CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation entitled, “Writing the Self: A Study of Select Dalit Autobiographies,” an attempt has been made to examine four Dalit autobiographies that include Sharan Kumar Limbale’s The Out Caste (2003), Narendra Jadav’s Outcaste (2003), Omprakash Valmiki’s Joothan (2003) and Baby Kamble’s The Prisons We Broke (2008). The study, being thematic in approach, has been divided into six chapters. The Introductory chapter, “Contextualising Autobiography: Writing for the Community” traced the evolution of the autobiography in the Indian context in general and the Dalit autobiographies in particular. The chapter explored the impact of the contemporary Dalit movements, politics and assertion. The historical need for documenting the Dalit experiences in the form of the Dalit autobiographies has been accounted for. The focus of the chapter has been that the nationalist ideology has been interrogated by the Dalit theoreticians and activists, and the genre of the Dalit autobiography reinforces the need for countering the Brahminical hegemony.

The second chapter, “Denial of Education: Subverting the Monopoly” attempted to examine the aspect of the denial of education to the Dalits as delineated in select autobiographies. The tradition of the Indian education, essentially being exclusivist,
distanced a majority of the social groups from education. The tradition of the denial of education continues even in the modern and secular educational system. This chapter explored how the Brahminical system of exclusivist pedagogy made the Dalits undergo the experience of insult, humiliation, psychological and physical violence and ultimately a sense of alienation from the mainstream society. However, it has been argued in the chapter that the Dalits challenged their exclusion from education, and came out of what may be termed the ‘Dronacharya syndrome.’ The Dalits used the denial of education to their advantage, and accomplished in the fields of education. The autobiographies of Limbale, Jadav, Valmiki and Kamble have been illustrated as to how the protagonists overcame the hurdles so as to excel themselves in education and career.

The third chapter, “Experiencing Discrimination: Dalit Livid Lives” delineated different aspects of humiliation and social exclusion at different spheres of life. The chapter explored how the Dalits are historically forced to accept the social, religious and economic exclusion. The thrust of the chapter has been to explore how the Dalit writers engage with caste as a subjective category of how they lived and experienced. The study also focused on how the Dalit autobiographies mapped the nuanced and unnoticed pains of the Dalits experience of discrimination.
The fourth chapter, “Writing Dalit Gender: Dalit among Dalits” dealt with the revisiting and redefinition of the Dalit women’s experience of caste and gender discrimination. The chapter focused on how the Dalit women experience double alienation related to caste and gender. The chapter illustrated the sociological conditions that characterize the Dalit women as the downtrodden of the down trodden. The discrimination of the Dalit women and their struggles for emancipation has been interpreted in terms of Ambedkar’s theory of asserting the self.

The fifth chapter, “Construction of Dalit Identity: Assertion of the Self” primarily dealt with the legacy of the Bakti movement, the Adi movements and Ambedkar’s contribution to the formulation of an alternative egalitarian, secular and modern identity for the Dalits. The chapter focused on non-Brahman movements during the colonial India, which questioned the Brahmin dominance in the socio-cultural and religious spheres. The chapter examined the aspect of how the non-Brahmin movements were suppressed and obliterated by the discourse of Gandhian ‘Ramarajya’ and Nehruvian ‘Secularism.’ The formation of the Dalit identity was based on giving a unique political identity through active participation in the process of making a modern, democratic and secular India. The chapter focused on how
the Dalit autobiographies are considered historical documentations of self-assertion, self-respect, liberation and empowerment of the Dalits.

Having summed up the study, the concluding Chapter presents the findings of the research as follows:

a) Quest for identity is an important aspect of the Dalit autobiographies, which represent the struggles of the Dalits for social equality and justice. The Dalit autobiographies in general are the narratives of the caste history of the Dalits. In the process of writing their caste history, the narrators interrogate the mainstream culture, religion, polity and the bases of exploitation. In so doing, the Dalit narratives construct an alternative history by liberally drawing from their culture, language and myth.

b) The Dalit autobiographies, by relocating, redefining and reconstructing the Dalit identity, demand for the legitimacy of the due space in history, culture, literature, economy and politics. The Dalit writers interrogate the mainstream autobiographies: "Gandhi, Nehru and Chauduri individually represent different world views, but socio-culturally they belong to a common category, i.e., they were upper caste men and hence they were quite privileged to have an audience worldwide...In recent times, there have been a considerable number of crucial studies on Indian upper caste women’s autobiographies."¹
c) The Dalit autobiographies do not share the features of the mainstream autobiographies. Influenced by Ambedkar, the authors of the Dalit autobiographies deal with the aspect of asserting the Dalit self, which in turn is aimed at the liberation of the Dalits. The philosophy of Ambedkar brought a new consciousness among the Dalits. The consciousness about their exploitation, atrocities and injustice experienced by the Dalits help them in shaping their intellectual life.

d) Though the Dalit autobiographies are full of agony and angst, they are aimed at awakening the Dalits and raising their consciousness. The Dalit autobiographies are not merely the writings of vengeance to spread hatred against the caste Hindus but also to promote the heritage of the Dalits. The Dalit autobiographies are aimed at rebuilding society to promote honour, dignity, justice and equality. The subjectivity of the Dalit autobiographies needs to be understood in terms of the communal self: “The identity of a person will be based on the location to which he/she belongs. Accordingly, the person will undergo the experiences in life. In order to understand the life-experiences of a person several disparate identical criterion can be put to test. It can be caste, class, ethnicity, language, religion, region, gender etc.”²
e) The very emergence of the Dalit autobiography is a form of the Dalit resistance because Dalits are using this opportunity to assert their identities through their writings. The growing number of Dalit autobiographies is a clear instance of how Dalits have been breaking the traditional silence.

The study however is not without limitations. The aspect of writing the self has been carried out by selecting four Dalit autobiographies as the primary sources. Though there are a number of Dalit autobiographies available in English translations, the researcher confined the work to the select four autobiographies as examining all the works is likely to be unwieldy. There is a scope of examining, in further research, the remaining autobiographies for exploring the Dalit self.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES


2 Raj Kumar, 3.