an uncle named Doddappa, whose daughters don’t go to school. They would graze cattle. He went along with these cousins to graze his cows and sheep. He was varying fond of a particular sheep. Among them, one sheep was pregnant which have grazing by me. Once, when he goes to forest for grazing cattle a pregnant sheep gave a birth in his hands. The new born started hopping around. He called out others and drink it a milk of its mother. It was unforgettable moment for him. He gave a new experience at childhood which was remained in his mind.

4.3.6. Portrayal of Mimicry:

Due to the effort of his mother, Siddalingaiah admitted to school. Nagappachar was a class teacher, who was very strict fellow. One day, a school inspector visited his school. Therefore, entire school spent a long time in school and teased the students by asking questions like to write and read. On such occasion, his lips were connected with each other like chaper...chaper. It was keenly observed by Siddalingaiah and make fun among his classmates to create mimicry of School inspector. He thus becomes popular among the classmates. Due to bored feeling, teacher said to students that sing a song. Suddenly, a boy said: ‘Sir, he can show inspector lips.’ [Ibid: 12] By humorsly, he asked: ‘What is it… come on, show it to me.’ [Ibid] In this way, Siddalingaiah mimicked inspector’s speech, gestures, facial expressions and gait. It makes a full of laughter in the class. This incident creates an interest towards education.

4.3.7. Tragic episode of Doddappa:

Doddappa was an elder uncle of Siddalingaiah, who was most educated, courageous man among the Dalits. One evening, a crowd had coming towards his house in the form of precession. It was Doddappa who seated on the horse which makes as a role of procession head. It was a victory procession in honour of uncle Alayya, who won an
election of Magadi Muncipal council. He comes to home and touched the feet of grandfather. Without spending single money, he won this election. Therefore, he worked sincerely and earned a name and fame. Socially, he was harsh disciplined. Though his wife died before two years ago, but he hadn’t married second time. It was his character but couldn’t maintain his future safe. Once, he had borrowed money from a woman, who was money lender, and couldn’t repay. Therefore, his life ended in tragedy.

4.3.8. Experience at Manchanabele:

Manchanabele was maternal village where Siddalingaiah lived with his family. It was a more colourful than his native place Magadi. Everyone was speaking to him very affectionately. He has a grandfather named Pooraiah, who was an assertive man. The members of his family were frightened whenever he comes at home. He was spending his long time to fresh at the morning. He always discussed about Mahatma Gandhi because he has attended Gandhi’s speech once in very close. His wife, Siddalingaiah’s grandmother, was a wealth of folk tales. She always took him along to festivals and weddings in other towns.

One day, Siddalingaiah was running at the street wildly, on the same time a man comes on the opposite side, which dashed me and make quarrel with me. Therefore, she had begged his forgiveness and went ahead. She said to join him his hands and say: ‘Namaskara, swami’. [Ibid: 15] It referred the Indian culture to feel less in compares to elder person. Once, he visited a wedding ceremony with his Ajji-grandmother. The groom was very old than bride. It was his second marriage. His Ajji was an expert in to catch the fishes. She had many cows. Regarding to this, Siddalingaiah said: ‘Memories of Magadi town flooded my heart whenever I was with this cow. I also thought of my father in Bangalore.’ [Ibid] There was number of folk stories heard by the narrator. Once, news comes that thieves had come to nearby village and everyone becomes disturbed being
heard the news of thieves. Thus, these are the lifelong experiences given by Siddalingaiah at his maternal village which can’t forget him.

4.3.9. Episode of Bus Journey:

His memories of Manchanabele were adventurous. Being come back to Magadi, his family migrates to Bangalore. It was first time he experienced the Bus journey. Regarding to this, he said: …including my father, mother and sisters, started feeling sick. Their faces looked pinched.’ [Ibid: 21] Due to first journey they feel suffocated. Others those who were sited without windows they get vomit out. With dirty smell and uncomfortable seat they have to complete their journey.

4.3.10. Experience at Srirampura:

Srirampura was a slum area belongs to Bangalore, where people were bouses to grow banana, drumstick and papaya. It was a big drain very close to Siddalingaiah’s house. It was fresh water passed by this drain, which used for bath, wash clothes and clean vassals. However, this area was new to the narrator. Fighting, thieves, trouble, chaos, affairs, exploitation and family matters were common I this area. Several events have been took place at this area which haven’t seen before this by Siddalingaiah. Among them rowdy and drunks was a common problem to his colony. There were many rowdies lived around his house. One night, a rowdy walks on the street where he felt going to lavatory. But suddenly a dog barked at him and tried to barge in. Being heard the voice, narrator’s mother used to quarrel with him. As a result, this quarrel becomes riot in between commoners and rowdies. Being drunk they make a noise, dance and fight with his wife. Regarding to this, Siddalingaiah narrates: ‘Some sang song in whatever manner they could. Their love for their wives and children brimmed over. Some would try to have sex with their wives in public.’ [Ibid: 24] At such circumstances he made the grown up.
4.3.11. Episode of Teacher, Andalamma:

Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri* is entirely a document of educational and political development of Dalits. He got food and basic needs from a Brahmin teacher Andalamma. In spite of poor background, he did not reveal his poverty. In school, free study materials were given, but Siddalingaiah did not get them. The teacher Andalamma saw the submissiveness and pleading face of Siddalingaiah and gave him more support in his studies: ‘I joined a government primary school near the graveyard. I had completed the first and second standards at Magadi and Manchanabele, so I joined the third standard. [Ibid: 31-32] However, he settled at a slum called Srirampura in Bangalore and began to concentrate on his study. He also developed the art of speaking.

4.3.12. Portrayal of Ice Candy:

Every parent’s wished their children would study hard and grown up. Siddalingaiah narrates that a man sends his son to school and had been given his study regularly. Once, they assemble for his study and demands to him for reading. A son has studied fourth class but doesn’t learn properly. Pretending to read, he would speak whatever came in his mind. His parents were delighted to come to know that his son can read. It was bad experience given to Siddalingaiah at Srirampura. It was boy deceives his parents whereas someone who studied while works. He said that a boy stands in front of his high school. He was far away from him therefore he called out, ‘Ey, ice candy.’ [Ibid: 33] Being heard the voice of narrator he warned him to never call to him that again. He was getting surprised to see him with books instead of ice candy.

4.3.13. Portrayal of Letter Reading:
By studied school Siddalingaiah got a job to read out the letters in his village. Whenever the letter arrived for reading he has invited with respect and sympathy. It gave him tasty foods like idli, dosa and others. People were so happy on him because he doesn’t only read the letter but explained the meaning of this letter. He had got another job to write the letters and thus used this money to buy the books. During that time, his father worked as woodcutter. This job fetched him ten paisa a killo and became his family’s source of income. This money was not enough to maintain the family therefore his mother work at Shivanahalli tank.

4.3.14. Episodes of Puttapa’s Tragedy:
Puttapa was a close friend of Siddalingaiah, who met at fifth standard. His mother was fallen sick, that’s why his father wasn’t paying attention to her illness. In anger, she got admitted to the hospital for many days. Therefore, his father got ready to marry a second time. Suddenly, Puttapa’s mother comes and known that her husband had married again. She became mad therefore they locked her in the room. When Puttapa goes to find her, his father and step-mother were thrashing him wildly. In this way, the crowd took his mother’s side and relived them from these troubles. Puttapa’s mother took him and goes to her mother’s house, where she died within a year.

4.3.15. Portrayal of Hostel Life:
Siddalingaiah had joined the R. Gopalaswamy Iyer, Dalit hostel of Srirampura, where his mother worked as a sweeper. It was new experience to him, because there were thousands of students live there. They were coming from different parts of Karnataka therefore they spoke varied languages. The hostel has four acre land which has used for playing volleyball and Kabbadi. He has fond of such games during the hostel life. Due to huge area of hostel there was number of ghost’s myth. Marakunna was an adventurous boy, who doesn’t afraid of ghosts. Once, he was on the bed and ghosts snatched his chopper with singing a song. He woke up and looks towards the ghosts those who were mocking
him and dancing with his chopper. Instead of panic he joined and dance with them. As a result of this, ghosts became the slave of him and their friendship grown up.

There was a tradition of prayer at early morning. The warden went each of the room and woke up every student for prayer. But among them there was a boy who most likes sleeping than prayer whose name was Govinda. Siddalingaiah also left prayer many times and stay at the cupboard like monkey. During that time, students were goes to morning walk therefore they feel hungry. The food served at the hostel was not enough to feel stomach and hence the boys concentrate on fruit trees from outside. Once, the boys climb on the tree and pluck the mango, guava and chakkota fruits. But suddenly the owner of the tree had come with stick. When house owner comes to the tree he said: ‘This house is not your’s father, come down, you thief.’ [Ibid 49] However, boy couldn’t come down he throw the stones towards him. The boy have been crying like, ‘Ayyayyo.’ [Ibid] Finally, he jumped from the tree and escaped.

The warden doesn’t allow eating non-vegetarian at the hostel. Once, when the boys returned from market they have surprised to see the leg piece on dining hall. It indicates someone was eaten the non-vegetarian at the hostel. Therefore, boys feel that it was an insult of the name R. Gopalaswamy Iyer, given to the hostel. During the eighth standard, Siddalingaiah met Rangadhamaiah, who encouraged for study. Regarding to this, he said: You are very bright. Don’t go around with those three good for nothing. You are very poor. They are the children of wealthier parents. You are my friend from today. You must listen to what I say.’ [Ibid: 55] As a result of this, all hostel felt that he was his guide. But it was not true he was only a good well-wisher.

Eating contest was common phenomenon in hostel life. A boy named Ramanjini was a master of this game, who always participated and won the game. Once, his father sends money for paid school fees. But he used it for contest and accepted the failure. Due to this, he drops out his school and joined waiter ship in Bangalore. There was another
A CULTURAL STUDY OF DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES IN INDIA

tradition to said ‘sir’ to seniors. One day, Siddalingaiah was at the outside of hostel where a student have coming to opposite direction. He said, ‘Hello, where have you been coming?’ [Ibid: 57] being he inquired Siddalingaiah said, ‘Just been here, kano.’ [Ibid] On heard his voice, the student heat him and pushed in the gutter. This matter goes to warden, where he understood that said ‘sir’ to seniors at the outside of hostel too.

4.3.16. Portrayal of Poetry Creation:

Srirampura had many libraries, where several newspapers and journals were available. There was a student Basavanna in hostel, who gave Siddalingaiah a slim book named, *Avatarapurusha Ambedkar* (Ambedkar the Massiah). Being influenced this; he has started to write poetry. Siddalingaiah wrote revolutionary poems and had delivered them in his speeches. He first emerged on the public scene as a student leader in the 1970s, a period when Dalit rights issues had begun triggering conflict with the upper caste people. However, Siddalingaiah did not join active politics then because he had too much work as a Post-Graduate. Although he is a poet, it is his autobiography *Ooru Keri* that is shaping the literary thinking of researchers.

During the span of hostel life, he had read several books about Ambedkar and gained enough confidence to speak about him. Once, a letter comes from D. C. Hostel, Nazarbad, Mysore. It was invited to him for speech of Ambedkar. He accepted the invitation and goes to Nazarbad. It was his first speech delivered by him before hundreds of students in hostel. It was an unforgettable experience for him. In speech, he has given two myths, which impressed by the students as well as the warden. One day, there was Ambedkar day therefore Chief Minister Veerendra Patil, High Court Judge Bheemaiah, IAS Officer Bharanaiah and Minister B. Rachaiah was invited as guest in Town Hall. Among them Shataveri Gopal Gowda was the main speaker on Ambedkar. Due to Arekari Siddalingaiah had got an opportunity to deliver the speech on the same topic. Being heard the speech everyone fell in love with high school boy named Siddhlingaih.
As a result of this, they encourage him and became famous in his school as well as in town. This incident gave him a representation in other inter-high school debates and colleges.

4.3.17. Portrayal of College Life:

Siddalingaiah admitted the Government Arts College and lives at Dalit hostel on Mahatma Gandhi road. Though he studied higher education but his poverty could not escape him. He had a broken trunk and tottered mat carried out to the Dalit hostel. The food of college level was good than school level. He got there a rice and chapatti twice in day. Due to this, his external appearance can be changed. He has bad experience at the school level that’s why he doesn’t said ‘no’ or ‘enough’ to food. He has turns his face whenever food was not served. As a result of this, his friends called him ‘envious.’ During the college life, he met a revolutionary poet Gajigatti, editor of English magazine People’s Guard, and write poetry. He has comes contact with D.R. Nagraj, a member of Yuvaka Sangha, who encouraged to writes poetry therefore he could published his book of poetry entitled Hole Madigara Hadu: Songs of the Holeyas and Madigas. He has been participated various college debates and won the prize and cups. He has also joined the scheme of earn while you learn at Bangalore.

Siddalingaiah joined the Karnataka Association and was elected the Joint Secretary. He got an opportunity to associate himself with leaders like Dejagow, Mariyappa Bhatta, G. Venkatashbhaiah and G.S. Shivarudrappa. Later he founded a society called Vicharavadi Parishat and visited all Dalits hostels around Bangalore. The association brought out the problems of hygiene, food, etc. He demonstrated the plight of Dalits to the Government of Karnataka. Under the leadership of Prof. M. D. Nanjundaswamy, Siddalingaiah was misused by politicians. Prof. M.D Najundaswamy asked Siddalingaiah and his followers to through ‘handbills’ at Vidhana Soundha visitors gallery where Ministers and Legislators participated. After that, police arrested Siddalingaiah and his friends. They were put in the lock-up. At midnight, they were released. Therefore, he understood that it was nothing but the political drama. This incident gives them a moral support to
confidence to make a black flag demonstration against Indira Gandhi. It was the time of
drought, instead of coming to Karnataka she goes to the Darshan of Swamiji. Therefore,
on such occasion, the slogan of this association was ‘Not to Udupi, go to Bidar.’ [Ibid: 86] In this way, he established a society called Vicharwadi Parishad. The purpose of this
society was to solve the problems of Dalit student. Regarding to this, a student said: ‘We
don’t even get food, why do we need lavatories?’ [Ibid: 89] Under its banner, Dalit
students first protest procession taken out in Bangalore. Its demands were to increased
scholarship amount, to repaired Dalit hostel. This meeting was took place with chief.
Minister Devraj Urs, which paved the way for to construct the new buildings besides the
two hostels on M G Road. The scholarship amount has been increased.

Once, Biligirirangaiah, guru of Siddalingaiah, comes at the hostel and said ‘to arrange a
function and invite the higher-ups of Syndicate Bank.’ [Ibid: 90] On such occasion, he
gave a welcome speech and vote of thanks like: ‘Thanks to this function, schemes to help
Dalit students take up higher studies came to be implemented by Syndicate Bank.’ [Ibid]
Basavalingappa was a controversial Minister in Devraj Urs’s cabinet, once he said:
‘Gandhiji didn’t know the meaning of truth, to fling god’s picture in gutter and the
Kannada literature was boosa agitation’ [Ibid: 94] The reply of these statements was to
demands the resign of him by traditionalist and students. Indirectly the congress party
was goes against him. It makes him anti-god, anti-Kannada and anti-Gandhi. As aresult
of this, his resignation made him very popular among Dalit society. Due to this, a
traditionalist group wanted the resignation of Siddalingaiah from secretary of Fine Arts.
During this time, he came in contact with communist (Marxism) party of India. Not only
he works for Dalit students but also started night school in slum area. As a night school
student, he realized the importance of night school. He started night schools for
Bangalore's slum children. The night school enlightened many downtrodden lives. They
shout, ‘Do something to get us to attend you classes.’ [101] In this manner, Siddalingaiah
evoked his tragic experiences to educated fellow men and women. In this way, his
political affairs improved with rationalists. He also published his poetry in the magazine *Shudra*.

Another association was founded by Siddalingaiah as *Dalit Sangharsh Samiti*, which goes to the last part of society and makes awareness among them. He walked to many parts of Karnataka to establish *Dalit Sangharsh Samiti* movement (DSS). Through this movement, he brought out *Dalits* basic issues to the government. His movement began to progress. As far as his education was concerned, he got first class in M.A., Kannada language, and won the D. L. Narashimhachar Gold Medal. He was honoured with the post of Research Assistant at the Kannada Study Centre. In this way, Siddalingaiah’s struggles made him self-empowered and got a desire for formal education from the beginning. Thus, as years passed, he considered that learning to read and write are the first steps toward self-empowerment.

**4.4. Self Identity and Roots of Dalit’s Humiliation and Injustice:**

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. Besides narratr’s house Banjara women went to the forest and collect firewood. It was their daily routine. They have to done their task like Gandharvas, divine beings. But it was not easy work for them; because on the way of settlement some mischievous boys were tease and taunt them. Being curged them, they had done their work continuously. Regarding to this, Siddalingaiah said: ‘A young man called Puttanarasa once claimed, with some pride, that he had teased an old Banjara women from close quarters and that, flinging to the ground the bundal of firewood was carrying, she had lifted her sari and clapsed him under it.’ [Ibid: 6] It was unbearable for Banjara women but due to low caste they could not do anything.
A CULTURAL STUDY OF DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES IN INDIA

Siddalingaiah narrates another incident, which contains severe humiliation. There was a woman who had no husband and children. She was forty years old lady but look like young. She has only one weakness was that she was always drunk. She was a labour by professionally, and returned home with drunk. It was a daily routine of her, because she passed day on the name of work but night always teased her. Therefore, she has used drink at night. Once, she was lay down at the street due to more drunk. It was seen by rowdy and tried to exploit her physically. She was in conscious but could not resist to him. Others have also harrashed her as the same way. Thus, as a crowd make and waiting for squeezed her. It was happened all over night and when she comes in consciousness, she goes on work as usually. The narrator described the pain, humiliation and injustice in the form of humour. Humour was his essential weapon to present society before the world.

Money-lender plays a vital role in the life of Siddalingaiah. Mostly poor people suffered into debt. There was a tradition of moneylender to take away small children for work in the form of interest. Once, a woman had borrowed money on weekly interest. Four weeks passed away but she could not pay the interest therefore her child took away her little son. She sold her ancestors cauldron and refund the interest of moneylender and took away her child. Siddalingaiah’s father too suffered through this situation. His father had become a huge debtor. Regarding to this, the narrator said: ‘My father had become a huge debtor…One day two toughs beat him on the street.’ [Ibid: 37] Lack of work, he was unable to refund the loan therefore he drunk regularly. One day, an agent of moneylender comes and thrashed him. Unable to bear the humiliation, he had attempt to suicide once.

Siddhlingaih memorized his college incident, which shows the the treatment of injustice: ‘A lecturer used to feel thirsty in class. He would give me the key to his Godrej almirah and ask me to fetch water. I would do as told. He was very orthodox. Why he still chose me to fetch water became a subject of discussion in class. He had mistaken me for a Lingayat. I was liberated from the task of fetching water after he came to know my
It indicates caste remains paramount factors in India. As long as neighbours are not aware of a person’s caste, a Dalit is safe and things will be fine. The moment they find out the caste particularly that of Dalithood, everything changes. Dalits are emerging as an indispensable force in India today but their problems could not change. Regarding to this, Bhagwan Das comprehends the livelihoods of Dalits today:

A professor, a lawyer, a doctor, an architect born in untouchable family is considered inefficient and inferior without even seeing his performance. [Das: 1995: 58]

Thus, these all make suffered experiences through his life long story.

4.5. Rejection to Traditional Hindu Culture and Acceptance to Buddhist Culture:

Being educated and influenced by Ambedkar and Periyar, Siddhlingaih began to deliver speeches on Ambedkar and caste system. His attitude towards the religion was rational and started opposing Hindu beliefs. Therefore, he acquired more knowledge about the orthodox Hinduism and caste system. He and graveyard workers always discussed on the subject o God. They were strong belivers of God whereas Siddhlingaih was rationalist. Therefore, they could not accept his aegument that God does not exist. Once, he narrator attended fest ceremony which was organized by graveyardworke for his friends. On the occasion of this, the owner of house said his faith of God was too diminished. Suddenly, Siddhlingaih asked but why? The story was told by himwas intresting. He said: ‘When he was standing devoutly in a queue to get darshn of the diety, the man behind him had tried to pick his pocketand rob him ll his money. If he had continued to stand devoutly, he would have lost his all money. Immediately becoming alert, he had bent backwords and caught the pickpocket. If he had lost the money, the very return of his family to Banglore would have been difficult.’ [Siddalingaiah: 2003: 73] It indicates if God is exist, so why could not punish him, who have been torrured the pilgrims. But still the workers could not lose their faith from God.
Once, the college has sent Siddhlingaiah to inter-collegiate debate. He began his speech with poetic language:

- Temples are houses of black magic
- Religious leaders are magicians
- Pilgrim centres are places of disease
- Innocents, idiots, these pilgrims [Ibid: 77]

He means to say temples become the houses of black magic and priests are their magicians. The place of pilgrim becomes the places of disease and idiot. He satirically interpreted the God and religion. It was not a speech only, but a satire on entire orthodoxical system. Therefore, the judges impressed his speech and selected for as first in debate. D R Nagraj, a student one class ahead to him, met at debate. He was a rationalist and revolutionary poet therefore he encouraged to him for future. His friendship gave a new turn to his life. It was time of debate and won the prize of it.

Once, there was an inter-collegiate debate took place at A P S College, Bangaloe. The subject of this debate was ‘God does not exist’. The inauguration function was started with the lighting a lamp. It was a symbol of God existed and incarnate. Having to say that god did not exist; Siddhlingaiah was annoyed with the lamp. He put off the light which was pointed out as evidence to the existence of God. He challenged, ‘If God does exist, will it stop me speaking.’ [Ibid: 81] He openly said God does not exist in the form of speech. Du to his stinging speech upper caste people planned to assault him, but still he got the first prize in debate. One day, he walks on the street where he saw secondhand books on footath. A book entitled Devaru Satta: God is Dead took attention towards them. He brought it and read out and decides to meet its writer Vasudeva Bhoopalan. He was lived at Lavelle Road near to Richmond Circle. When he meets to the writer, Siddalingaiah understood that he was living under the pressor of traditionalist. They were discussed on the title of the book and said annoyedly: ‘When you have God is dead for a title, dosnt it means that you agree thathe did exist?’ [Ibid: 81-82] It shows that
Siddalingaiah not only read books but also met to the author whenever the objection rose in his mind.

Once, Siddalingaiah saw an advertisement in the news paper. The news was that those who did not believe in god could meet a Swamiji who would show god to them. Having seen this news, Siddalingaiah and his friend Devarajappa decided to meet him. Once, both of them met the Swami and said, ‘show us god’. [Ibid: 82] Like this, they have raised number of questions. Being scared, the Swamiji said: Why are trying so hard? I am god myself’. [Ibid] Soever Siddalingaiah said Swmiji if the god is in yourself. There are millions of gods on the earth. The Swamiji further said not only god is in me but myself as Shiva. Siddalingaiah replied if you are Shiva then you have committed murder of Manmatha. The Yogi was dnied his statement: ‘What murder? I havn’t murdered anyone’. [Ibid] Siddalingaiah said Didn’t you burn Manmatha to death with your third eye because he ruined your penance? The yogi said oh! That Manmatha, he was so smart with me. As result of this, this conversation has become the symbol of rationalism.

Once, the Swamiji tried to awaken the consciousness of humanity that there is neither God nor caste system: ‘...the Swamiji had visited Dalit colonies. He had been speaking of reform. In the given set-up, what he had done was quite big. Yet I, being a fiery revolutionary, publicly asked the Pejavara swamiji, ‘if you are really concerned about the Dalits, make an untouchable the head of your religious order. The swamiji did not give a clear answer, but explained the concern he had for reform. The organisation took care of me very well till I left Udupi.’ [Ibid: 106] Siddalingaiah asked Pejavara Swamiji to give equal job or treatment of a Dalit in his ashram. But the Swamiji kept silent. Siddalingaiah enlighten himself by reading books of great scholars, teachers and political leaders who worked for the welfare of Dalits. Thus, the Ooru Keri is the record of consciousness of self and Humiliation. It became a source of motive for entire Dalits.

4.6. Summing up:
Autobiography is a very influential genre through which Dalit writers have portrayed a realistic picture of the Dalit world. Ooru Keri is a Dalit autobiography of world-wide writer Siddalingaiah which deals with his childhood and youth, recording the emergence of a new, confident, educated Dalit from a very humble background. S. Bhartiraja said:

Siddalingaiah grew up like any Dalit wanton boys- humiliated and unable to comprehend why his family was made to suffer. His early memories, he said, were of how his father was unable to find work in Magadi, causing the family to move finally to Bangalore. All through his growing up, hungry, suffering, and humiliation at odd jobs while studying are his chief memories; they made him lose faith in God, and also mark the beginning of his Dalit introspection. He first emerged on the public scene as a student leader in the 1970s, a period when Dalit rights issues had begun triggering conflict with upper classes. However, Siddalingaiah did not join active politics then because he had too much work on hand. Although he was both a teacher and an activist, it was his autobiography that would be most influential, shaping the literary thinking of the time. [Opp. Cite., Bhartiraja: 2012: 76]

It describes Siddalingaiah as a poet, thinker, activist and professor. It is not only recount the personal anxiety and turmoil’s involved in the difficult process of transformation from one state into another, but simultaneously cites at the new historical and political processes which made possible this change. This equilibrium between the micro and the macro is one of the features of this autobiography. As Sumit Guha, Professor of History, Brown University, was reviewing Ooru Keri:

…A Searching memoir of the life of a sensitive and intelligent Dalit youth in Independent India. It tells us how he overcome contempt, humiliation and violence to gain and education and join the slowly
Indeed, he means to say Siddalingaiah have been in search of a record of the life-long struggle of a sensitive and intelligent Dalit youth in Independent India. He narrated how he overcome contempt, humiliation and violence to gain and education and join the slowly growing ranks of Dalit intellectuals in India. It is an essential to those who would understand modern south Asia. Thus, the entire autobiography is full of lively anecdotes, memorable pen sketches and inimitable caricatures. But the personal and the general are so organically bound each other that the book is as much about Siddalingaiah the individual as it is about all major social, political and cultural movements of Karnataka in the last four decades.
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