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Transliteration and Terminology

Transliteration of the (Deva)Nāgarī Script (Hindi and Sanskrit)

Independent vowel characters

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ॡ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ
a	*ā*	*i*	*ī*	*u*	*ū*	*ṛ*	*ṝ*	*ḷ*	*ḹ*	*e*	*ai*	*o*	*au*

Dependent vowel signs

क	का	कि	की	कु	कू	कृ	कॄ	कॢ	कॣ	के	कै	को	कौ
ka	*kā*	*ki*	*kī*	*ku*	*kū*	*kṛ*	*kṝ*	*kḷ*	*kḹ*	*ke*	*kai*	*ko*	*kau*

Consonants

क	क़	ख	ख़	ग	ग़	घ		ङ
ka	*qa*	*kha*	*xa*	*ga*	*ġa*	*gha*		*ṅ(a)*
च		छ		ज	ज़	झ		ञ
ca		*cha*		*ja*	*za*	*jha*		*ñ(a)*
ट		ठ		ड	ड़	ढ	ढ़	ण
ṭa		*ṭha*		*ḍa*	*ṛa*	*ḍha*	*ṛha*	*ṇa*
त		थ		द		ध		न
ta		*tha*		*da*		*dha*		*na*
प		फ	फ़	ब		भ		म
pa		*pha*	*fa*	*ba*		*bha*		*ma*
य	र	ल	व	श	ष	स	ह	
ya	*ra*	*la*	*va*	*śa*	*ṣa*	*sa*	*ha*	

Special characters

ँ	हूँ	ं	मैं	ः	निःशंक	ॅ	डॉक्टर
̃	*hū̃*	*ṃ*	*maiṃ*	*ḥ*	*niḥśaṃk*	˘	*dăkʹṭar*

- *ʹ* is used, when an inherent short *a* (अ) is omitted in the pronunciation of a word, e.g. करना (*karʹnā*).
- the omission of an inherent short *a* (अ) at the end of a word is not marked in the transliteration, e.g. मेज़ (*mez*).

The transliteration of other Indic scripts follows the same principles, *mutatis mutandis*.

Names and Quotations

Names of authors or other persons are used in their anglicized forms deemed to be most common, except for when they appear in the text for the first time, in which case the anglicized version of the name is followed by its transliterated form in parentheses, e.g. Valmiki (Vālmīki). Names of characters (with the exception of main protagonists, whose names are identical with those of the authors) are transliterated throughout, since the anglicized versions of their names are unknown to me. Book titles are transliterated and italicized (*Jūṭhan*). When names of occupational and other human groups (*jāti*s, ethnic groups, etc.) appear in the text for the first time, they are transliterated and their anglicized version deemed the most common is given in parentheses (e.g. *ahīr* (Ahir)), after which, the anglicized version is used throughout the text to allow for an easy reading flow. An exception to this rule is made when such a name is discussed as a term, in which case it is transliterated and italicized (e.g. *dalit*), or when it is discussed as a contested category, in which case it is put into single quotation marks (e.g. 'Dalit'). Double quotation marks are used in verbatim quotations which appear in the main text; while indented quotations are not put in quotation marks. Double quotation marks are also used in quoted dialogue. Any quotation marks inside a quote are replaced by single quotation marks. Anything left out of a quotation is marked with an ellipsis sign, i.e. …, and put within square brackets, i.e. […]. Square brackets are also used in quotations for additions of single words or phrases deemed necessary to enable the reader to grasp the meaning; this predominantly occurs in translations from Hindi. By contrast, added explanations are marked by parentheses within square brackets. Thus, [xyz] would be an addition, whereas [(xyz)] would be an explanation. In the Bibliography, square brackets are also used for the original year of publications which are actually new editions (revised or reprinted without any changes) (e.g. Monier-Williams, Monier. 2002. [1899]).

Glossary

The following is a list of (mostly Hindi) loanwords and caste-related terms used in this dissertation. Translations, unless indicated differently, are from Hindi. The term *dalit*, which is the main topic of the first chapter of this dissertation, is, for reasons of its complexity, not defined in this list.

abbā jī — The word *abbā* literally means “father”, *abbā jī* is a form of respectful address to an elderly man. See ***jī***.

abe — The Oxford Hindi-English dictionary gives its translation as “interj. pej. you! you rascal! wretch!” (McGregor 2014: 46). The English translator of Omprakash Valmiki’s autobiography *Jūṭhan* Arun Prabha Mukherjee leaves it untranslated as “abey” (Valmiki 2003: p. 3). This word is used in Hindi as a form of highly impolite or rude address. In *Jūṭhan*, the word *abe*, which is only used in direct speech, is frequently followed by ***cūhˈṛe ke*** or ***cūhˈṛe kā***. The word *be* is a short form of *abe*.

achūt and ***aspr̥śya*** — Two Hindi versions of the derogatory term “untouchable”. As a rule, *achūt* is the more commonly used term in Hindi, while *aspr̥śya* sounds overly sanskritized in it. However, the latter term is, according to Monika Browarchyk, a common and exclusive word denoting “untouchable” in the Marathi language, which is the mother tongue of Kausalya Baisantri, one of three authors, whose works are in the focus of this dissertation (Browarczyk 2013: 296).

***ādivāsī* (Adivasi)** — The term *ādivāsī* (Adivasi) – literally meaning “original inhabitant” from Sanskrit *ādi* “beginning, origin” and *vas* “to dwell” – is a prob-

lematic term and a contested group category. A detailed discussion of the term is beyond the scope of this dissertation. To hint at the problematic, however, I will quote Prathama Banerjee explaining why they use the terms "tribe" and "adivasi" together: "in areas such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh communities have chosen to replace the term tribe with the more positive term adivasi, in the northeast, the term adivasi refers to migrants from central India. Indigenous groups of the northeast choose to call themselves tribes in order to distinguish themselves from such later 'encroachers'" (Banerjee 2016: 131).

***ahīr* (Ahir)** The *ahīr* (Ahir) is a pastoral community, which, according to Robert Vane Russell, can be found throughout India but is particularly dispersed in the central and northern areas. The community was traditionally occupied in breeding cattle and dealing in milk and butter (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 13–29).

ājī Marathi for "grandmother".

aspr̥śya see ***achūt***

bahū Daughter-in-law, traditional form of address.

***baniyā* (Bania)** The word *baniyā* (Bania) is derived from the Sanskrit *vāṇij* which means "merchant". Traditionally, people from the Bania community are bankers, moneylenders, grain dealers and shopkeepers. People from this community can be found all over India but have their densest concentration in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The Banias are divided into a large number of endogamous groups. One of them is *jayasˈvāl* or Jaiswal (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 90–112; Samanta 1998: Vol. XXXVIII, 438–442).

bārāt	In the case of *Jūṭhan*, a *bārāt* party is a marriage procession of the bridegroom's party to the bride's house.
bastī	The word *bastī* f. means any small place or living area, like a small town, part of a village, a neighborhood, etc. In the context of Dalit life and literature, *bastī* usually means a smallish neighborhood on the outskirts of a village or a town, in which members of one or several Dalit communities are segregated. The term is often translated into English as "slum", but is left untranslated in this dissertation.
bhābhī	The word *bhābhī* is commonly used in Hindi for a sister-in-law.
bhaiyā	The word *bhaiyā* m. means "brother" and is also used in Hindi as a form of friendly address to a younger person or one of the same age.
bhaṃgī **(Bhangi)**	The term *bhaṃgī* (Bhangi) is a better known name of Valmiki's ***jāti cūhˈṛā***.
bhaṛbhū̃jā **(Bharbhunja)**	The *bhaṛbhū̃jā* (Bharbhunja) is a community of grain-parchers. According to Russell, the name is derived from the Sanskrit word *bhrāstra* (frying-pan), and *bhārjaka* (one who fries). They are dispersed in northern India (Russell 2021: Vol. IV, 202–204).
brāhmaṇ **(Brahman)**	The word *brāhmaṇ* (Brahman) is the name of the highest ranking of the four *varˈṇa*s. Robert Vane Russell states that "Their traditional occupation was that of priesthood. They are considered to be the purest among all castes. So they alone are qualified of performing certain vital religious tasks, including e.g. studying sacred

scriptures, performing rites at ceremonial occasions, composing and reciting religious hymns and giving instruction to the laity. At present they hold a wide variety of occupations” (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 290–300).

camār* (Chamar)** People belonging to the *camār* (Chamar) community were traditionally tanners and leather workers. They are primarily found in Hindi-speaking regions, in central and northern India, but are found also in all parts of Bengal. The name is derived from the Sanskrit word *carmakāra*, a worker in leather (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 339–355). Today, the ***jāti Chamar is a Scheduled Caste.

***caṇḍāla* (Chandala)** Otto Böhtlinkg’s Sanskrit-Wörterbuch lists two forms, *caṇḍāla* and *cāṇḍāla* and translates them as “*ein Mann der verachtetsten Schichte der menschlichen Gesellschaft.* Im System *der Sohn eines Śudra und einer Brāhmaṇī*“ (italics in original) (Böhtlinkg 1998: 207; 221). “The system” presumably means the explanation of the origins of various groups of peoples, who did not belong to any *varṇa*, which is given in the *Manusmṛti.* Similar to the prevailing academic opinion that the *varṇa* system did not describe the actual state of the Indian society at that time, it is widely accepted today that this systematic also is of a theoretical nature and cannot be used as evidence for the origins of groups of people such as the Chandala. Yamazaki (2005: 192) claims that the “Caṇḍāla” belonged to “non-Aryan native peoples” of India, but offers no evidence for such a claim.

caudharī According to Carmen Brandt, *caudharī* “is a title which was introduced by the Mughal rulers for certain officials and bestowed irrespective of religion. It usually denoted and may still denote an

economically and socially superior position" (Brandt 2015: 259). Today, the title is often also used as a form of respectful address to a person occupying a higher social position than the speaker.

chūtchāt A common word denoting the noun "untouchability" in Hindi.

cūhˈṛā* (Chuhra)** The term *cūhˈṛā* is the name of the ***jāti, to which Valmiki's family belongs, and which appears to be the biggest Scheduled Caste of Valmiki's native village Barla. Denzil Ibbetson (1916) writes that it is a community of sweepers and scavengers, mainly based in Punjab and Pakistan (Ibbetson 1916: 290–295).
The words *kā* and *ke* in phrases *cūhˈṛe kā* and *cūhˈṛe ke* are masculine singular and plural forms of the Hindi possessive postposition, so *cūhˈṛe kā* and *cūhˈṛe ke* means "belonging to Chuhra/'s". Also see ***abe***.

chūhˈṛī The word *chūhˈṛī* is the female form of *cūhˈṛā*, it is a very impolite way of addressing a woman from the Chuhra *jāti*.

dalit cetˈnā Laura Brueck (2006) has devoted a lengthy article to the subject of *dalit cetnā*. It is therefore not easy to define it in one short paragraph. Sharankumar Limbale defines Dalit consciousness as "the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature; it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness" (cited in Brueck 2006). According to Brueck, "Dalit chetna today is a thoroughly modern critical concept in the mode of deconstruction. It is an expression of denial, a theoretical tool that contributes to the destabilization of traditional notions of social hierarchy and cultural au-

thenticity. Contemporary Dalit critics are specific about both the current nature and the importance of Dalit chetna. […] Dalit chetna has become an essential component of the growing Dalit literary critical lexicon". For a deeper discussion see Brueck's 2006 article.

dhobī* (Dhobi)** The term *dhobī* (Dhobi) is the name of the ***jāti of washer people. The name is derived from the Hindi verb *dhonā* and Sanskrit *dhav*, "to wash" (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 431–436). The community is large and distributed all over the subcontinent, it is listed as a Scheduled Caste, though, to my knowledge, not in every Indian state.

***gõḍ* (Gond)** Russell lists the Gonds as "[t]he principal tribe of the Dravidian family and perhaps the most important of the non-Aryan or forest tribes in India" (Russell 2021: Vol. III, 41). The *gõḍ* (Gond) are listed as a Scheduled Tribe in Madhya Pradesh and as a Scheduled Caste in Uttar Pradesh (Böck, Rao 1995: 125). The ambiguity of group categories, which is discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, is emphasized by this example.

***gaṛeriyā* (Gadariya)** The *gaṛeriyā* (Gadariya) is a shepherd community, mainly found in northern India. According to Russell, the name is derived from the Hindi *gādar* and the Sanskrit *gandhāra*, meaning "sheep". The Sanskrit name was derived from the country of Gandhāra or Kandahār, from which sheep were first brought. The traditional occupations of the Gadaria included breeding and grazing of sheep and goats, and weaving of blankets from sheep's wool (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 1–6).

***harijan* (Harijan)** The word *harijan* (Harijan), literally meaning "child of God", is an etic term, which was meant to replace the derogatory term "un-

touchable”. It was promoted by Mohandas Gandhi in an attempt – in Sarah Beth’s words – “to move away from the idea of “untouchable” and promote a new, positive ascription to the community” (Beth 2007: 546). The etic term *harijan* was rejected by the majority of Dalit activists, who perceived it as demeaning and patronizing (ibid.).

***jayasˈvāl baniyā* (Jaiswal Bania)** See ***baniyā* (Bania).**

***jamādār* (Jamadar)** The *jamādār* (Jamadar) community is a Scheduled Caste. Their traditional occupations include village watchmen and field-laborers. Members of the community are primarily found in the region of Bundelkhand (Russell 2021: Vol. III, 355–358).

jāti The word *jāti* comes from the Sanskrit root *jan*, which means “to be born”. It is translated by the Oxford Hindi-English dictionary as “1. birth, 2. position fixed by birth, community or caste group. 3. good birth, high caste. 4. kind, race; genus, species; nationality. 5. community; nation; tribe; family, lineage” (McGregor 2004b: 367). See chapter 1 “Who is a Dalit?” for discussion.

jī The word *jī*, when used with a name or a title, is a formal appellation similar to “sir” or “madam”. Used on its own in a dialogue, it can be understood as both, a polite form of address as well as an extremely polite form of agreement.

julāhā* (Julaha)** In India, there exists both a Hindu and a Muslim ***jāti called *julāhā* (Julaha). Their members are traditionally weavers (Maitra 1998, Vol. XXXVIII, 459–461; Russell 2021: Vol. III, 231–232).

janmāṣṭamī	The *kr̥ṣṇa janmāṣṭamī* or Krishna Janmashtami is an annual festival that celebrates the birth of Krishna.
jūṭhan	The word *jūṭhan*, which is the namesake of Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography, means "food leftovers".
jhīṃvar **(Jhinwar)**	People belonging to the *jhīṃvar* ***jāti*** for the most part live in the states of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh in India. Their traditional occupations include those of watermen, boatmen and cooks (Ibbetson 1916: 303–309; Russell 2021: Vol. III, 241–244).
kumhār **(Kumhar)**	The *kumhār* (Kumhar) or *kumbhār* (Kumbhar) is a community that was traditionally involved in making pottery. The name is derived from the Sanskrit word *kumbh*, meaning "water-pot" (Risley 1892: Vol. I, 517–526; Russell 2021: Vol. IV, 1–10).
lallā jī	Form of affectionate address used in *Jūṭhan* by the main protagonist's sister-in-law for her husband's youngest brother.
mahār **(Mahar)**	The ***jāti*** *mahār* or Mahar is the largest Scheduled Caste in Maharashtra. According to Russell, traditional occupations of the Mahars included those of watchman, messenger, wall mender, etc. (Russell 2021: Vol. IV, 105–114). This community or *jāti* became famous because Dr. B. R. Ambedkar – principal instigator of the Dalit movement in the 1920s, famous politician, and much more – was one of its members.
māṃg **(Mang)**	The *māṃg* or Mang ***jāti*** is the second largest Scheduled Caste in Maharashtra and can also be found in the neighboring states. Their traditional occupations include tanning, shoemaking, preparation of leather buckets, acting as village musicians and castrat-

ing bullocks; the Mang women often serve as midwives (Russell 2021: Vol. IV, 151–155).

muṃśī jī In Valmiki's autobiography *Jūṭhan* the words *muṃśī jī* stand for the father's affectionate form of address for the young Omprakash. Its meaning and significance are discussed in chapter 5 "Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment".

***musahar* (Musahar)** The *musahar* (Musahar) are listed as a Scheduled Caste. According to William Crooke, "the name means 'rat-catching' or 'rat-eating'. It signifies 'flesh-seekers' or 'hunters'. They are now mostly landless agricultural labourers and sometimes still have to resort to rat catching to survive during lean times" (Crooke 1896: Vol. IV, 12–37).

***nāī* (Nai)** The *nāī* (Nai) is traditionally a Barber community which is widespread in northern India. It is a Scheduled Caste. See Crooke 1896: Vol. IV, 40–49; Russell 2021: IV, 217–233.

***naṭ* (Nat)** The *naṭ* (Nat) community is a Scheduled Caste. The word *naṭ* derives from the Sanskrit word *naṭa*, "dancer". Crooke states that it seems that "Nat is an occupational term which includes a number of different clans who have been grouped together merely on account of their common occupation of dancing, prostitution, and performance" (Crooke 1896: Vol. IV, 57).

***noniyā* (Nonia)** The *noniyā* (Nonia), also known as *nūniyā*, *lūniyā* and *loniyā* is a community that has traditionally been occupied in the extraction of salt and saltpeter from saline earth. Both, Crooke (1896: Vol. III, 386–395) and Russell (2021: Vol. IV, 243–244) speak of them as being at "the bottom of the caste system".

pahˈcān The word *pahˈcān* means “recognition, distinguishing mark, identity”, etc. With this word Omprakash Valmiki refers to his chosen surname Valmiki, which constitutes a ***jāti*** marker. See also ***vālmīki* (Valmiki)**.

***pāsī* (Pasi)** The *pāsī* (Pasi) community’s hereditary occupation is the tapping of the Palmyra date and other palm trees for their sap. It is registered as a Scheduled Caste (Russell 2021: Vol. IV,309–313; Singh 1971).

pūjā The word *pūjā* means a religious ceremony.

roṭī Flat round bread, usually cooked on a griddle.

sāhab The word *sāhab*, used with a name or a title, means as much as “sir”, “mister”.

sālā The word *sālā* m. means brother-in-law, but is widely used as an abusive address in Hindi.

salām According to *Jūṭhan* (Valmiki 1999: 42f.), it was common among the Chuhras that during a *salām* procession, the groom went around in the bride’s village with his party and the bride visited the groom’s village with her party – both in order to receive gifts from “upper caste” village residents.

sasure Literally, father-in-law, often used as a form of abusive address.

Savarna See ***varṇa**.*

tyāgī* (Tyagi) /** Valmiki introduces the *tyāgī* or *tagā* ***jāti as the dominant Hindu

***tagā* (Taga)** and Moslem community of the village he grew up in (Valmiki, 1999, p. 11ff.). William Crooke writes about the Tyagis/Tagas as a cultivating and land-owning community with a high position in caste hierarchy. They are said to be Brahmins by origin, though, as in most cases, the origin of the community cannot be determined with any certainty (Crooke 1896: 351–355).

vālmīki* (Valmiki)** According to Debjani Ganguly (2009: 434f.), the name Valmiki or Balmiki was given to the Bhangi community by the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement that originated in northern India in the nineteenth century, in an attempt to keep members of this community within the Hindu fold. It is not by chance that Omprakash Valmiki's chosen surname is equivalent to one of the names of his ***jāti*.* The author speaks about his choice at length towards the end of his autobiography.

varṇa In Sanskrit, the word *varṇa* literally means "color"; it can be found in the R̥gveda Hymn 10, 90, the *Puruṣasuktam*, that describes the creation of the universe out of 'Puruṣa' or the 'Cosmic Being'. In this hymn, the four *varṇa*s (*brāhmaṇ*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śudra*) are said to have originated from it in a hierarchical order. The term *savarṇa* (Savarna), means "with *varṇa*" and refers to members of the Hindu society with the exception of communities formerly labeled as "untouchable". The authors whose autobiographies are in the focus of this dissertation, use this term as the opposite of Dalit. See chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?" for details.

yār The word *yār* m. means "friend"; it is an emphatically informal Hindi word.

Text and Subtext: Narrative Techniques in Hindi Dalit Autobiographies

Introduction

This dissertation analyzes autobiographies written by three Hindi Dalit authors and the narrative techniques used by these authors to perform their Dalit identity. Each of the authors, their works as well as the terms used in the title and the previous sentence of this work will be given consideration in this introduction. But since "Dalit literature" is the umbrella term for literary texts written by "Dalit authors", it should be the first to be scrutinized. Before discussing the term "Dalit literature", it seems appropriate to discuss each of the terms contained in it on their own. However, this dissertation dedicates a whole chapter to the many possible meanings of the highly problematic term *dalit* and the meanings of the ostensibly simple term "literature", when scrutinized, appear to be similarly manifold. Let it be said at this point, that unless indicated otherwise, I use the Hindi word *dalit*, unmarked and capitalized (Dalit), in the way used by most scholars today, namely, as a collective term referring to members of the Scheduled Castes and/or people formerly labeled as "untouchable". The term "literature", unless otherwise specified, is used here according to definition 3a from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, namely as "a body of literary works produced in a particular country or period, or of a particular genre".[1]

[1] https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/109080?redirectedFrom=literature accessed on 09.05.22.

1 Dalit Literature

The phenomenon known as Dalit literature today begins with Marathi Dalit literature in the 1970s in the Indian state of Maharashtra. According to Arjun Dangle (Arjun Ḍāṃgˡle) – one of the three Marathi Dalit authors, who inaugurated the Dalit Panther[2] movement in 1972 – the term "Dalit literature" was decided upon and officially introduced at the first Dalit literary conference in 1958. Dangle was also the editor of the groundbreaking anthology of Marathi Dalit literature in English translation, *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, first published in 1992. In his introduction to this volume, he describes Dalit literature as "marked by revolt and negativism, since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom of a group of people who, as untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality". For him, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar (Bhīmˡrāv Āmbeḍˡkar)[3] was the "pioneer of Dalit literature", since it were "[h]is revolutionary ideas [that] stirred into action all the Dalits of Maharashtra and gave them a new self-respect. Dalit literature is nothing but the literary expression of this awareness" (Dangle 1994: xi).

Dangle names Baburao Bagul (Bāburāv Bāgūl) – one of the first and most prominent Marathi Dalit writers – as the major source of inspiration for other authors, who began to write literature in great numbers in the 1960s and 70s. Marathi Dalit writers produced an enormous amount of poetry, but short stories, autobiographies and critical essays have also been created in great numbers. According to Dangle, the Dalit Panthers were established in 1972 by three Marathi Dalit writers – Arjun Dangle himself, Namdeo Dhasal (Nāmˡdev Ḍhasāl) and J. V. Pawar (Je. Vī. Pavār) – when a great amount of Dalit writings already existed in the Marathi language. Thus, the Dalit Panther Ambedkarite so-

[2] Ambedkarite militant social organization, see Zelliot 2015.

[3] Bhīmˡrāv Rāmˡjī Āmbeḍˡkar (1891–1956), better known as Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar or Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, was an economist, politician, social reformer, the first Law and Justice minister of independent India, who headed the committee drafting the Constitution of India, and the father and inspiration of the Dalit movement as well as a prolific writer.

cial organization grew out of this new and vibrant literary movement. The establishment of the Dalit Panther movement prompted a further increase in literary production.[4]

Several other Dalit authors and critics have attempted to define “Dalit literature”. The definition given by Sharankumar Limbale (Śaraṇˈkumār Liṃbāle) appears to be the one accepted by most scholars today. According to Limbale, Dalit literature means “writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with Dalit consciousness” (Brueck 2014: 10). Dalit consciousness, or *dalit cetˈnā,* is an essential concept and a central theoretical tool for Dalit literature. Limbale defines Dalit consciousness as

> the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature; it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness (cited in Brueck 2006).

According to Laura Brueck

(http://www.india-seminar.com/2006/558/558%20laura%20r.%20brueck.htm.),

> Dalit chetna today is a thoroughly modern critical concept in the mode of deconstruction. It is an expression of denial, a theoretical tool that contributes to the destabilization of traditional notions of social hierarchy and cultural authenticity. Contemporary Dalit critics are specific about both the current nature and the importance of Dalit chetna. […] Dalit chetna has become an essential component of the growing Dalit literary critical lexicon.[5]

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[4] See Dangle1994: xii.

[5] For a deeper discussion of the term *dalit cetˈnā* see Brueck 2006.

Sara Beth Hunt has pointed out that in the case of Dalit literature, the meaning of "literature" has been expanded so that "Dalit literature has become an umbrella-like term used to encompass all Dalit-authored writings on Dalit issues", including, alongside fictional genres "articles on economic liberalisation/privatisation/globalisation and their effects on the Dalit community, articles on the system of reservation[6] […,] on Dalits and on the education system, [… and the] relationship between Dalits and other minority communities, particularly the OBCs and the STs"[7] (Beth Hunt 2014: 154). While definitions might vary, what seems to have been accepted by most Dalit authors, critics and activists from the 1970s until today is that Dalit literature is part of the Dalit emancipatory movement and should not be regarded separately from it.

2 History of Hindi Dalit Literature: An Overview

Sara Beth Hunt traces the beginnings of Dalit writing in Hindi back to the late 19th century and what is called by her "jati histories" (Beth Hunt 2014: 27) – i.e. documents, written by members of "untouchable" *jāti*s,[8] such as the Chamar (*camār*),[9] in an attempt to

[6] The term "reservation" means, in the Indian context, affirmative action, i.e. places and positions in schools, universities and in the governmental and public sector, which are reserved for members of marginalized groups such as Dalits.

[7] The abbreviations ST and OBC stand for Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. These terms, along with SC for Scheduled Castes, were introduced by the British government in 1936 as a means of enforcing affirmative action (or "reservation", see footnote above) (Böck, Rao 1995).

[8] The term *jāti* is discussed at length in chapter 1 of this work. To give an extremely simplified explanation at this point, it might be said that *jāti* is one of the terms traditionally and not quite correctly translated into English as "caste", while today it overwhelmingly refers to occupational groups.

[9] See footnote 73.

prove to the British government that these *jāti*s have mistakenly been registered as "untouchable" while their true origins were *kṣatriya*.[10, 11]

As the next stage in the development of Dalit writing in Hindi, Beth Hunt names the writings of Swami Achutanand (Svāmī Achūtānand, 1879–1933), a key figure in Dalit political history in the Hindi sphere. The following paragraph from Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp's article *From Bhakti to Buddhism: Ravidas and Ambedkar* provides information about crucial cornerstones of his significance:

> Swami Achutanand (1879–1933) arrived and made his home in Kanpur. He was a jatav chamar who grew up in the cantonment in western Uttar Pradesh and joined the Arya Samaj.[12] Disgruntled with its discrimination against untouchables, he left and deliberately chose the nom de plume of 'a-chut' (meaning not polluted), "the one who was in a state of purity" (Khare 1984: 84).[13] He built up the Adi Hindu movement in Uttar Pradesh, reversed the so-called "Aryan theory of race" (Bayly 1999: 127), and claimed that the untouchables were the highly civilised and peaceful original inhabitants of India who used to rule the country. They were subjugated and enslaved through the Aryan conquest. That theory was nothing new or original. The Adi Andhra, Adi Karnataka and Adi Dravida movements in south India (Omvedt 1994) and the Ad Dharm movement in Pun-

[10] The word *kṣatriya* stands for the second highest of the four *varṇa*s. See chapter 1 of this work and Böck, Rao (1995) for a detailed discussion.

[11] This phenomenon has been termed Sanskritization, for its detailed discussion and theorization see Beth Hunt (2014), Srinivas (1968), Bayly (1999).

[12] The Ārya Samāj was a "Hindu revivalist movement founded in 1875 by Swāmī Dayānand Sarasvatī. The Ārya Samāj sought to restore Hinduism to what was perceived to be its original purity" (Sullivan 2003: 28).

[13] The term *achūt* is a commonly used word for "untouchable" in Hindi and some related Indian languages, but, being derived from the verb *chūnā*, "to touch", with the negative prefix *a*, it can also mean "untouched". See also Beth Hunt 2014: 37.

jab (Juergensmeyer 1982: 46) developed similar theories (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2007: 3).

According to Beth Hunt, Swami Achutanand started writing poetry and dramas in the early 1920s to promote the Adi Hindu movement and reach his mainly illiterate audience. Other activists soon joined in and started producing similar literary texts. Beth Hunt states that Adi Hindu activists suffered from an exclusion from the mainstream literary public sphere, and consequently created a counter-public sphere with a number of small privately owned printing presses. The launch of these presses helped develop what Beth Hunt calls "the field of Dalit pamphlets" of Hindi Dalit literature. By the 1930s this field turned into a vibrant counter-public sphere, through which literary texts written by "untouchable" authors "spread across north India on a massive scale by the mid-20th century" (Beth Hunt 2014: 26). The pamphlets printed and circulated by activists of this field, contained "songs, poetry, dramas, short ideological articles and, especially, narratives recounting the ancient past" and "were distributed at community gatherings, political meetings and annual community melas [(i.e. fairs)]" (Beth Hunt 2014: 26).

With the rising popularity of Bhimrao Ambedkar, the broader Dalit movement and especially following Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism,[14] themes of these pamphlets shifted to include Ambedkar's life story, texts on Buddhism, etc. With the rise of Dalit politics in the 1940s, political issues, such as challenges to the Scheduled Castes Federation[15] and the Republican Party of India[16] were also discussed (Beth Hunt 2014: 42f). This shift marked, according to Beth Hunt, the beginnings of a new trend in Hindi Dalit

[14] Dr. B. R. Ambedkar famously converted to Buddhism in an unprecedented ceremony on December 6th 1956 together with almost half a million Dalits (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2011: 1).

[15] The Scheduled Castes Federation was founded in 1942 by B. R. Ambedkar to campaign for the rights of the Dalit community.

[16] In 1956, B. R. Ambedkar announced that he planned to dismantle the SCF (Scheduled Castes Federation) and to found the Republican Party of India. Since he passed away before this could be accomplished, the Republican Party of India was formed in 1957 by his followers (Yadav 2011).

literature of the mid-20th century, characterized by a commitment to Ambedkarite politics, propagation of Buddhism as well as deep concern with the upholding of the securities and rights given to members of the Scheduled Castes[17] at the time of Independence. Beth Hunt states further that Hindi Dalit writers of this generation (1940s through 1970s) recognized that "literary production, political activism and religious protest went hand in hand" (Beth Hunt 2014: 49).

According to Beth Hunt, despite the decline in Dalit politics in the 1970s, some of the most influential "pamphlet field" presses maintained their publications throughout the decade. At the same time, a new generation of Dalit writers in Hindi emerged and started several new periodicals, such as *Bhim Dainik* ("Ambedkar Daily"; 1970) and *Samta Shakti* ("Power of Equality"; 1972), *Bhim* ("Ambedkar"; 1977), *Dalit Chetna* ("Dalit Consciousness"; 1978), etc. (Beth Hunt 2014: 54). This generation kept to the practices of Dalit pamphlet literature in that it continued to use small privately owned printing presses; it also adhered to the pamphlet format and community-based distribution during political rallies, fairs and other gatherings.

Beth Hunt states further that the pamphlet field of Hindi Dalit literature continues to thrive today, but functions quite separately from what in Beth Hunt's phrasing emerged as the "rise of the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature" in the 1980s. It was initiated by Hindi Dalit authors such as Mohandas Naimishray (Mohandās Naimiśrāy) and Omprakash Valmiki (Omprakāś Vālmīki) – to name two of the best known authors who played a major part in the origination of this field – who were inspired by Marathi Dalit literature and its trends.

According to Beth Hunt, Arjun Dangle referred to the period between 1978 and 1986 as "the period of autobiographies" in the history of Marathi Dalit literature. These autobiographies included Daya Pawar's *Balut* (1978), Shankarrao Kharat's *Taral-Antaral*

[17] See footnote 7 above.

(1981), Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (1984), Laxman Mane's *Upara* (1980), Dadasaheb More's *Gabal* (1984), P. E. Sonkamble's *Athvaninche Pakshi* (1973); as well as the following autobiographies written by Dalit women authors: Babetai Kamble's *Jina Amucha* (1986), Shantabai Kamble's *Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* (1983) and Kumud Pawde's *Antasphot* (1981) (Beth Hunt 2014: 206). These autobiographies quickly became widely acclaimed and are regarded as masterpieces of Dalit literature today. Daya Pawar's *Balut*, to mention one example, was translated into Hindi as *Achūt* and published in three editions within fifteen years.

Beth Hunt identifies several periods in the formation of this new field of Hindi Dalit literature initiated by middle-class Dalit writers starting in the early 1980s. The first phase included translation of Marathi Dalit literature into Hindi – particularly, translation of autobiographies. The formation of an extensive support network was followed by the publication of autobiographical narratives written by Hindi Dalit authors. This phase commenced in the 1990s and the autobiographies were at first published in parts in literary magazines such as *Hans*,[18] and later as monographs (Beth Hunt 2014: 133).

Debjani Ganguly associates the popularity of the autobiographical genre in Dalit literature with an increased vocalization of the Human Rights discourse:

> The recent dominance of life-writing over poetry and the short story [(which were dominant in early Marathi Dalit literature)] is a significant development and occurred in tandem with an incremental increase through the 1990s in the vocalisation of low-caste[19] aspirations in the public

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[18] The literary magazine *Hans* was first established by Munshi Premchand in the 1930s, but was shut down some 25 years later. Its modern manifestation was revived by the renowned Hindi writer Rajendra Yadav. *Hans* is one of the most important Hindi literary magazines today. Its late editor is well-known for the crucial role he played in the development and promotion of Hindi Dalit literature.

[19] See chapter 1 of this work for a detailed discussion of the term "caste".

sphere. This is intimately linked not just to an increased questioning of the foundations of the secular and modernising Nehruvian state through the 1980s, but also to an enhanced connectivity to the discourse of human rights on the international stage. The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights and the National Federation of Dalit Women, both established in the 1990s, are now powerful forums for the national and global articulation of Dalit rights (Ganguly 2009: 432).

3 The Special Place of Autobiography

As is the case with many other terms used in the title of this dissertation, the word "autobiography" is also a problematic term. The most common term used in the Hindi originals is *ātmakathā*, meaning literally "self-story" or "story of the self". This is a very common term in the Hindi language – one could say, it is as common as the word autobiography is in English – and it is also the term which is mostly used by the authors themselves to talk about the works in the focus of this dissertation. Both, Omprakash Valmiki and Tulsiram (Tulsīrām)[20] used it repeatedly in my interviews with them in 2012 and 2014 respectively. Other terms or phrases with a similar meaning are used by the authors as well. In the introduction to *Jūṭhan*, Omprakash Valmiki uses the term *ātmakathā* four times, but he also uses the term *vyathā-kathā* twice. The word *vyathā* means as much as "pain" or "sorrow". Thus, *vyathā-kathā* can be translated as a "story of pain" (Valmiki 1999: 1). Arun Prabha Mukherjee translated it as a "narrative of pain" in her translation of the work (Valmiki 2003: XIII). While this is Valmiki's own designation for his autobiography, it is unquestionably not a synonym of *ātmakathā*, but a term that describes Valmiki's feelings and attitude towards his autobiography *Jūṭhan*. Kausalya

[20] As often happens with South Asian proper names, Tulsiram's name appears in several resources (including his books) at times written as one word (Tulsīrām) and at times as two words (Tulsī Rām). I chose to write it as one word, because Tulsiram himself wrote his name as one word in the copy of *Maṇikarṇikā*, which he gave me as a gift during our meeting in September 2014.

Baisantri (Kausalyā Baisaṃtrī) calls her autobiography *jīvan kī kathā* when she dedicates *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* to her parents (Baisantri 1999: 7). The word *jīvan* means "life", so *jīvan kī kathā* could be translated as "life story" and seen as a synonym of *ātmakathā*. In the introduction to *Murdahiyā*, Tulsiram avoids the usage of any term which could be translated as "autobiography", but describes his work as *jīvan yātrā kā lekhā-jokhā* ("account of life-journey") at one point (Tulsiram 2014a: 6). In the introduction to the second part of his autobiography, *Maṇikarṇikā*, however, the term *ātmakathā* is used: *maiṃ hameśā kahˈtā rahˈtā thā ki atmakathā kisī bhī vyakti kī aṃtim racˈnā honī chahie* ("I always kept saying that an autobiography should be a person's final work"; Tulsiram 2014b: 5). The corresponding terms which can be used in the English language are more diverse than the terms used in Hindi by the authors whose works are in the focus of this dissertation.

The term autobiography has been accused of being "bound up in historical terms with the life narratives of the 'atomistic Western male hero'" (Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley 2015: 4) and thus rejected by "many postmodern and postcolonial theorists" "on the basis that, as Smith and Watson summarize, 'its politics is one of exclusion'. Not only does it fail to recognize the breadth of autobiographical practice around the globe and at different times […] but, […] it also privileges a specifically "Western" notion of self, thus marginalizing other cultural forms of self and self-representation" (ibid.). While Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson "favor the terms *life writing* and *life narrative* on the basis that they are more 'inclusive of the heterogeneity of self-referential practices' and thus offer a means by which 'a new, globalized history of the field might be imagined'", according to Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley "scholars of South Asia have favored other terms: *life history* or, if concerned that the former would indicate some sort of truth-claim, *life story*" (Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley 2015: 4f.).

If one looks specifically at English language scholarly articles concerned with Dalit literature, a search on Google Scholar[21] yields 676 results for "Dalit autobiographies", 199

[21] https://scholar.google.com/ accessed on 02.09.22.

results for “Dalit personal narratives”, 147 results for “Dalit life narratives”, and 93 for “Dalit life writing”. The terms “life history” and “life story” are hardly used. Thus, while this demonstrates that there is no consensus in academic circles about the term to be used, the term “Dalit autobiographies” is still the most favored. The neglect of the problematic regarding the term “autobiography” by scholars of Dalit literature could reflect the fact that Dalit studies as a field is less concerned with the dichotomy colonized vs. colonizer while focusing on the more internally South Asian problematic of “untouchability”. In this dissertation, I therefore join the majority of scholars in the field and use the term “Dalit autobiography” while disregarding its arguable Western-centered aspect.

Today, nearly forty years after its inception, the corpus of the “autobiographic field” of Hindi Dalit literature is enormous and includes literary texts in many genres. Beth Hunt states that

> literary genres are […] ranked in the autobiographic field of Dalit literature in a hierarchy of symbolic value. At the top rung are Dalit autobiographies and Dalit literary criticism. Below these literary genres are forms of fictions, especially short stories, and below these, articles on contemporary Dalit social issues or on histories of Ambedkar or the Buddha. Finally, at the lowest rung are poetry and drama (Beth Hunt 2014: 168).

Beth Hunt explains further that members of this new field of Hindi Dalit literature began by writing and publishing their autobiographies not only due to the fact that they were inspired by Marathi Dalit autobiographies, but also because of the problem of representativity: “Emphasising their impoverished upbringing, their struggles to gain even a basic education and the continual obstacles they face in the form of caste discrimination, all become important strategies for Hindi Dalit writers to highlight their ‘representative’ Dalit identity while downplaying their ‘unrepresentative’ middle-class one” (Beth Hunt 2014: 136). Another reason was that, while a short story or a novel can be dismissed as fic-

tion, an autobiography cannot easily be accused of not being true and is thus often seen as a historic document (Beth Hunt 2014: 138; 176, etc.).

The genre of autobiography has developed into such a central feature of Hindi Dalit literature that Dalit authors have indicated that they were required to publish an autobiography before other works could be accepted for publication. For instance, Shyauraj Singh Bechain claimed in an interview that when he approached a commercial publishing house in Delhi for the publication of one of his books, he was told: “First give me your autobiography, then I’ll publish your other books. Otherwise your books will not sell” (Beth Hunt 2014: 206). Surajpal Chauhan (Sūrajˈpāl Cauhān), another renowned Hindi Dalit writer who authored a well-known autobiography, said in an interview that he was thinking about writing a second autobiography: “I had to rush to write the first one, since the movement needed it” (Beth Hunt 2014: 203). Moreover, all three authors whose autobiographies are in the focus of this dissertation claim in introductions to their respective works that they were approached either by publishers or other Dalit literary figures and asked to write their life stories.

Omprakash Valmiki states in the short author’s note preceding his autobiography that Raj Kishore (Rājkiśor),[22] renowned journalist, writer, poet, critic and editor of the well-known book series *Āj ke praśn* (“Today’s questions”), requested Valmiki to write “10−11 pages of his experiences in autobiographical style”[23, 24] (Valmiki 1999: *Lekhak kī or se*, i.e. “from the writer”) for the book *Harijan se Dalit* (“From Harijan to Dalit”). Valmiki claims that he was not able to complete this task and after a period of silence received an ultimatum from Raj Kishore. Only as a result of this was Valmiki able to bring himself to write the requested pages. The decision to write a book-length autobiography came,

[22] The transliterated form of the name is according to the way it is written in Valmiki’s footnote, while the anglicized version is the one most commonly found in English language sources.

[23] Hindi original: *das-gyārah pr̥ṣṭhoṃ meṃ apˈne anubhav atmakathātmak śailī meṃ*.

[24] All translations from Hindi are mine unless indicated otherwise.

according to him, as a response to the stream of letters suggesting this, which he received following the publication of his short autobiographical text in *Harijan se Dalit*.

Similarly, Kausalya Baisantri states in the introduction to her work (*bhūmikā*) that women writers Kumud Pawde (Kumud Pāwḍe) and her sister Nalini Somkuwar (Nalinī Sumkuṃvar) were the first to suggest to her to write about her experiences. In a nearly verbatim repetition of Valmiki's words, she claims that she found it very hard to start writing. Only later, when another duo of women writers, Urmila Pawar (Urmilā Pavār) and Meenakshi Moon (Mīnākṣī Mūn), came to interview her in Delhi and also suggested that Baisantri should write about her experiences did she decide to compose her autobiography. Both Kumud Pawde and Urmila Pawar are acclaimed authors of Dalit women autobiographies in Marathi.

In the introduction to the first part of his autobiography, Tulsiram claims that all the credit for the "digging out of this life out of Murdahiyā"[25, 26] (Tulsiram 2014a: 5) goes to *Tadbhav* magazine[27] editor Akhilesh (Akhileś), who "always used to meet me holding a spade instead of a pen"[28] (ibid.). "Strictly speaking, I dug out my life out of Murdahiya with his spade"[29] (ibid.). While Tulsiram does not go into details explaining Akhilesh's role in the creation of his autobiography, it does appear as if Tulsiram was less than enthusiastic about "digging out his life" and that a suggestion and perhaps even insistence from the *Tadbhav* editor were needed for him to be convinced to commit to writing his

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[25] The namesake of the first part of Tulsiram's autobiography, *Murdahiyā* is the name of a space on the outskirts of the village Dharampur (near Azamgarh), in which Tulsiram grew up. See below for more details.

[26] Hindi original: *is jiṃdagī ko murdahiyā se khod'kar bahār lāne kā.*

[27] *Tadbhav* is a quarterly Hindi language literary magazine.

[28] Hindi original: *ye hameśā mere sāmne kalam ke bad'le phāv'ṛā liye taiyār mil'te the.*

[29] Hindi original: *sahī arthoṃ meṃ maiṃne un'kī hī phāv'ṛe se khod'kar 'murdahiyā' se ap'nī jiṃdagī ko bāhar nikālā.*

autobiography. In the introduction to the second part of his autobiography, *Maṇikarṇikā*, Tulsiram adds that he always thought that an autobiography had to be the final endeavor in a person's life (see above) and that it was the editor of *Tadbhav* magazine Akhilesh, who convinced him that this not necessarily had to be so (Tulsiram 2014b: 5).

All of the above points towards the significance, which Dalit autobiographies are endowed with by both established Dalit writers themselves, as well as editors interested in publishing Dalit literature. Beth Hunt maintains that "[t]here is a common assumption that members of a marginalised group will both *want* and *need* to write autobiographical literature in order to express their experiences of oppression. In the eyes of the mainstream literary field, this is their one (and only) legitimate life experience. In this sense, autobiography allows Dalits to participate in the literary field only in a limited and predetermined way" (Beth Hunt 2014: 206).

Many authors of Hindi Dalit autobiographies have proceeded to publish literary texts written in other genres such as short story, literary criticism, poetry and even novels. Omprakash Valmiki, to name one example, published one poetry collection before the publication of his autobiography *Jūṭhan* in 1997 and two further poetry collections, two short story collections as well as two books of literary criticism after it.[30] It is indisputable that the genre of autobiography was crucial for the development of Hindi Dalit literature and Beth Hunt's claim that writing their autobiographies helped authors in this "autobiographic field" of Hindi Dalit literature to enter mainstream Hindi literary sphere and publish literary works written in other genres, seems appropriate. However, in this dissertation I argue that Hindi Dalit authors do not depend on fictional genres to skillfully use literary conventions and narrative techniques, but expertly do so in their autobiographies as well, despite the restrictions imposed upon them through this genre.

[30] The titles in corresponding order are: *Sadiyoṃ Kā Santāp* (1989), *Bas! Bahut Ho Cukā* (1997), *Salām* (2000), *Ghuspaithiye* (2004), *Dalit Sāhitya Kā Saundaryaśāstra* (2001) and *Mukhyadhārā Aur Dalit Sāhitya* (2009).

4 Authors and Works in Focus of this Dissertation

This dissertation analyzes four books written by three distinguished Dalit authors: Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*, Kausalya Baisantri's *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* and Tulsiram's *Murdahiyā* and *Maṇikarṇikā* each constitute a milestone in the history of Hindi Dalit literature in their own way. The following brief introductions of the books and their authors are meant as rough outlines with the purpose to provide context for the reader; they are unable to give justice to these exceptional works, nor can the analysis presented in this dissertation be seen as exhaustive. Rather, I suggest that further analyses of narrative techniques used by Dalit authors is needed in order to complement scholarly understanding of the major phenomenon Dalit literature has become – not exclusively in the Hindi language. The following subsections correspond to the chronological order of the original publication of each autobiography.

4.1 Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*

Omprakash Valmiki (1950–2013) was one of the first authors in what Sara Beth Hunt calls "the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature" (see above). As a young man, Valmiki spent several years in the Indian state of Maharashtra. He was first a trainee at the Ordnance Factory Training Institute in Bombay, then an employee at the ordnance factory in Chandrapur, where he came into contact with numerous Dalit activists, including Marathi Dalit writers. During this time, he started to write poetry and short plays, in which he acted as both performer and director. Having been deeply influenced by Marathi Dalit literature, once he returned to Dehradun – a city not far away from his home village, in which he spent his last years of school – Valmiki became instrumental in the development of Hindi Dalit literature. The 2005 bilingual (English and Hindi) anthology *Indian Literature: An Introduction,* published by the University of Delhi, calls Valmiki "a forerunner among writers who laid the foundation for Dalit literature in Hindi"

and claims further that “Valmiki has enriched Hindi literature with” his works (University of Delhi 2005: 322). By 2010, Valmiki became one of the most prominent and established Hindi Dalit authors not only in the Dalit counter-public sphere, but also in the Hindi mainstream: in that year he was invited to the prominent Jaipur literature festival along with five other notable Dalit authors.[31] Four years later, Valmiki’s poem *Thākur kā kuāṃ*[32] was recited on the same stage by Irrfan Khan – one of the most prominent Bollywood actors at the time. Valmiki’s autobiography *Jūṭhan* was the first Hindi Dalit autobiography to have been translated into the English language (by Arun Prabha Mukherjee, published in 2003 by Columbia University Press). In the words of the renowned Hindi and English writer Mridula Garg, “Valmiki put Dalit writing on the Hindi literary map”.[33]

About two thirds of *Jūṭhan*[34] cover in a chronological account Omprakash Valmiki’s childhood and adolescence in the North Indian village Barla (Muzaffarnagar district, Ut-

[31] The invited authors, according to *The Indian Express*, were: Des Raj Kali, P. Sivakami, Omprakash Valmiki, Kancha Ilaiah, Ajay Navaria and Laxman Gaikwad (http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/des-raj-kali-a-dalit-writer-to-feature-at-jaipur-literature-fest/570019/ accessed on 04.07.22.).

[32] The poem is a direct response to a short story by the same name written by the famous Hindi writer Munshi Premchand. The relationship between Premchand’s works and Dalit literature is discussed in chapter 5 “Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment” below.

[33] See *The Times of India* archive:
https://web.archive.org/web/20131121102207/http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-11-18/india/44201313_1_dalit-joothan-hindi-literature accessed on 04.07.22.

[34] The Hindi word *jūṭhan* means “leftovers”, the significance of this title is discussed below in chapter 5 “Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment”.

tar Pradesh). Valmiki's family belonged to the Chuhra[35] *jāti* and lived in a *bastī*[36] on the outskirts of the village. Between the village itself and the *bastī* was a kind of a boundary, a pond called Dabbowali (*ḍabbovālī*, Valmiki 1999: 11). Valmiki describes this boundary and with it the environment he was surrounded with as a child and young adult in the following manner:

> The homes of the Chuhras were on the edges of the pond. All the women of the village, young girls, older women, even the newly married brides, would sit in the open space behind these homes at the edges of the pond to take a shit. Not just under the cover of darkness but even in daylight. The purdah-observing Tyagi[37] women, their faces covered with their saris, shawls around their shoulders, found relief in this open-air latrine. They sat on Dabbowali's shores without worrying about decency, exposing their private parts. At this same spot they would have a conference at a round table to discuss all the quarrels of the village. The muck was strewn everywhere. The stench was so overpowering that one would choke within a minute. The pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights – this was the environment of my childhood. 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[38, 39] (Valmiki 2003: 1f).

[35] The term *cūhˈṛā* is the name of the *jāti*, to which Valmiki's family belongs, and which appears to be the biggest Scheduled Caste of Valmiki's native village Barla. Denzil Ibbetson (1916) writes that it is a community of sweepers and scavengers, mainly based in Punjab and Pakistan. According to Ibbetson, the name *cūhˈṛā* is derived from the word *śudˈrā*, the designation of the lowest of the four varˈṇas (Ibbetson 1916: 290–295).

[36] The word *bastī* f. means any small place or living area, like a small town, part of a village, a neighborhood, etc. In the context of Dalit life and literature, *bastī* usually means a smallish neighborhood on the outskirts of a village or a town, in which members of one or several Dalit communities are segregated. The term is often translated into English as "slum", but is left untranslated in this dissertation.

[37] See footnote 80 below.

From the very beginning of his autobiography Valmiki uses this implicit way to accuse the Indian society, and particularly supporters of the “caste system”,[40] of condemning members of the so-called “lower *jāti*s” to a life at the bottom of society. While the surroundings are described as dirty, stinking and full of excreta, as persons creating this dirt and stench Valmiki names only “upper caste” women: “all the women of the village, young girls, older women, even the newly married brides”. By using this imagery of what traditionally is considered pure, modest and respectable (i.e. young women, newly married brides) and contrasting it with the dirt and filth around the pond Dabbowali, Valmiki breaks the pattern of the anticipated and emphasizes the shocking and horrific nature of the state this “barrier” between the village proper and the Chuhra *bastī* was in. Thus, Valmiki distances himself as well as the members of his *jāti* Chuhra from the dirt and stench that surrounded the *bastī* he grew up in while simultaneously blaming for it women from the so-called “upper castes”. This motif runs like a thread through Valmiki’s narrative, in which he poignantly challenges the customs associated with the ‘caste system’ and depicts the dire living conditions and stark caste oppression which the Chuhras and Valmiki’s own family had to suffer. “If those who call the *varṇa* system an ideal system would have to live in this environment for two or four days, their opinion would surely change”[41, 42] (Valmiki 1999: 11).

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[38] Even though in this case Arun Prabha Mukherjee’s translation is used rather than my own, the Hindi original is provided in the following footnote in order not to diverge from the standard practice in this dissertation and to allow the reader to compare between the two versions.

[39] Hindi original: *johˈṛī ke kināre par cūhˈroṃ ke makān the, jinˈke pīche gā̃v bhar kī aurateṃ, javān laṛˈkiyā̃, baṛī-būṛhī yahā̃ tak ki naī navelī dulhaneṃ bhī isī ḍabbovālī ke kināre khule meṃ ṭaṭṭī-farāgat ke lie baiṭh jātī thīṃ. rāt ke aṃdhere meṃ hī nahīṃ, din ke ujāle meṃ bhī parˈdoṃ meṃ rahˈnevālī tyāgī mahilāeṃ, ghū̃ghaṭe kāṛhe, duśāle oṛhe is sārvajanik khule śaucālay meṃ nivṛtti pātī thīṃ. tamām śarm-lihāj choṛˈkar ve ḍabbovālī ke kinare gopanīy jism ughāṛˈkar baiṭh jātī thīṃ. isī jagah gā̃v bhar ke laṛāī-jhagˈṛe golˈmez konfreṁs kī śakl meṃ carˈcit hote the. cāroṃ taraf gaṃdagī bharī hotī thī. aisī durgaṁdh ki minaṭ bhar meṃ sā̃s ghuṭ jāe. taṃg galiyoṃ meṃ ghūmˈte sūar, naṃg-dhaṛaṃg bacce, kutte, rozˈmarrā ke jhagˈṛe bas yah thā vah vātāvaraṇ jisˈmeṃ bacˈpan bītā. is māhaul meṃ yadi varṇ-vyavasthā ko ādarś-vyavasthā kahˈnevāloṃ ko do-cār din rahˈnā paṛ jāe to unˈkī rāy badal jāegī* (Valmiki 1999: 11).

[40] See chapter 1 “Who is a Dalit?” below.

Having been the youngest son in a family of five brothers and one younger sister, the young Valmiki was the first person in his family to be sent to school and receive formal education. In this village setting of his autobiography, the author documents his experiences as a boy from the Cuhra *jāti* who was subjected to stark caste oppression as well as physical violence at school, particularly at the hands of his school teachers.

Apart from the more personal and familial topics, *Jūṭhan* also depicts the day-to-day life of members of his community and the daily struggles they had to face. Unpaid labor, hunger, clay houses collapsing during monsoon season, religious ceremonies and explicit critique of superstition as well as extreme caste oppression and physical violence against people from “lower *jāti*s” are among the major themes of Omprakash Valmiki’s autobiography. Once the narrative – together with its main protagonist – leaves the village and moves to the city, more personal stories are gradually included, which towards the end of the book are increasingly replaced by questions of Dalit activism and politics.

4.2 Kausalya Baisantri’s *Dohᴵrā Abhiśāp*

Kausalya Baisantri (1926–2011) was born Kausalya Nandeshwar (Naṃdeśvar) in Nagpur, Maharashtra. She was the second oldest child in a family of six daughters and one son. Living in Nagpur at that time and belonging to the Mahar[43] community, her parents were inspired by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and his ideas. As a result of this inspiration,

[41] Hindi original: *is māhaul meṃ yadi varṇ-vyavasthā ko ādarś-vyavasthā kahᴵnevāloṃ ko do-cār din rahᴵnā paṛ jāe to unᴵkī rāy badal jāegī*.

[42] In the Hindi original, two different verb constructions are used in this sentence: subjunctive in the first clause (*yadi* […] *rahᴵnā paṛ jāe,* “if […] would have to live”) and future tense in the second (*badal jāegī,* “will change”). The subjunctive in the first clause suggests a condition, something that may or could happen, while the future tense in the second implies that the opinion in question would change for sure. Since it is against the rules of the English language to use these two constructions simultaneously in one sentence, the adverb “surely” has been added to the translation.

they decided to provide all their children with education. In turn, Kausalya herself also became greatly influenced by Ambedkarite ideology and volunteered in Ambedkar's student campaign: she was junior secretary of the *śeḍˈyūlˈkāsṭ sṭūḍeṃṭ feḍˈreśan* ("Scheduled Caste Student Federation"; Baisantri 1999: 93) and participated in the meeting of the All India Scheduled Caste Student Federation in 1947 (Baisantri 1999: 96). Dalit activism remained extremely important to her even after her comparatively late marriage[44] to Devendra Kumar Baisantri (Devendra Kumār Baisaṃtrī). Her autobiography is to my knowledge her only published work.[45] Having been the first autobiography written by a Dalit woman in Hindi, it is considered a milestone in Hindi Dalit literature. According to Laura Brueck, the Dalit feminist activist, author and critic Anita Bharti (Anitā Bhārtī) referred to *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* as "*Dalit strī saṃgharṣ kā mahākāvya*, a 'classic' of Dalit feminist struggle" (Brueck 2017: 3). Kausalya Baisantri's autobiography has seen several reprints. The title of the work, *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*, literally means "double curse",[46] which refers to the intersectionality of being both, a woman and a Dalit. The two causes Kausalya Baisantri dedicated her life to – Ambedkarism and feminism – are clearly reflected in this title.

Kausalya Baisantri's autobiography dedicates over a dozen pages to a detailed account of the lives of the author's maternal grandmother and mother. Assuming the role of an omniscient narrator, Baisantri describes the life of her maternal grandmother starting

[43] The *jāti mahār* or Mahar is the largest Scheduled Caste in Maharashtra. According to Russell, traditional occupations of the Mahars included those of watchman, messenger, wall mender, etc. (Russell 2021: Vol. IV, 105–114). This community or *jāti* became famous because Dr. B. R. Ambedkar – principal instigator of the Dalit movement in the 1920s, famous politician, and much more – was one of its members.

[44] Kausalya was twenty-one at the time of her marriage.

[45] Apparently, "she [also] translated various essays and articles from Marathi to Hindi. She introduced Hindi readers to the work of activist Urmila Pawar through her translations", however, I could not find evidence of this. Source: https://theprint.in/opinion/kausalya-baisantri-early-dalit-woman-autobiographer-fought-double-curse/640191/ accessed on 04.07.22.

[46] It has also been translated as "Twice Cursed", i. e. by Laura Brueck (2019).

with her childhood, then proceeds to narrate the events which resulted in Baisantri's parents' marriage, by the way also dedicating a few paragraphs to the childhood of her father. After this, *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp* relates in a chronological order the life of its main protagonist, Kausalya Baisantri herself. Baisantri and her older sister are the first members of the family to be sent to school. Each of the schools Baisantri studied at and the circumstances of her schooling are given some prominence in the autobiography.

In a way which pushes the boundaries of autobiography,[47] this narrative is often interrupted to include episodes from the lives of other (mostly Dalit) women (see chapter 3 below). The optimistic narration of Baisantri's Ambedkarite activist student movement days is in a frank and sober narrative style followed by the disillusioned and bitter account of her marriage. However, despite the bitterness, positivity returns to the narrative when she announces that after years of misery she divorced her husband and obtained her independence to once again become busy as a feminist and Ambedkarite activist. The book ends on a critical note, in which Baisantri addresses the problems of patriarchy among Dalits and "upper caste"[48] feminism.

4.3 Tulsiram's *Murdahiyā* and *Maṇikarṇikā*

Tulsiram (1949–2015, born in Dharampur, Azamgarh district, UP) was a renowned academic and Dalit author, who regularly published critical articles on issues related to caste oppression, communalism, Dalit identity, contemporary politics and literature in

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[47] According to Philippe Lejeune (1989: 14), one of the main defining features of an autobiography is the fact that its main protagonist, author and narrator are (with some reservations) identical.

[48] While I endeavor not to use the term 'caste' or its derivatives in this dissertation, it is not always possible. The problematic of the term, as well as my usage of it, is discussed at length in chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?". The terms 'upper caste' or 'high caste', in this dissertation, do not refer to any specific 'castes', but are meant to be understood as "other than Dalit".

Hindi magazines. As an academic, he also authored several books in his professional capacity. According to the authors of his obituary, "[b]esides engaging in research in Marxism, International Politics, in particular the international politics during the period of Soviet Union, he also studied Buddhist perspectives and Ambedkarism, assimilating his understandings of them in his larger understanding of politics".[49] His critically acclaimed autobiography is comprised of two books[50] – *Murdahiyā* (2012, quoted acc. to 2nd edition 2014a), which covers approximately the first 16 years of his life in the village Dharampur and *Maṇikarṇikā* (2014b), covering subsequent ten years, which he spent in Varanasi as a student at the Banaras Hindu University (BHU). According to the introduction to *Manikarṇikā*, the first book of Tulsiram's autobiography received high praise from several renowned academics who called *Murdahiyā* an "anthropological work". Furthermore, the late literary critic, linguist and academic Namwar Singh (Nāmˈvar Siṃh) stated that the descriptions of village life which can be found in *Murdahiyā*, cannot be found even in Premchand's[51] works (Tulsiram 2014b: 5).

The titles of both parts of his autobiography are names of places which were of particular significance to the author. In the case of the first part of his autobiography, *Murdahiyā* is the name of a "multipurpose working ground" (*bahuddeśīy karmasthalī*) of the village Dharampur, which combined a cremation and a burial ground, a grazing place, agricultural fields, a playing ground for Tulsiram and his friends – in short, it was a "strategic center" (*sāmarik kendr*) for the Dalits of the village. According to his autobiography, Tulsiram spent a great part of his youth and adolescence in and around this place. Due to the good, bad, frightening, macabre and touching memories he associated with this place, he often uses it as a metaphor for home in his narrative. Besides his own experiences as a child and youth, the first part of his autobiography contains a

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[49] https://www.cpiml.net/liberation/2015/03/professor-tulsi-ram accessed on 06.07.22.

[50] Tulsiram wrote in the author's note to *Manikarṇikā* that a third part was forthcoming. Whatever progress he had made on it, it remained unfinished due to his death in 2015.

[51] The relationship between Premchand's works and Dalit literature is discussed in chapter 5 "Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment" below.

great amount of descriptions of life, traditions and superstitions of the people – mainly, but not restricted to, Dalits – who lived around him in Dharampur. It also contains detailed descriptions of his experiences as a school pupil – from the writing materials he used to the friends he had and the discrimination he faced.

The namesake of the second part of Tulsiram's autobiography is the *manikarṇikā ghat* (Manikarnika Ghat) in Varanasi, one of the holiest cremation grounds among the sacred riverfronts (*ghat*s), alongside the river Ganga. It appears that this *ghat* was the nearest thing to *murdahiyā* – the place – Tulsiram found in Varanasi and it thus became the title for the ten years of his life he spent there. This second part of his autobiography, describes his years as a BHU student, his engagement with Buddhism, Marxism, the Naxalite[52] movement, Communism and leftist politics. At times, it reads more as an account on the political history of India of those years (1966–1976) than as an autobiography. But the narrative returns again and again to the thoughts, ideological dilemmas, feelings and experiences of the author and main protagonist of this extraordinary book.

5 Reception of Dalit Literature Today

Sarah Beth Hunt has argued that Hindi Dalit literature entered the realm of the mainstream Hindi literary public sphere in 2004 with the special issue of the mainstream Hindi literary magazine *Hans*. The issue was dedicated to Hindi Dalit literature in its entirety. Two Hindi Dalit authors were invited as guest-editors of the same: the by that time well-established Shyauraj Singh Bechain (Śyaorāj Siṃh Bechain) and the then young and up-and-coming Ajay Navaria (Ajay Navāriyā), who is one of the best known and most prominent Hindi Dalit authors today (Beth Hunt 2014: 132).

[52] "Naxalite, general designation given to several Maoist-oriented and militant insurgent and separatist groups that have operated intermittently in India since the mid-1960s" (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Naxalite accessed on 13.07.22.).

The constantly growing readership of Dalit literature is indisputable. For several decades, works of Hindi Dalit literature have regularly appeared in renowned Hindi literary journals such as *Hans* magazine and *Yuddhrat Aam Aadmi*, whose late publishers Rajendra Yadav (Rājendra Yādav) and Ramnika Gupta (Ramaṇikā Guptā) have been instrumental in the development of Hindi Dalit literature. There also exist several Dalit-run Hindi Dalit magazines, of which the annual *Dalit Sahitya* as well as *Apeksha* are the most prominent ones (Beth Hunt 2014).

Several Hindi Dalit autobiographies, including the works discussed in this dissertation, have been published by India's major publishing houses such as Rajkamal Prakashan, Radhakrishna Prakashan, Vani Prakashan, etc. in more than one edition. Beth Hunt states that, after the publication of their autobiographies, several Hindi Dalit authors, for instance, Omprakash Valmiki and Mohandas Naimishray, were able to publish further works in the Hindi mainstream, including collections of short stories, literary criticism and more (Beth Hunt 2014: 202).[53] Beth Hunt points out that "since the transaction is commercial, these publishers will only publish Dalit writers whose books they expect to make a profit" (Beth Hunt 2014: 166). She goes on to quote two well-known Hindi Dalit authors, Mohandas Naimishray and Jayprakash Kardam (Jayprakāś Kardam), both of whom attest that mainstream Hindi commercial presses are willing to publish Dalit authored books, because of the growing market for Dalit literature (ibid). Thus, a large readership and a growing demand for Hindi Dalit literature seems undeniable.

Scholarship on Dalit literature is enormous. To get a glimpse at the amount of scholarly articles on Dalit literature it is enough to have a look at some well-known online databases of academic papers. An online search in the Indian research paper archive Shodhganga[54] for the keyword "dalit" returns 289,017 results.[55] A search for "Dalit literature"

[53] For instance, Valmiki 1999, 2010, 2015, Tulsiram 2014a, 2014b, Navaria 2012.

[54] https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in (accessed on 25.01.2022).

on Google Scholar[56] returns 44,900 results while the same search on JSTOR[57] yields 4,297 results.

In the introduction to the second part of his autobiography, *Maṇikarṇikā*, Tulsiram writes that "more than 50 research students from universities from the whole country are doing research on *Murdahiyā*"[58] (Tulsiram 2014b: 5). *Murdahiyā* is the title of the first part of his autobiography, which appeared two years before the second part. That is to say that in the space of about two years only, according to the knowledge of the author, more than 50 research papers have been written on the first part of his autobiography. While this undoubtedly indicates the popularity Tulsiram's work has achieved, it also hints at the great interest Dalit literature as a whole is facing in academic circles.

In their 2012 article, M. Sridhar and Alladi Uma argue for re-interpretation of Comparative Literature and a development and inclusion of a comprehensive Dalit Studies program instead of a mere inclusion of some Dalit authored texts in single courses (Sridhar and Uma 2012). It is unclear how far such a development has progressed, but, in recent decades, Dalit Studies as an academic discipline – often combined with Adivasi,[59] Gender and/or Diaspora Studies – has emerged. Today, many Indian universities offer courses in this field, among them are such established institutions as the Jawaharlal Nehru

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[55] Unfortunately, the keyword system on Shodhganga is not well structured and a great many of the keywords may refer to subjects related to Dalit literature (e.g. "Dalit", "dalit", "dalita", "dalit sahitya", "dalit chetna", "dalit atmakatha", "dalit athmakathan", "dalit kavita", etc.), some of which may as well refer to research papers in the fields of sociology, political science, history, etc. Thus it impossible to say how many results "dalit literature" alone would yield. At the same time, the mere existence of this many subcategories points to the vastness of scholarship involved.

[56] https://www.google.com/search?q=google%20scholar (accessed on 25.01.2022).

[57] https://www.jstor.org (accessed on 25.01.2022).

[58] Hindi original: *50 se bhī jyādā śodh chātr 'murdahiyā' par deś bhar ke viśvavidyālayoṃ meṃ śodh kar rahe haiṃ*.

[59] See footnote 119.

University, University of Hyderabad, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, University of Allahabad.

Outside of India, scholarship on Dalit literature commenced after the milestone publication of *Poisoned Bread*. *Translations from Modern Marathi Literature* in 1992, a volume which for the first time made Dalit authored texts available for non-Marathi speakers. Eleanor Zelliot's *From Untouchable to Dalit* – probably the first serious academic study of Dalit literature outside of India – was also first published in 1992 and reprinted at least six times. Today, in addition to a vast amount of articles and essays which regularly appear in renowned academic journals, important anthologies have emerged, such as *Dalit Studies* by Ramnarayan S. Rawat and Kusuma Satyanarayana (eds.), *Dalit Literatures in India* by Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi Barak (eds.) and *Dalit Text: Aesthetics and Politics Re-Imagined* by Judith Misrahi-Barak, Kusuma Satyanarayana and Nicole Thiara (eds.), both of which were published by Routledge – one of the most important academic publishing houses in the field of South Asian studies. These publications illustrate that Dalit literature has become an established field of study not only on the subcontinent, but also outside of it.

6 Analyzing Dalit Literature: Analysis of Content or Form?

At this point, a thorough discussion of the title of this dissertation becomes increasingly important. While the terms "literature" and "Dalit literature" have been defined above, the terms "text", "subtext" and "narrative technique" still need clarification. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the definition of "text" as given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms as: "the actual wording of a written work, as distinct from a reader's (or theatrical director's) interpretation of its *STORY, *THEME, *SUBTEXT etc.; or a specific work chosen as the object of analysis" (Baldick 2001: 257). The same dictionary defines "subtext" as "any meaning or set of meanings which is implied rather

than explicitly stated in a literary work" (Baldick 2001: 249). I also use the term "narrative technique" in accordance with the definition from the same source, which states that "[a]s an adjective, 'narrative' means 'characterized by or relating to story-telling': thus narrative technique is the method of telling stories" (Baldick 2001: 165f), in other words, narrative technique answers the question of how a text is written rather than what is written in a text. Text, in this context, thus means the concrete wording or content of the literary works which are in the focus of this dissertation, while subtext signifies a message or messages that lie below (sub) the explicit (i.e. text). Through an analysis of form rather than content I uncover such hidden or implicit meanings, which the authors convey through the narrative techniques they use rather than through the actual words.

Dalit literature as a whole, including Hindi Dalit autobiographies, has for a long time been mainly studied as a sociological, cultural and historical phenomenon. Content analysis has been its dominant research mode, while analysis of form has rarely been in the foreground. Laura Brueck, one of the forerunners of formal and aesthetic analysis of Hindi Dalit literature, has pointed out that this treatment of Dalit literature has "somewhat paradoxically" resulted "in the rendering of this literature too as 'untouchable'" (Brueck 2017: 2). Furthermore, she argues that "Dalit literature has matured and expanded and institutionalized itself […] to the point that it is no longer responsible to […] disallow a considered analysis of the formal and aesthetic" (Brueck 2017: 9). Several other scholars argue for the analysis of literary aesthetics and form of Dalit literature rather than limiting research to content analysis. In addition to Brueck (2014, 2017), Toral Jatin Gajarawala (2013) and Nicole Thiara (2016) are among the leading scholars in this trend. In the case of Hindi Dalit autobiographies, the lack of formal and aesthetical analysis is even greater. Dalit autobiographies have been widely celebrated as authentic documents of Dalit experience and analyzed for their socio-political significance, while very little attention has been paid to their structural, formal, aesthetic and linguistic elements.

Reasons for this phenomenon may include the fact – as both Brueck and Thiara have pointed out – that Dalit critics themselves want to discourage aesthetic analysis of Dalit

literature, while putting political aims of Dalit empowerment in the foreground (Brueck 2014: 6f., Thiara 2016: 257). In her groundbreaking book *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imaginations of Hindi Dalit Literature* Brueck argues that

> Dalit literary theory itself is too often dismissive, perhaps willfully so, of the diversity and complexity of the literary strategies employed by Dalit authors across a range of regional, linguistic, class, and gender identity positions. This arises from a strategic critical campaign […] to protect the boundaries of Dalit literature from dissimilation into multiple, individual authorial approaches that, when differentiated and divided, lose their unified political impact" (Brueck 2014: 7).

At the same time, according to Beth Hunt, "Hindi Dalit writers have continued to face severe criticism from [… mainstream] Hindi scholars regarding the crudeness of their language, their lack of creativity and literary 'style', and their acquiescence to using 'identity politics'" (Beth Hunt 2014: 44). I argue that academic works such as the present serve to challenge this kind of critique and demonstrate that Dalit literary works deserve scholarly and critical attention in no way to a lesser degree than the rest of modern Indian literature.

Furthermore, it seems that the apparent requirement of Hindi Dalit authors to start their literary careers in the genre of autobiography, as stated by Beth Hunt (see above), has also taken control of scholarship on Dalit literature. The vast majority of content-based research on Hindi Dalit autobiographies seems to assume that members of marginalized groups write their life narratives solely out of the urge to share their experiences and – in the case of Dalit literature – lay bare the evils of caste oppression, and in no way to find means of creative expression and an artistic outlet. Brueck (2014) has argued that Hindi Dalit writers expertly as well as extensively use a wide range of narrative techniques in their short stories. I argue that Hindi Dalit authors stylize the narrative form of their autobiographies not less skillfully and consciously than in the case of short stories. While I in no way want to deny Hindi Dalit autobiographies their worth as histori-

cal documents, I read these works as literary texts and analyze their form and narrative structure not in order to diminish their socio-political significance and impact, but to add to the scholarly understanding of the major phenomenon that Dalit literature has become since its inception. Thus, joining Nicole Thiara in her motivation, I read the narrative techniques employed by Hindi Dalit authors in their autobiographies "as explicitly linked to their political content and seeking to create an aesthetics of empowerment" (Thiara 2016: 258).

The present dissertation constitutes a structural analysis of Hindi Dalit autobiographies. Using computer assisted text analysis – for which I created digitized versions of the analyzed texts – and close reading as my main methods of analysis I seek to reveal the narrative techniques used by the three authors of Hindi Dalit autobiographies in question to perform their Dalit identity. Thus, the first question to be asked is who a Dalit is according to the analyzed works. Chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?", discusses this question at length. The chapter discusses relevant caste-related terminology and demonstrates how each of the three authors use caste-related terminology and the term *dalit* in their respective autobiographies. Chapter 2 explores the "Buddhist Past and Future in Tulsiram's Autobiography" and the construction of a Buddhist identity for Dalits in the two volumes of his autobiography. It demonstrates how Hindi Dalit writer Tulsiram uses Buddhist stories as parables to create a virtual link between present day Dalits and Buddhists of ancient times. Tulsiram argues – together with several Dalit leaders since the beginning of the 20th century – that Dalits must have been Buddhists before having been labeled as "untouchable". Chapter 3 "Tropes of Agency in Kausalya Baisantri's *Dohʹrā Abhiśāp*", looks into the specific case of Kausalya Baisantri, who as a woman Dalit writer performs her intersectional identity as a Dalit and a woman, creates new literary tropes through her narrative and re-distributes narrative agency in the context of gender roles and the discourse of empowerment in her narrative. Chapter 4 "Forms of Hindi as a Rhetorical Strategy: *Dalit Cetʹnā* in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*", analyzes the language and usage of non-standard versus standard forms of Hindi in Valmiki's autobiography. Using examples of direct speech from *Jūṭhan*, I show that Valmiki uses in his autobiography different forms of Hindi in direct speech to indicate to the reader cer-

tain differences between speakers. Finally, Chapter 5 “Challenging: Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment”, examines the narrative techniques employed by Omprakash Valmiki to express Dalit consciousness (*dalit cetʼnā*) by means of rhetorical and linguistic methods and to challenge an infamous statement made by a character from Munshi Premchand’s short story *Dūdh kā dām*. It is addressed to a woman from the Bhangi *jāti* and reads, “Whatever else might happen in the world, Bhangi will remain Bhangi. It is hard to make people out of them”[60] (Premchand 1996: 284). The chapter shows how, in his autobiography, Valmiki uses this statement to argue that Dalits need to get educated in order to improve their social and financial status.

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[60] Hindi original: *duṇiyā mẽ aur cāhe jo kuch ho jāe, bhaṃgī bhaṃgī hī raheṃge. inheṃ ādʼmī banānā kaṭhin hai*.

Chapter 1

Who is a Dalit? The Ambiguous Usage of the Term in Literature

1 Introduction

In the focus of the literary works that are discussed in this dissertation are people to whom different terms and categories have been applied in the course of time. The "so-called untouchables", the "former untouchables", the "Depressed Classes", "Harijan", "Dalit", "SC", "members of the lower castes" – the assortment of designations for the people formerly labeled as "untouchable" is almost as wide and diverse as the "caste system" itself.[61] This chapter introduces and discusses these terms and categories as well as other caste-related terms, without which any discussion of the former would be impossible. It also discusses the variety and vagueness of caste-related terminology, and particularly the definition of the term *dalit* as it is used by the three authors in question.

Through an analysis of four books which are in the focus of this dissertation and have been written by three different authors this chapter explores how the selected literary works answer the question "Who is a Dalit?". Using methods of computer assisted text analysis and subsequent close reading of relevant passages I show how Omprakash Valmiki, Kausalya Baisantri and Tulsiram use caste-related terminology and particularly the term *dalit* in their autobiographies thus implicitly providing their own individual definition of these terms.

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[61] All of these terms are explained on the following pages.

1.1 Relevant Caste-related Terms and their Problematic

The trouble with definitions starts with the English term "caste". In English as well as other European language texts, it has been simultaneously used to describe two phenomena which are referred to as *varṇa* and *jāti* in various South Asian languages such as Sanskrit and Hindi. This has led to a terminological confusion, which is often the reason for the latter to be thought of or represented as a sub-system of the former.

In fact, references to the '*varṇa* system' can be found in old Sanskrit texts such as the *R̥gveda* (approx. 1200–900 BCE) and the *Manusmr̥ti* (approx. 400 BCE–400 CE). It is allocated to Brahminical culture and with it to what is regarded as Hinduism (another very problematic term[62]). In Sanskrit, *varṇa* literally means "color"; it can be found in the R̥gveda Hymn 10, 90, the *Puruṣasuktam*, that describes the creation of the universe out of *puruṣa* or the "cosmic being". In this hymn, the four *varṇa*s (*brāhmaṇ, kṣatriya, vaiśya, śudra*) are said to have originated from *puruṣa* in a hierarchical order.[63] It is widely acknowledged by scholars that this system did not describe the actual structure of society at that time, but was rather a kind of ideal model which the dominant Brahmins tried to impose upon this society. By this point ancient Vedic texts as well as texts such as the *Manusmr̥ti* contain several names for groups that are considered to be outside of the *varṇa* system. The most prominent among them is the group called *caṇḍāla*or *cāṇḍāla* (anglicized as Chandala),[64] about which it is often written that its

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[62] For details regarding the complexities of the term "Hinduism", see King 1999, Oddie 2009 and Sharma 2002.

[63] For a deeper discussion see Böck, Rao 1995.

[64] Otto Böhtlinkg's Sanskrit-Wörterbuch lists two forms, *caṇḍāla* and *cāṇḍāla* and translates them as "*ein Mann der verachtetsten Schichte der menschlichen Gesellschaft.* Im System *der Sohn eines Śudra und einer Brāhmaṇī*" (italics in original) (Böhtlinkg 1998: 207; 221). "The system" presumably means the explanation of the origins of various groups of peoples, who did not belong to any *varṇa*, which is given in the *Manusmr̥ti.* Similar to the prevailing academic opinion that the *varṇa* system did not describe the actual state of the Indian society at that time, it is widely accepted today that this systematic also is of a the-

members lived on the outskirts of villages and were not allowed to intermarry or participate in the normal day to day activities and religious rituals of the rest of society at that time. In their writing, Dalit authors sometimes mention the Chandalas as their ancestors.[65]

The term *jāti* must be defined much more broadly than *varṇa* – a phenomenon that might point to the fact that *varṇa* is more of a theoretical concept, while *jāti* is part of everyday life and language in South Asia. The word *jāti* comes from the Sanskrit root *jan*, which means "to be born", and is translated by the *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* as "1. birth, 2. position fixed by birth, community or caste group. 3. good birth, high caste. 4. kind, race; genus, species; nationality. 5. community; nation; tribe; family, lineage" (McGregor 2004b: 367). This vast assortment of meanings is accentuated by the fact that online Hindi-Hindi dictionaries, such as pustak.org,[66] also indicate *varṇa* as one of the meanings of *jāti*.

Despite this vagueness and multiplicity of definitions, in South Asia today *jāti* overwhelmingly refers to occupational groups. Due to the very fact that not only among "Hindus" but also among followers of Christianity and Islam occupations were and often still are passed down from one generation to the next, Christians and Muslims also belong to *jāti*s,[67] whereas they are excluded from the *varṇa* system. In addition to *varṇa* and *jāti* the word "caste" itself, while being of a foreign origin,[68] is frequently used in modern

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oretical nature and cannot be used as evidence for the origins of groups of people such as the Chandala. Yamazaki (2005: 192) claims that the "Caṇḍāla" belonged to "non-Aryan native peoples" of India, but offers no evidence for such a claim.

[65] See for example, Tulsiram 2014b.

[66] https://www.pustak.org/index.php/dictionary/index/ accessed on 30.08.2021.

[67] See for instance Das 2005, Guha 2016.

[68] See Das 2005 for a discussion of the term 'caste' and its origins.

spoken Hindi as well. Its usage is highly ambiguous, as it is rarely clear whether it refers to *varṇa* or *jāti*.

When the three authors whose works are discussed in this dissertation talk about the social hierarchical system as they experienced it, they uniformly use the Hindi word *jāti,* not *varṇa*. Yet, the word *brāhman* (anglicized as Brahmin)[69] – which is the name of a *varṇa* – is used in these works extensively in contrast to names of "untouchable" *jāti*s such as *cūhṛā* (anglicized as Chuhra),[70] *mahār* (anglicized as Mahar),[71] etc. However, as will be shown later on in this chapter, the three autobiographers also most frequently contrast the term *dalit* with *brāhmaṇ* or *savarṇa* (see below), while they do not use names of the other three *varṇa*s in their texts at all.

In the same way in which it is rarely clear which hierarchical system (*jāti* or *varṇa*) is meant when the term "caste" is used in both English and Hindi language texts, the diversity of meanings attributed to *jāti* makes it impossible for the reader of Hindi texts to be sure about its meaning in each particular instance. Thus, some scholars have ar-

[69] The word *brāhmaṇ* (Brahman) is the name of the highest ranking of the four *varṇa*s. Robert Vane Russell states that "their traditional occupation was that of priesthood. They are considered to be the purest among all castes. So they alone are qualified of performing certain vital religious tasks, including e.g. studying sacred scriptures, performing rites at ceremonial occasions, composing and reciting religious hymns and giving instruction to the laity. At present they hold a wide variety of occupations" (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 290–300).

[70] The term *cūhṛā* is the name of the *jāti*, to which Valmiki's family belongs, and which appears to be the biggest Scheduled Caste of Valmiki's native village Barla. Denzil Ibbetson (1916) writes that it is a community of sweepers and scavengers, mainly based in Punjab and Pakistan (Ibbetson 1916: 290–295).

[71] The *jāti mahār* or Mahar is the largest Scheduled Caste in Maharashtra. According to Russell, traditional occupations of the Mahars included those of watchman, messenger, wall mender, etc. (Russell 2021: Vol. IV, 105–114). This community or *jāti* became famous because Dr. B. R. Ambedkar – principal instigator of the Dalit movement in the 1920s, famous politician, and much more – was one of its members.

gued[72] against the usage of the word "caste" – which is a foreign term – in the context of South Asia at all, or, at the very least, against the usage of the term "caste" synonymously with *jāti*. Following their argument, I attempt to use the original terms used in the literary works discussed in this dissertation whenever possible. When using derivatives, such as "caste-related terminology", I do not mean either one of the original terms, but all of them as one category.

The term *savarṇa* (anglicized as Savarna) is frequently used in both Hindi as well as English language primary texts as another term in contrast to *dalit*. S*avarṇa* is originally a Sanskrit word, literally meaning "with *varṇa*". It traditionally denotes members of the four *varṇa*s, of which Dalits or the people formerly labeled as "untouchable" are thought to be excluded. Its opposite *avarṇa* means "without *varṇa*", but is used to a far lesser extent, if at all.

Further group denominations used by the three authors include names for "touchable" (i.e. *savarṇa*) as well as "untouchable" *jāti*s. The most common of these include the following: *mahār* (Mahar), *cūhˈṛā* (Chuhra), *camār* (Chamar)[73] and *tagā* (Taga). Along with names for "untouchable" *jāti*s, the more traditional (and outdated) designations for a Dalit that are used in these works include two Hindi versions of the derogatory term "untouchable", i.e. *achūt* and *aspr̥śya*. As a rule, *achūt* is the more commonly used term in Hindi; *aspr̥śya* sounds overly sanskritized in this language, but it is, according to Monika Browarchyk, a common and exclusive word denoting "untouchable" in the Marathi language (Browarczyk 2013: 296). Marathi was Kausalya Baisantri's mother tongue, for which reason the usage of the term *aspr̥śya* in Baisantri's autobiography *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* should not be seen as particularly noteworthy.

[72] See, for example, Das 2005: 98.

[73] People belonging to the *camār* (Chamar) community were traditionally tanners and leather workers. They are primarily found in Hindi-speaking regions, in central and northern India, but are found also in all parts of Bengal. The name is derived from the Sanskrit word *carmakāra*, a worker in leather (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 339–355). Today, the *jāti* Chamar is a Scheduled Caste.

The term *harijan* (literally “child of God”) was promoted by Mohandas Gandhi in an attempt – in Sarah Beth’s words – “to move away from the idea of “untouchable” and promote a new, positive ascription to the community” (Beth 2007: 546). The etic term *harijan* (anglicized as Harijan) was rejected by the majority of Dalit activists, who perceived it as demeaning and patronizing (ibid.). In the works that are in the focus of this dissertation, *harijan* appears only when the term itself is introduced or discussed and never as a designation for a group of people.

The term “Scheduled Caste” and its abbreviation SC[74] is a bureaucratic term that is nevertheless still very much in use, including in everyday speech. It is not uncommon for a person to call themselves SC. The term is used in the literary works analyzed in this dissertation to a far lower degree than other caste-related terms, which makes it impossible to determine whether or not the authors use it synonymously with *dalit* or attribute any other significance to it.

1.2 The Term *dalit*

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*[75] the etymology of *dalit* is: “modern Sanskrit *dalita*, adjective (also with vernacular pronunciation *dalit*), not belonging to one of the four Brahminic castes, (also as noun) person not belonging to these castes (both 19th cent.), specific use of classical Sanskrit *dalita* burst, split, broken, use as adjective of the past participle of *dal-* to burst, split”. The first part of the entry talks about the modern usage of the term, though what is useful for the study at hand at this point is the term’s origin, i.e. the last part of this entry. Neither Otto Böhtlingk’s *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*

[74] Along with “ST” for “Scheduled Tribes” and “OBC” for “Other Backward Classes”, the term was introduced by the British government in 1936 as a means of enforcing affirmative action (or “reservation” as it is called in India), at the same time helping to solidify the “caste system” (Böck and Rao 1995).

[75] https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/293168?redirectedFrom=dalit#eid accessed on 15.08.21.

nor Monier Monier-Williams' *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* – the two classics as far as Sanskrit dictionaries are concerned – have an entry for the word *dalita*. The meaning of the Sanskrit root *dal* is given in these dictionaries as follows. Böhtlingk: "bersten, aufspringen (auch von einer Knospe); zersprengen, vertreiben" (Böhtlingk 1998: part 3, p. 73); Monier-Williams: "to crack, fly open, split, open (as a bud); to cause to burst; to expel" (Monier-Williams 2002: 471). Thus, the meaning "burst, split" for "*dalita*" seems justified.[76]

In the groundbreaking monograph *From Untouchable to Dalit*, Eleanor Zelliot (first published in 1992) gives the following definition: "*dalit*: 1. Ground. 2. Broken or reduced to pieces generally. Molesworth's Marathi-English Dictionary, 1975 reprint of 1831 edition" (Zelliot 2015: 289).

No concrete information as to by whom or why the term *dalit* was introduced as a designation for the people who were previously labeled as "untouchable" is readily available. Information on the subject is vague and seems to be regarded as unimportant. Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, for instance, phrase it thus: "[the term *dalit*] was seemingly first used in the context of caste oppression by the great nineteenth-century reformer Phule, but its modern history dates from the early 1970s among activists from the Untouchable Mahar caste" (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 4).

Most etic terms used as designation for Dalits are problematic for which reason many Dalits reject them, but the term *dalit* itself also seems to be not unambiguous. The history of the term becomes clearer starting with the 1970s, when the Dalit Panthers[77] re-

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[76] It could also mean "expelled", but this latter meaning is not mentioned by any Dalit scholars or activists as far as I am aware.

[77] The Dalit Panthers are an Ambedkarite social organization founded in 1972 in the Indian state Maharashtra. See the Introduction to this dissertation for further details about the Dalit Panther organization and its relation to Dalit literature.

vived it and started using it as an emic term that was meant to replace the previously used etic terms like “untouchable” and “Harijan”, which were rejected by the activists. From this time onwards, the term *dalit* becomes synonymous with “oppressed”, a meaning that will be made more apparent below, when the *Dalit Panther Manifesto* is discussed. The term *dalit* was selected and accepted by most Dalit activists as a self-chosen term that is meant to emphasize not only the fact that the group is oppressed, but also the political awareness of its bearer.

There have been many attempts to define the term by political activists as well as by scholars. In this chapter, I argue that the variety of interpretations and definitions of the term that can be found in scholarly works and discussions with activists or people otherwise involved is also reflected in Dalit literary works, or more specifically in this case, in the three Hindi Dalit autobiographies in question.

My own usage of the term follows what I perceive as the major tendency in contemporary scholarship. Throughout this thesis, when not talking about the term *dalit*, about the contested category ‘Dalit’ or quoting someone else, I use the term unmarked and capitalized (Dalit) as a collective term referring to members of the Scheduled Castes and/or people formerly labeled as “untouchable”.

To date, there is no agreement or uniformity about the usage of the term *dalit* – whether it is among Dalit activists themselves or scholars who write on the subject. The definitions vary between very broad ones and extremely narrow ones. Therefore, before looking into the usage of the term *dalit* by the three authors, I will demonstrate the variety and diversity of available interpretations by quoting several definitions of *dalit* provided by scholars and Dalit activists.

John C. B. Webster writes in his article “Who is a Dalit?”:

> Dalit (‘oppressed’ or ‘broken’) is not a new word. Apparently it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of ‘Depressed Classes’, the term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. […] The Dalit Panthers revived the term and in their 1973 manifesto expanded its referents to include the Scheduled Tribes, ‘neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women, and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion’ (Omvedt, 1995: 72). […] Since the 1970s, the word has come into increasingly wider usage in the press and in common parlance where it is normally used in the original, narrower, caste-based sense (Webster 1999: 76).

Webster proceeds to say that scholars, too, use the term in different ways, while, in his opinion, two views predominate: for those, who use a class analysis, ‘Dalits’ are placed within “such class or occupational categories as peasants, agricultural labour, factory workers, students and the like”, while for those using “a communal analysis of caste, Dalits are the people within Hindu society who belong to those castes which Hindu religion considers to be polluting by virtue of hereditary occupation” (Webster 1999: 76f.).

When introducing the term in her book *From Untouchable to Dalit*, Eleanor Zelliot begins by pointing out that the terms “Dalit Panthers” and “Dalit literature” can be explained “by substituting the word ‘Black’ for ‘Dalit’” and by comparing the phenomenon to the American Black Panthers and Black literature. She proceeds to say that,

> Like the American movements, the Dalit Panthers and the Dalit school of literature represent a new level of pride, militancy and sophisticated creativity. The Marathi word *dalit*, like the word Black, was chosen by the group itself and is used proudly; and even in the English press, the unfamiliar Marathi word had to be used. None of the normal words – Untouch-

> able, Scheduled Castes, Depressed Classes, Gandhi's euphemism, Harijan – had the same connotation. *Dalit* implies those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, *karma*, and justified caste hierarchy (Zelliot 2015: 267).

The Introduction to the third edition of Zelliot's book, which first came out in 2001, contains the following passage:

> Just last year I was asked by some highly educated followers of Dr. Ambedkar if I was going to do a book called "From Untouchable to Buddhist", since this group resented the term "Dalit" as negative, even demeaning. I replied that I could not, since not all Dalits were Buddhists, and that the term Dalit was not only to be interpreted as "the oppressed", but also as "the proud, the defiant". […] When Martin Macwan won the Kennedy award for his work on the Dalit Human Rights Campaign, he said, "To me Dalit is not a caste, but a moral position […], one who respects all humans as equal is a Dalit" (Zelliot 2015: 267).

It is not completely clear whether or not Zelliot shares the Dalit Panther definition, but she does share the standpoint of several Dalit writers and activists I have spoken to, who see *dalit* as a defiant and proud term. At the same time, Zelliot introduces both the point of view of "some highly educated followers of Dr. Ambedkar", who reject the word *dalit* and do not want to be associated with it, as well as Martin Macwan's point of view, which is even broader than the Dalit Panthers' definition. Apparently agreeing with the Dalit Panther Manifesto, the prominent Hindi Dalit writer Ajay Navaria says in the preface to his book *Yes Sir* that "a woman is a Dalit in every society"[78] (Navaria 2012: 10).

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[78] Hindi Original: *strī sabhī samudāyoṃ meṃ dalit hai*.

More recently, I have asked several people in private conversation about their opinion regarding the term *dalit*. A high ranking Dalit functionary said that “Dalits”, “SCs” and “untouchables” were synonyms: there was no difference, only the words themselves were different. An American historian, who is well-known for his work in Subaltern Studies, said that “Dalit” is a political term, usually appropriated by the politically dominant Scheduled Caste of a given region (i.e., the Mahar in Maharashtra, the Chamar in certain parts of Uttar Pradesh, etc.), while members of other Scheduled Castes continue to use names of their *jāti*s. Omprakash Valmiki – one of the authors of the autobiographies under examination – told me in an interview on 25.02.2012 that a Dalit is a person who possesses *dalit cetnā* or “Dalit consciousness”[79] – a definition that appears to agree with the “defiant and proud” interpretation as it has been shown above.

Thus, arguably it can be said that broadly speaking, two points of view predominate: according to one, “Dalits” are oppressed people in general, while according to the other, “Dalits” are equivalent with the people formerly labeled as “untouchable” according to the *varṇa* system. Yet, in South Asia, and in India in particular, there are further groups of people who call themselves “Dalit”, for instance, the Muslim and the Christian Dalits (Deshpande 2008). They may be thought of as included into the Dalit Panther Manifesto with all those “who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion”, but these groups are not explicitly mentioned in any of the above definitions.

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[79] Laura Brueck (2006) has devoted a whole article to the subject of *dalit cetˡnā*. It is therefore not easy to define it in one short sentence. Sharankumar Limbale’s defines Dalit consciousness as “the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature; it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness” (cited in Brueck 2006). According to Brueck, “Dalit chetna today is a thoroughly modern critical concept in the mode of deconstruction. It is an expression of denial, a theoretical tool that contributes to the destabilization of traditional notions of social hierarchy and cultural authenticity. Contemporary Dalit critics are specific about both the current nature and the importance of Dalit chetna. […] Dalit chetna has become an essential component of the growing Dalit literary critical lexicon”. For a deeper discussion see Brueck’s 2006 article.

In the following three sections I demonstrate and discuss how the three authors in question use the term *dalit*, as well as the most striking usages of other caste-related terms in their autobiographies.

2 Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*

In his autobiography *Jūṭhan*, Omprakash Valmiki extensively uses both names of particular *jāti*s as well as the word *dalit*. However, there is a distinct difference between his usage of these categories, which is demonstrated in the following subsections.

2.1 *dalit* vs. *cūhṛā*

The term *cūhṛā* (anglicized as Chuhra) is the name of Omprakash Valmiki's own *jāti*. When he sets the scene in the beginning of his autobiography, Valmiki introduces the geography of his North-Indian village Barla as well as its demographics. As inhabitants of the village are named the Tagas[80] (*tagā*; Valmiki 1999: 11), some families of Muslim Julahas[81] (*kuch parivār musalmān julāhoṇ ke the*; ibid.), the Chuhras, and two or three

[80] Valmiki introduces the *tyāgī* or *tagā jāti* as the dominant Hindu and Moslem *jāti* of the village (Valmiki, 1999, p. 11ff.). William Crooke writes about the Tyagis/Tagas as a cultivating and land-owning community with a high position in caste hierarchy. They are said to be Brahmins by origin, though, as in most cases, the origin of the community cannot be determined with any certainty (Crooke 1896: 351–355).

[81] In India, there exists both a Hindu and a Muslim *jāti* called *julāhā*. Their members are traditionally weavers (Maitra 1998: 459–461, Russell 2021: Vol. III, 231–232).

Jhinwar[82] families (*jhīṃvaroṇ ke do-tīn parivār*; ibid.). Each of the four designations is the name of a *jāti*, all of which are Savarna with the exception of the Chuhras.

As on many other occasions, by using these terms from the beginning of the book – and not the words *dalit* and *savarṇa*, for example – Valmiki performs the changes in his protagonist's consciousness through his writing. Before the young Omprakash – in the timeline of the narrative – learns the word *dalit*, before he reads about the Dalit movement and himself acquires *dalit cetnā*, Valmiki uses *jāti* names to introduce his characters, just in the way everyone around him certainly must have done when he was growing up. The usage of caste-related terminology in *Jūṭhan* abruptly changes on page 89 with the introduction of the term *dalit*: "a new word 'dalit', too, was added to my vocabulary, which was not a substitute for 'Harijan' but the expression of the anger of millions of untouchables [(*achūtoṃ*)]"[83] (Valmiki 1999: 89). Together with *dalit* the word *savarṇa* also appears for the first time on this page. Valmiki clearly needs the "Savarnas" to define the "Dalits" through the polarity: Dalits are those who are not Savarna. However, Valmiki does not abandon the usage of *jāti* names in the subsequent narrative.

The word *cūhˡrā* appears about 50 times in the book on the whole: in most cases, it happens in descriptions of village life, of the jobs that the Chuhras had to perform and the hardships they had to suffer. It also frequently appears in direct speech as a means of identifying and/or abusing a person.

The word *dalit*, on the other hand, appears over 80 times on the whole – and considering that before its introduction on page 89 it only appears 3 times, it's density in the text

[82] People belonging to the *jhīṃvar jāti* for the most part live in the states of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh in India. Their traditional occupations include those of watermen, boatmen and cooks (Ibbetson 1916: 303–309, Russell 2021: Vol. III, 241–244).

[83] Hindi original: *ek nayā śabd 'dalit' bhī mere śabd-koś meṃ juṛ gayā thā, jo 'harijan' kā sthānāpann nahīṃ balki karoṛoṃ achūtoṃ ke ākroś kī abhivyakti thā.*

is much higher than that of the words *cūˈhrā* and *bhaṃgī* (anglicized as Bhangi)[84] combined.[85] However, except for very few instances, it is only used as a technical term in phrases such as "Dalit Panthers", "Dalit literature", "Dalit movement", "Dalit consciousness", etc. or to refer to an abstract group of people, i.e.: "I showed my sympathy towards Dalits"[86] (Valmiki 1999: 110), or "only one or two [boys] from Dalit families came to study [in our school]"[87] (Valmiki 1999: 39).

To refer to himself, Valmiki regularly uses the word *cūhˈrā*[88] and sometimes *bhaṃgī*[89] – the better known equivalent of the *jāti* name Chuhra, which he uses as its synonym throughout the book. The designation *vālmīki* (anglicized: Valmiki) is also used on a few occasions as an alternative *jāti* name synonymously with Chuhra and Bhangi.[90] There are only two instances, in which Valmiki (very nearly) calls himself Dalit. The first of these instances occurs in a dialogue with a friend, after the main protagonist finds out

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[84] The term *bhaṃgī* or, anglicized, Bhangi, is a better known name of Valmiki's *jāti cūhˈṛā*.

[85] Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography *Jūṭhan* is 160 pages long, which means that the word *dalit* appears about 80 times on the last 70 pages of the book.

[86] Hindi original: *maiṃne dalitoṃ ke prati apˈnī saṃvedˈnā dikhāī.*

[87] Hindi original: *dalit parivāroṃ se ikkā-dukkā hī paṛhˈne āte the.*

[88] To give a few instances: "I said simply: "My *jāti* is Chuhra" (*maiṃne sahaj bhāv se kahā, "merī jāti cūhˈṛā hai*"; Valmiki 1999: 80), "My birth happened in an untouchable *jāti* Chuhra" (*merā janm ek achūt jāti 'cūhˈrā' meṃ huā hai*; ibid, 115), "As soon as I said my *jāti* was Chuhra (*maiṃne jaise hī apˈnī jāti 'cūhˈṛā' batāī*; ibid, 138f.).

[89] For example, "…why would I have been born in a Bhangi house?" (*…maiṃ bhanˈgī ke ghar paidā kyoṃ hotā?* Valmiki 1999: 159).

[90] According to Debjani Ganguly (2009: 434f.), the name Valmiki or Balmiki was given to the Bhangi community by the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement that originated in northern India in the nineteenth century, in an attempt to keep members of this community within the Hindu fold. It is not by chance that Omprakash Valmiki's surname is equivalent to one of the names of his *jāti*. The author speaks about this choice of his at length towards the end of his autobiography.

that members of an acquainted family keep separate dishes for members of the Mahar *jāti*:

> [Valmiki:] “Do they behave like this with all Dalits?” […]
>
> [Friend:] “Yes, with all of them”. […]
>
> “Do they know about me?”
>
> “Maybe no […]” […]
>
> “Did you not tell them at some point…” […]
>
> “Why would I tell them? Is being Dalit a crime?”[91] (Valmiki 1999: 116).

This is the closest Valmiki gets to calling himself Dalit in the whole of his autobiography until the very last page, on which he describes his situation as “my being Dalit”, “*merā dalit honā*” (Valmiki 1999: 160):

> That is, my being Dalit and arriving at a point of view according to my environment and my socioeconomic situation is being arrogant. Because in their eyes, I am only an SC, the one who stands outside the door[92, 93] (Valmiki 2003: 154).

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[91] Hindi original: *kyā sabhī dalitoṃ ke sāth unˈkā vyavahār aisā hī hai? […]; hā̃, aisā sabhī ke sāth hai. […]; mere bāre meṃ ve jānˈte haiṃ?; śāyad nahīṃ […] […]; tumˈne unheṃ batāyā nahīṃ kabhī… […]; kyoṃ batātā?... dalit honā kyā apˈrādh hai?*

[92] Even though in this case Arun Prabha Mukherjee’s translation is used rather than my own, the Hindi original is provided in the following footnote in order not to diverge from the standard practice in this dissertation and to allow the reader to compare between the two versions.

[93] Hindi original: *yānī merā dalit honā aur kisī viṣay par apˈne pariveś, apˈnī sāmājik-ārthik sthiti ke anusār dr̥ṣṭikoṇ banānā airogaiṃṭ ho jānā hai, kyoṇki maiṃ unˈkī nazar meṃ sirf es. sī. hūṃ, darˈvāze ke bāhar khaṛā rahˈnevālā* (Valmiki 1999: 160).

As stated above, apart from these two instances, whenever Valmiki's main protagonist's *jāti* affiliation is discussed, he calls himself *cūhˈrā* or *bhaṃgī*; and on a very few occasions – as in the above example – SC. No particular importance appears to be attached to the latter term.

The situation with other people's *jāti* affiliation is very similar: Valmiki rarely mentions it, but when he does, it is the name of the *jāti* that he uses, be it *tagā* or *tyāgī*, *mahār* (anglicized as Mahar) or any other name, not the more general or collective terms like Dalit or Savarna. The word *brāhmaṇ* (anglicized as Brahmin) is, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, an exception to this principle: being the name of a *varṇa* it is nevertheless often used in the Valmiki's autobiography as if belonging to the same category as names of *jāti*s. Since *tagā/tyāgī*, for instance, is a *jāti* name which is considered to belong to the *brāhmaṇ varṇa*, it is, however, unclear whether in Valmiki's vocabulary *brāhmaṇ* means an umbrella term for all *jāti*s belonging to the *brāhmaṇ varṇa* or only specific ones.

Other caste-related terms used in *Jūṭhan* include *aspṛśyatā* ("untouchability"; Valmiki 1999: pp. 12, 81, 145), *chuāchūt* ("untouchability"; Valmiki 1999: pp. 29, 75, 116), *achutoddhār* ("untouchability", Valmiki 1999: 12), *achūt* ("untouchable"; Valmiki 1999: pp. 12, 20, 34, 89 (x2), 143) and *harijan* (Valmiki 1999: 89 (x4)). All of these terms are used in a neutral way. The terms meaning "untouchable" and "untouchability" appear as mere matter-of-fact statements; there does not seem to be any difference between Valmiki's usage of the different Hindi words that are translated as "untouchability". As for *harijan*, precisely as mentioned in the discussion of caste-related terminology above, this word only appears in Valmiki's narrative when it is discussed as an etic term (see below).

2.2 'Dalit' as 'not Hindu'

Just before the formal introduction of the term *dalit* on page 89 (see above), Valmiki skillfully introduces the history behind the naming of the people formerly labeled as "untouchable" in one short paragraph. He includes in it the conflicting points of view in this regard, as well as the history of the controversy between Mahatma Gandhi and Bhimrao Ambedkar which resulted in their agreement on the Poona pact on 24th September 1932.

> From textbooks to the media of communication, they were all beating the drum about Gandhi. I had heard many *savarnas* […] abuse Gandhi in day-to-day conversations – that this old man had turned the heads of the Bhangis and the Chamars by naming them […] Harijans […]. How wrong was their anger about Gandhi. After reading Ambedkar, I realized that by naming the untouchables [(*achūtoṃ*)] Harijans, Gandhi had not helped them to join the national mainstream but had saved the Hindus from becoming a minority. Guarded their interests, in fact. Yet these […] were angry with him because he had turned Harijans' heads! The Poona Pact episode completely erased any illusions that I had harbored about Gandhi.

The Poona Pact was what had made Ambedkar lose heart[94, 95, 96] (Valmiki 2003: 83f.).

This paragraph touches on the most important issues behind the naming of 'Dalits' as well as the question of Dalits' religious affiliation. What is particularly important for the argument in this section is that Valmiki implies in it that Gandhi's renaming of the people formerly labeled as "untouchable" as "Harijan" *artificially* made them Hindus, while, in fact, the above passage implicitly suggests that it is common knowledge that they are not Hindu. Furthermore, saying that Gandhi has saved Hindus from becoming a minority, Valmiki once again – in passing – suggests that Harijans and Hindus do not belong to the same category. This strategy of presenting the opinion that Dalits are not Hindus as a fact which is accepted by both author and reader is characteristic for Valmiki's writing: several examples below elucidate and discuss this strategy further.

The question whether or not Dalits are to be considered Hindus, goes back to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and the circumstances preceding the Poona Pact. Accordingly, John C. B. Webster, for example, says that: "Ambedkar […] while agreeing that Hindu religion was clearly a, if not *the*, major source of Dalit oppression, […] did not consider the Dalits

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[94] See footnote 92.

[95] Hindi original*: pāṭhya-pustakoṃ se lekar saṃcār-mādhyamoṃ tak meṃ un dinoṃ 'gā̃dhī' kā ḍhol pīṭā jā rahā thā. bāt'cit meṃ kaī savarṇoṃ ko gā̃dhī ke lie ap'śabd kah'te sunā thā ki is būṛhe ne bhaṃgī-camāroṃ ko harijan banākar sir par caṛhā liyā hai. un'kā gussā kit'nā galat thā aṃbeḍ'kar ko paḍh lene ke bād yah bāt samajh meṃ ā gaī thī ki gā̃dhī ne 'harijan' nām dekar achūtoṃ ko rāṣṭriy dhārā meṃ nahīṃ joṛā, balki hiṃduoṃ ko alpasaṃkhyak hone se bacāyā. un'ke hitoṃ kī rakṣā kī. phir bhī ve us'se khaphā the kyoṃki us'ne harijanoṃ ko sir caṛhāyā. pūnā paikṭ kī ghaṭ'nā ne mere man se gā̃dhī ke bhram ko poṃch diyā thā. pūnā paikṭ ne aṃbeḍ'kar ko hatāś kiyā thā* (Valmiki 1999: 89).

[96] Footnote from Arun Prabha Mukherjee's translation: *In 1931 Gandhi went on a hunger strike until Ambedkar withdrew his support for separate representation of untouchables, which Gandhi believed would be a very divisive force in Hindu society. Ambedkar capitulated because the Mahatma was extremely weak and frail, and the entire nation wondered whether he would survive the ordeal* (Valmiki 2003: 84).

themselves to be Hindus" (Webster 2007: 80). Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp explains that for Dalits, "Hinduism came to be regarded as intrinsically intertwined with the caste hierarchy, which defined Dalits as 'untouchable'. Liberation from the fetters of caste appeared only possible through a negation of Hinduism" (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2011: 187).[97] The following close reading of relevant passages makes apparent that for Omprakash Valmiki as well it was important to distance himself and his community from Hinduism and he selected the subtle way described in this subsection to do so.

There are at least seven instances, in which the word *hindū* (anglicized as Hindu) is juxtaposed with words or phrases like *hamārī birādarī* ("our community"), *basᶦtī ke log* ("people of the *bastī*"[98]), *vālmīki samāj* ("the Valmiki community") and *dalit*. The rhetorical question "Why are Hindus so cruel against Dalits?" is repeated several times throughout the autobiography. While this question does not necessarily imply that 'Dalits' are not 'Hindus', the discussion that nearly invariably follows this question, says so explicitly. To be precise, it states that people from the Valmiki's community worship different gods, perform different religious rituals, etc., and are therefore not Hindus. The three following examples illustrate this.

> In our community widow-marriage was accepted from the very beginning. Widow-marriage was not looked down upon like in Hindu-traditions[99] (Valmiki 1999: 22).

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[97] See chapter 2 "Buddhist Past and Future in Tulsiram's Autobiography" for more information about Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his views on Hinduism and the Dalit's religious affiliation.

[98] The word *bastī* f. means any small place or living area, like a small town, part of a village, a neighborhood, etc. In the context of Dalit life and literature, *bastī* usually means a smallish neighborhood on the outskirts of a village or a town, in which members of one or several Dalit communities are segregated. The term is often translated into English as "slum", but is left untranslated in this dissertation.

[99] Hindi original*: hamārī birādarī meṃ vidhᶦvā-vivāh ko prāraṃbh se hī mānyatā thī. hindū-paraṃparāoṃ kī tarah vidhᶦvā-vivāh hīn dr̥ṣṭī se nahīṃ dekhā jātā thā.*

> These gods are different from Hindu gods; their names won't be found in any *Purāṇa* even if one looks hard. But go to any such family, which is connected to this community, there you will have an opportunity to see a *pūjā*[100] performed for these gods and goddesses. Whether it's a birth or another happy occasion, a wedding or a feast for the dead – it will be incomplete without a *pūjā* for these gods and goddesses[101] (Valmiki 1999: 37).

> Officially all the people from the *bastī* were Hindus, but they didn't worship Hindu gods and goddesses. On *Janmāṣṭamī*[102] they didn't worship Kṛṣṇa [(Krishna)], but *Jahārpīr* [(Jaharpir)] or else, a spirit was worshiped. And that, too, not on the eighth day [(*aṣṭami*)], but just before sunrise on the ninth day [(*navamī*)][103] (Valmiki 1999: 53).

In the first example above the author states very casually and in passing – in the middle of a narrative that has nothing to do with religion, but rather tells the story of Valmiki's eldest brother's death and his widow marrying the next eldest brother – that "our community" (*hamārī birādarī*) is not "Hindu". It is a very plain statement, it is not open for discussion; and thus, it leaves the reader with the impression that this is a fact of life, nothing more.

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[100] The word *pūjā* means a religious ceremony.

[101] Hindi original*: ye devˈtā hiṃdū-devˈtāoṃ se alag hote haiṃ, jinˈke nām kisī pothe-purāṇ meṃ ḍhū̃ṛhˈne se bhī nahīṃ mileṃge. lekin kisī bhī aise parivār meṃ cale jāie jinˈkā sambandh is birādarī se hai, vahā̃ in devī-devˈtāoṃ kī pūjā dekhˈne ko milegī. janm ho yā koī śubh kāry, śādī-vivāh yā mṛtyu-bhoj! - in devī-devˈtāoṃ kī pūjā binā adhūrā hai.*

[102] The *kṛṣṇa janmāṣṭamī* or Krishna Janmashtami is an annual festival that celebrates the birth of Krishna.

[103] Hindi original*: kahˈne ko to bastī ke sabhī log hiṃdū the, lekin kisī hiṃdū devī-devˈtā kī pūjā nahīṃ karˈte the. janmāṣṭamī par kṛṣṇa kī nahīṃ, jahārˈpīr kī pūjā hotī thī yā phir 'paun' pūje jāte the. ve bhī aṣṭamī nahīṃ, 'navamī' ke brahmamuhūrt meṃ.*

Yet, Valmiki does not leave it at mere suggestions: the second passage quoted above states that in households connected “to this community” (*is birādarī se*), different deities are worshiped – different, that is, from Hindu deities. According to Valmiki, these different deities cannot be found in “any *Purana*” (*kisī pothe-purāṇ meṃ*), which is a vast collection of texts ascribed to the Hindu religious tradition. The narrative implies thus that those deities necessarily need to be considered as “not Hindu”.

The third passage quoted above continues this theme, but contains a concrete example which serves to prove Valmiki’s point. On paper, *bastī* residents might have been called “Hindu”, but in actual fact, on the anniversary of the god Krishna, not he himself – a Hindu god – is worshiped, but either another god called Jaharpir or unnamed spirits. The ritual is said to be different from the Hindu ritual, as well.

The author’s choice of words here – “our/this society”, “people from the *bastī*” rather than *dalit*, *cūhˈrā* or any other specific *jāti* name – makes one wonder whether it is not this said vagueness of terminology that makes the author choose a phrasing that allows for different or at least vague interpretations. Does Valmiki only mean the Chuhra community? Does he include other “Dalits” in it? The text does not offer a clear answer to these questions. On the other hand, another instance seems to suggest that Valmiki only speaks about his own *jāti*:

> And anyway, not only in the *bastī*, in the whole Valmiki community Hindu gods and goddesses are not worshiped. The imitation [that is going on] among educated people is another matter. These worship their [own] gods and goddesses, whose names are neither to be found in Vedic books nor

> in the *Purāṇa*s. The rites of the *pūjā*s are different, too[104] (Valmiki 1999: 78).

As stated above, *vālmīki* is an alternative name for Valmiki's *jāti*, Chuhra. On this occasion, it looks like the author is fighting the battle for his own *jāti* only, rather than for "all Dalits". Yet, the discussion whether or not Valmiki's community is Hindu culminates in the rhetorical question about the cruelty of Hindus – first, against the author personally, and then, against "Dalits" on the whole. When the young protagonist refuses to partake in a religious ceremony and answers his father's concerned enquiry whether his son has "become a Christian" (*īsāī to nahī̃ ho gae ho?*; Valmiki 1999: 54) in the negative, the narrative continues:

> But in my mind a kind of rage was arising that wanted to say: but I'm not a Hindu either. If I were a Hindu, why would Hindus hate me, why would they discriminate against me so much? What also came to mind was [the question] why one had to be a Hindu in order to become a good human being… I had seen and endured the cruelty of Hindus since childhood. Why does caste-superiority [(literally: *jāti*-superiority)] turn into arrogance and hit only the weak? Why are Hindus so harsh and cruel towards Dalits?[105] (Valmiki 1999: 54).

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[104] Hindi original: *vaise bhī bastī meṃ hī nahīṃ, pūre vālmīki samāj meṃ hiṃdū devī-devˈtāoṃ kī pūjā nahīṃ hotī hai. paṛhe-likhe logoṃ meṃ dekhā-dekhī kar lene kī bāt aur hai. ye pūjā karˈte haiṇ, apˈne devī-devˈtāoṃ kī jinˈke nām na to vaidik graṃthoṃ meṃ mileṃge, na purāṇoṃ meṃ. pūjā kī vidhiyā̃ bhī alag haiṃ*.

[105] Hindi original*: lekin man meṃ ek ubāl-sā uṭhˈtā thā jo kahˈnā chahˈtā thā, maiṃ hiṃdū bhī to nahīṃ hū̃. yadī hiṃdū hotā to hiṃdū mujhˈse itˈnī ghr̥ṇā, itˈnā bhed-bhav kyoṃ karˈte? bāt-bāt par jātīy-bodh kī hīnˈtā se mujhe kyoṃ bharˈte? man meṃ yah bhī ātā thā ki acchā inˈsān banˈne ke lie jarūrī kyoṃ hai ki vah hiṃdū hī ho... hiṃdū kī krūrˈtā bacˈpan se dekhī hai, sahan kī hai. jātīy śreṣṭhˈtā-bhāv abhimān banˈkar kamˈjor ko hī kyoṃ mārˈtā hai? kyoṃ dalitoṃ ke prati hiṃdū itˈnā nirmam aur krūr hai?*

On the last page of his autobiography, Valmiki returns to the question of the Hindus' cruelty for a last time:

> Times have changed. But there is something that doesn't let me be at ease. I have asked several scholars why there is so much hatred in the minds of the Savarnas against Dalits, Shudras. Why is the trees and plants, animals and birds worshiping Hindu so intolerant against Dalits? Today, '*jātī*'[106] is a distinct and important factor. As long as it is not known that you are a Dalit, everything is fine, as soon as your '*jātī*' is known, everything changes. Whispering, the pain of being a Dalit cut the veins like a knife. How will Savarna Hindus, full of proper high-born qualities, know poverty, illiteracy, broken and harsh lives, the pain of standing outside the door?[107] (Valmiki 1999: 160).

In this last instance, on the last page of the book, Valmiki for the first time treats Dalits and Shudras as belonging to the same category – though quite in the spirit of the Bahujan Samaj movement and ideology, yet adding further confusion to his terminology.[108] Since this is the last page of the book, in which the author started out using *jāti* names only, while then progressing to an extensive use of the term *dalit*, in this addition of the *śudrā*s to the "Dalit" category at the last moment one is rather inclined to see a culmina-

[106] Single quotation marks in original, see next subsection.

[107] Hindi original: *vakt badˈlā hai. lekin kahīṃ kuch hai jo sahaj nahīṃ hone detā hai. kaī vidvānoṃ se jānˈnā cāhā ki savarṇoṃ ke man meṃ dalitoṃ, śūdroṃ ke lie itˈnī ghr̥ṇā kyoṇ hai? peṛ-paudhoṃ, paśu-pakṣiyoṃ ko pūjˈnevālā hiṃdū dalitoṃ ke prati itˈnā asahiṣṇu kyoṃ hai? āj 'jāti' ek viśiṣṭ aur mahattvapūrṇ ghaṭak hai. jab tak yah patā nahīṃ hotā ki āp dalit haiṃ to sab kuch ṭhīk rahˈtā hai, 'jāti' mālūm hote hī sab kuch badal jātā hai. phusˈphusāhateṃ, dalit hone kī pīṛā cākū kī tarah nas-nas meṃ utar jātī hai. garībī, aśikṣā, chinn-bhinn dāruṇ jiṃdagī, darˈvāze ke bāhar khaṛe rahˈne kī pīṛā bhalā abhijātya guṇoṃ se saṃpann savarṇ hiṃdū kaise jān pāẽge?*

[108] Compare Kancha Ilaiah's *Why I am not a Hindu* (2019), in which Ilaiah, too, treats Shudras and Dalits – whom he calls "Ati-Sudras" or "Dalitbahujans" – as belonging to the same category, while both not belonging to the category "Hindu".

tion of the progression in accordance with the Bahujan Samaj's ideological message.[109] Though the book does not offer an unambiguous answer to the question whether or not Valmiki meant it as such.

To sum up, it can be said that, according to *Jūṭhan*, "Dalit" is a collective term – somewhat similar to the way in which "Brahmin" or "Savarna" can be seen as collective terms for the Dalit's opposite – used in rather formal and abstract contexts but is rarely used in more personal situations or applied to individual persons. This implicit meaning of the term stands in contrast to the explicit meaning given by Valmiki on page 89 of his autobiography (see above) as well as in my interview with him (see the subsection "Dalit" above), namely, that a "Dalit" is a person who possesses *dalit chetꞌnā* or Dalit consciousness, that is to say, who is aware of the centuries-long exploitation their community has been submitted to and who actively stands up against their oppressors, rather than every person belonging to one of the *jāti*s formerly labeled as "untouchable". I read the juxtaposition of Chuhra/Valmiki and, partly, Dalit, with Hindu as Valmiki's political statement, which also could be seen as an attempt at re-defining the identity of the first. Though as far as terminology is concerned, this juxtaposition ultimately serves to add confusion of meanings to already highly ambiguous terms. An additional noteworthy feature with regard to caste-related terminology – an example of which could be seen in the last quoted passage in the form of single quotation marks enclosing the word *jāti* – is discussed in the next short sub-section.

[109] The idea behind the Bahujan Samaj ideology is that all marginalized groups of the Indian society together – i.e. members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes – make up the majority (= *bahujan*) of the Indian population.

2.3 *jāti* or ‘*jāti*’?

The substance of the following subsection appears as more of a – possibly unintended – peculiarity rather than an unambiguous circumstance. However, it nonetheless supports and emphasizes the foremost argument of this chapter – that is to say, that there is no uniformity in caste-related terminology even in texts written by Dalit authors.

Rather similarly to the terminological turning point that occurs in *Jūṭhan* after the introduction of the term *dalit*, there appears a significant alteration in the treatment of the term *jāti* after page 71. While before page 71 the word *jāti* appears numerous times without being marked in any way, on this page and on many occasions after this, the word *jāti* appears in single quotation marks: ‘*jāti*’, as well as plain and unmarked. This usage of the term ‘*jati*’ in single quotation marks seems at times to be rather incongruous.

On the one hand, it looks like Valmiki, as on many other occasions in his autobiography, performs the changes in his main protagonist’s consciousness through his narrative: that is to say that as long as *jāti* seemed to be a natural phenomenon to the main protagonist, it did not need to stand out in the text. But as his studies progress and he becomes aware of the unfairness and the discrimination that his community has been facing for centuries, the young Omprakash begins to perceive *jāti* as a construct, as something that is not really there or that should not have the right to exist. This change in the main protagonist’s perception is made apparent in the text through single quotation marks.

On the other hand, the usage of the word *jāti* without quotation marks does not cease after page 71. There is no consistent difference in the usage of either: five times out of ten when *jāti* is written without quotation marks it appears in direct speech – a usage that seems reasonable – but the other five cases when *jāti* is written without quotation

marks are in no way different from the over twenty instances when it is written in single quotation marks. There are even two occasions, on which *jāti* in single quotation marks appears in direct speech, e.g.: “What ‘*jāti*’ are you from?” (“*āp kis ‘jati’ se haiṃ*?”; Valmiki 1999: 138).

The usage of quotation marks seems out of place on a few other occasions in *Jūṭhan* as well,[110] which is a phenomenon that might be attributed to editorial mistakes. However, no other word is used in single or double quotation marks as often as the word *jāti*.[111] For this reason I argue that it is the change in the main protagonist’s consciousness which was discussed above, which Valmiki intended to emphasize with this usage. However, the fact that the author did not write his book on one single day and that his opinion about the correct writing of this term might have changed several times in the process should also not be left unconsidered.

As a final consequence, the reader is left with the impression that the text itself is not sure whether *jāti* as a phenomenon should be accepted and treated like any other word or whether it should be denied existence and put into single quotation marks to emphasize its problematic and possibly even give it a sense of artificiality. This effect may have been intended or not, either way it does make the text more thought-provoking and multifaceted. It also can be seen as another illustration of the vagueness and complexity of caste-related terminology and its definitions: the ultimate effect of the ambigu-

[110] The following two examples illustrate this: on page 41 it says: “Actually, people from the *bastī* called him ‘Bandar’. In the same way, they called ‘Hiram Singh’ Sundal and me ‘Palla.’” (Valmiki 1999: 41), (Hindi original: *vaise bastī ke log use ‘baṃdar’ kah'kar pukār'te the. isī tarah ‘hiram sinh’ ko suṃḍal aur mujhe ‘pāllā’)*. Since Hiram Singh is the boy’s name and Sundal is what he was called, it is the word “Sundal” that should be in quotation marks here. Similarly, quotation marks are misplaced on page 60: “This college is called ‘Barla Inter College Barla’ village now” (Valmiki 1999: 60), (Hindi original: *ab is kălej kā nām ‘bar'lā iṃṭar kălej bar'lā’ gā̃v hai)*.

[111] Throughout *Jūṭhan*, double quotation marks are used for direct speech and quotations. Single quotation marks are used instead of the phrase “so called” and with titles of literary works. On one occasion, the pen name “Premchand” (*prem'cand*) is written in single quotation marks as well; Valmiki 1999: 27).

ity between *jāti* vs. ‘*jāti*’ might not have been intentional, but this does not mean that it is not accurate.

3 Kausalya Baisantri’s *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*

Kausalya Baisantri’s usage of caste-related terminology seems to be similar to Valmiki’s on the first glance. A closer look, however, makes obvious that although *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*, similarly to *Jūṭhan*, begins by using various *jāti* names and finishes with approx. twenty pages’ worth of text brim-filled with the word *dalit*, its significance is rather a different one.

From the beginning of her autobiography, Baisantri extensively uses both various *jāti* names – including her own, Mahar – as well as the two Hindi words denoting “untouchable” (*aspr̥śya* and *achūt*; see introduction to this chapter). In *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*, there are altogether 64 mentions of the word *aspr̥śya*, 14 mentions of the word *achūt* and 27 mentions of the word *mahār*. Among the designations for the opposite of these categories appear the terms *savarṇa* (8 mentions) and *spr̥śya* (“touchable”, 3 mentions). The latter term only appears on two consecutive pages (Baisantri 1999: 31f.), where it is clearly and directly opposed to *aspr̥śya*.

Alongside *mahār*, several other names of “untouchable” *jāti*s appear in the narrative and there is a clear-cut difference between those *jāti*s in the text. That is to say that instead of talking about all members of “untouchable” *jāti*s as belonging to a single group – be it “untouchable” or “Dalit” – Baisantri describes each *jāti* on its own, mentioning by the way, members of which of those *jāti*s practiced untouchability (*chūtchāt*) towards mem-

bers of which other *jāti/*s. For instance, the *mā̃g* people (anglicized as Mang)[112] are described in the following manner:

> The Mahars practiced untouchability towards people from the Mang *jāti*. They used to throw away water and food that had been touched by them[113] (Baisantri 1999: 31).

About the *jamādār* (anglicized as Jamadar)[114] she states:

> Once, a Jamadar was taking the container [with feces] away and I put a piece of cloth over my nose. The Jamadar said, "when you shit, doesn't it smell? You people turn away your noses from your own parents' or sick people's shit and urine and look at us, we do this work for our stomachs". What he said was true. Even now in many places Jamadar put filthy baskets on their heads and carry them away.
>
> […]
>
> Even now very little awakening has happened among them. One will have to work with missionary spirit to bring awakening among these people, then some emancipation can happen. From being neglected and degraded for centuries their nature has become somewhat stubborn there-

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[112] The *māṃg* or Mang *jāti* is the second largest Scheduled Caste in Maharashtra and can also be found in the neighboring states. Their traditional occupations include tanning, shoemaking, preparation of leather buckets, acting as village musicians and castrating bullocks; the Mang women often serve as midwives (Russell 2021: Vol. IV, 151–155).

[113] Hindi original: *māṃg jāti ke logoṃ se mahār log chūtʼchāt baratʼte the. unʼke hāth kā chuā pānī aur khānā pheṃk dete the*.

[114] The *jamādār* community is a Scheduled Caste. Their traditional occupations include village watchmen and field-laborers. They are primarily found in Bundelkhand (Russell 2021: Vol. III, 355–358).

fore in order to improve them [(i.e. their situation)], for their benefit a lot of patience and steadfastness is needed[115] (Baisantri 1999: 69).

Baisantri draws a very clear line between different *jāti*s that were formerly labeled as "untouchable", but it is not quite clear from the text, whether this is an attempt at demarcating between Baisantri's own *jāti*, Mahar, and other *jāti*s – as seems to be typical for minority groups – or whether it is rather a boundary marker between the different *jāti*s, while also a way of demarcating of her own family as belonging to the people who have become aware of the importance of education and cleanliness.[116] However, this treatment of different "untouchable" *jāti*s in *Dohʹrā Abhiśāp* demonstrates that there also exists a strong hierarchy between different *jāti*s, which today are often seen as belonging to the same category, i.e. "Dalit" or Scheduled Castes. In other words, it demonstrates that the problem of caste hierarchies is not limited to the polarities "Brahmins" vs. "Dalits", but permeates all layers of Indian society – or at the very least, it did so in Nagpur at the time of Baisantri's childhood.

Speaking about herself, Baisantri on several occasions uses the words *mahār* as well as *aspr̥śya* and *achūt*, while other people or groups of people are indiscriminately called at times by their *jāti* names, at other times by the labor they performed, as well as *aspr̥śya*, *achūt* or even *dalit*:

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[115] Hindi original: *ek bār jamādār yah gāṛī le jā rahā thā tab maiṃne nāk par kapʹṛā rakh liyā. jamādār kahʹne lagā, "ṭaṭṭī karʹtī ho tab badʹbū nahīṃ ātī hai kyā? tum log apʹne māṃ-bāp yā bīmār kī ṭaṭṭī-peśāb se bhī nāk-bhauṃ sikoṛʹte ho aur hameṃ dekho, peṭ kī khātir aisā kām karʹte haim". sac thī usʹkī bāt. abhī bhī maile kā bartan sir par uṭhākar jamādār le jāte haiṃ kaī jagahoṃ par. [...]*

abhī bhī inʹmeṃ bahut kam jāgr̥ti āī hai. in logoṃ meṃ jāgr̥ti lāne ke lie miśanʹrī spiriṭ se kām karʹnā paṛegā tab kuch uddhār ho sakʹtā hai. sadā se upekṣit aur apʹmānit rahʹne se inʹke svabhāv meṃ kuch jiddīpan ā gayā isʹlie inʹko sudhārʹne, inʹkī bhalāī ke lie baṛe dhairy aur sahanśākti kī zarūrat hai.

[116] See chapter 4 "Tropes of Agency in Kausalya Baisantri's *Dohʹrā Abhiśāp*" below and Browarczyk 2013 for more details.

The land of *Khalāsī Lāin*[117] belonged to a Patel. His *jāti* was **Jaiswal Baniya**[118] [...] The people who lived here were mostly **untouchable** [(*achūt*)]. They were poor, uneducated manual laborers [(*majˈdūr*)] [...]

Mostly, here lived **untouchables** [(*achūt*)] from the **Mahar *jāti***. Ten-fifteen houses altogether belonged to **Chamars** from Andhra Pradesh and they lived in one part. Some thirty-forty houses belonged to **cleaning people**. There were also about fifteen houses belonging to the **Mang** (***achūt*) *jāti***. Some houses belonged to **Adivasis**[119] **from the Gond**[120] ***jāti*** and two-three were houses of **Dalit Christians**[121, 122] (Baisantri 1999: 30f.).

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[117] Name of the *bastī* where Kausalya Baisantri lived in Nagpur.

[118] The word *baniyā* (Bania) is derived from the Sanskrit *vāṇij* which means "merchant". Traditionally, people from the Bania community are bankers, moneylenders, grain dealers and shopkeepers. People from this community can be found all over India but have their densest concentration in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The Banias are divided into a large number of endogamous groups. One of them is *jayasˈvāl* or Jaiswal (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 90–112; Samanta 1998: Vol. XXXVIII, 438–442).

[119] The term *ādivāsī* (Adivasi) is a problematic term and a contested group category. A detailed discussion of the term is beyond the scope of this dissertation. To hint at the problematic, however, I will quote Prathama Banerjee explaining why they use the terms "tribe" and "adivasi" together: "in areas such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh communities have chosen to replace the term tribe with the more positive term adivasi, in the northeast, the term adivasi refers to migrants from central India. Indigenous groups of the northeast choose to call themselves tribes in order to distinguish themselves from such later 'encroachers'" (Banerjee 2016: 131).

[120] Russell lists the Gonds as "[t]he principal tribe of the Dravidian family and perhaps the most important of the non-Aryan or forest tribes in India" (Russell 2021: Vol. III, 41). The *gõḍ* (Gond) are listed as a Scheduled Tribe in Madhya Pradesh and as a Scheduled Caste in Uttar Pradesh (Böck, Rao 1995: 125). The ambiguity of group categories, which is discussed in this chapter, is emphasized by this example.

[121] Emphasis mine, MR.

[122] Hindi original: *khalāsī lāin kī zamīn ek paṭel kī thī. vah jāti kā jayasˈvāl baniyā thā. [...] yahāṃ ke rahˈne vāle jyādātar achūt the. garīb, anˈpaṛh aur mazˈdūr the. [...] jyādātar mahār jāti ke achūt yahāṃ rahˈte the. kul das-paṃdrah ghar āṃdhra pradeś ke camāroṃ ke the aur ve bastī ke ek bhāg meṃ rahˈte the. karīb tīs-cālīs ghar safāī karmacāriyoṃ ke the. mā̃g (achūt) jāti ke bhī lagˈbhag paṃdrah ghar the. kuch ghar ādivāsī gõḍ jāti ke aur do-cār ghar dalit īsāiyoṃ ke bhī the.*

The words marked **bold** in the above passage are various group categories used by the author. It is mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that *jāti* can have manifold meanings and that it is often impossible to say which of the meanings a particular text or person is referring to when using the word *jāti*. The passage quoted above demonstrates that for Baisantri, *jāti* is not a phenomenon that can be found in Hinduism only, nor does it describe merely professional groups. The above example emphasizes the disadvantage of translating *jāti* as 'caste' or, for that matter, of translating it at all. The typical category for the *gõḍ* (anglicized as Gond) people in the English language is "tribe". The Gond are also listed as a Scheduled Tribe by the Indian government. But as a matter of fact, in the same way in which the term 'caste' has been introduced by the colonial rulers, so has been the term 'tribe', while in Hindi and in many other South Asian languages *jāti* is a category which can denote both.[123]

As can be clearly seen from the above passage, *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* doesn't seem to differentiate between *jāti* names such as *mahār* or *māṃg*, Adivasi *jāti* ("tribe") names such as *gõḍ*, and occupational terms (*safāī karmacārī*, "cleaning workers"), while the "Dalit Christians" are the only ones called *dalit* at this point in the narrative. This terminological blend seems to hint at a lack of importance of categories for Baisantri – at least, at this stage in her narrative. However, the fact that the word *dalit* appears this early in the book, should not be ignored. No other group of people gets the designation "Dalit" at this point, but just a few pages later another "Dalit Christian" makes his appearance, and this time, it is a specific person that is talked about, not an abstract group of people as in the example above.

> There was an untouchable [(*achūt*)] woman named Jai Bai Caudhari who had opened a school for girls at a place called *naī bastī*.[124] This school was established in two rooms of a brick and mortar house right next to her

[123] See, for example, Chatterjee 1996.

[124] Meaning "new settlement" or "new *bastī*".

> home. This house belonged to a Dalit Christian. They lived in one half of this house and the other half they had given to the school. They were educated people. One of their sons worked in an office and their daughter was a nurse. He himself was a teacher in a school. Their living was nice[125] (Baisantri 1999: 37).

What is noteworthy in the passage above is not only the fact that this is the second appearance of the designation “Dalit Christian”, but more importantly, the way in which this “Dalit Christian” is described. His is an “educated” family (*paḍhe-likhe log*), they live in a brick and mortar house (*pakkā ghar*), which means that they cannot be called poor, at least by comparison with people living in houses built out of straw and clay as is often the case in Dalit *bastī*s; they can afford and are generous enough to let a half of that house be used as a school for girls run by an “untouchable” (*achūt*) woman; their children have respectable jobs. In other words, the person called *dalit* on this occasion is someone, who realized the importance of education, who has educated himself and his family, is working as a teacher to educate others and is prepared to live in cramped circumstances to forward the education of girls.

This is, on the one hand, one of the first instances of a description of what I call the “man role model trope” – a trope created and used by Baisantri throughout her autobiography.[126] On the other hand, this also seems to be Baisantri’s definition of a “Dalit”. I argue that in Baisantri’s vocabulary, a person ceases to be “untouchable” or “Mahar” when said person realizes the importance of education, gets themselves and/or their children educated and achieves a better situation in life.

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[125] Hindi original: *jāī bāī caudharī nām kī ek achūt mahilā ne naī bastī nāmak jagah par laṛ'kiyoṃ ke lie ek skūl kholā thā. yah skūl un'ke ghar ke pās hī ek pakke makān ke do kam'roṃ meṃ lag'tā thā. yah ghar ek dalit īsāī kā thā. is ghar ke ādhe meṃ ve rah'te the aur ādhā ghar skūl ke lie de diyā thā. ve paṛhe-likhe log the. un'kā ek laṛ'kā kisī daftar meṃ kām kar'tā thā aur laṛ'kī nars thī. khud kisī skūl meṃ śikṣak the. un'kā rahan-sahan acchā thā.*

[126] See chapter 3 “Tropes of Agency in Kausalya Baisantri’s *Doh'rā Abhiśāp*”.

Just like in Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*, *Dohrā Abhiśāp* also contains a turning point after which the author's usage of terminology changes abruptly: but here it is not a case of a formal introduction of the word *dalit*, but rather the first time Baisantri explicitly refers to herself as a Dalit. On page 102 – out of 124 pages on the whole – Baisantri describes her own family's new life circumstances after their relocation to a new place, where her husband got a leading position in an office. While talking about the servant from that office, Baisantri states: "He had learned that we were from the Dalit community"[127] (Baisantri 1999: 102). As mentioned above, before this instance, Baisantri calls herself "untouchable" (*aspr̥śya* or *achūt*) and "Mahar", not "Dalit". It is remarkable that the first time when she uses "Dalit" to refer to herself appears at the first instance when she narrates how her family moved to a new position – both, physically as well as metaphorically, i.e. "up the social ladder" – as this is the first time when her husband holds a leading position and has several subordinates.

After this passage Baisantri's usage of the words *aspr̥śya*, *achūt* and *mahār* virtually comes to an end. After page 102 they appear 3, 0 and 4 times respectively. The word *dalit* seems to effectively replace them: it appears 8 times before page 102 and 47 after it. When it is used before page 102, it is used to describe the "Dalit Christians" who were mentioned earlier; apart from those occasions, a few times abstract groups of people are mentioned as "Dalit people" (*dalit log*; Baisantri 1999: 25), living in a Dalit *bastī* (*dalit bastī*; Baisantri 1999: 97) or in a Dalit society (*dalit samāj*; Baisantri 1999: 28, 38, 93). Considering that "after page 102" means only the last 22 pages of the book, the density of the word *dalit* on these pages is extremely high. Both groups of people, as well as specific individuals are called "Dalit" after page 102, including Baisantri herself and members of her household.

The virtual disappearance of the words meaning "untouchable" (*aspr̥śya* and *achūt*) and the *jāti* name *mahār* from the narrative after this defining moment can be explained by the fact that once Baisantri considers her own family to have reached the status of

[127] Hindi original: *ham dalit samāj ke haiṃ, yah vah jān gayā thā*.

"Dalit", her circle of acquaintances also changes: she is now surrounded by and writes about people, whom, like herself, she is prepared to call "Dalit". Contrary to Valmiki's explicit definition of a 'Dalit' as a person who has become aware of the oppression his community has been subjected to for centuries, in the case of Baisantri, one needs more prerequisites to be regarded as a "Dalit". Interestingly, the question of Dalit oppression is barely raised in *Dohʼrā Abhiśāp* at all. The important circumstance, of which Baisantri's parents become aware when they listen to one of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's speeches in the Kasturchand park when Baisantri is a little girl is that "if you want to progress, it is very important to acquire an education. One should educate both boys and girls"[128, 129] (Baisantri 1999: 47). Yet, even after this realization Baisantri's family does not turn into a family of "Dalits". It is only when the family members have advanced both in terms of education as well as their socio-economic status, that the author allows them the emic term *dalit*.

Thus, Baisantri's usage of caste-related terminology suggests that according to *Dohʼrā Abhiśāp*, a "Dalit" is not just any member of any "untouchable *jāti"*, neither is it such a member, who has become aware of their community's oppression, but rather one who being a member of an "untouchable *jātī*" has realized the importance of education and has achieved a better position for themselves and their family through hard work. Therefore, unlike Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*, Baisantri's autobiography does not appear to deny *jāti* or "caste hierarchy" the right to existence. Rather, *Dohʼrā Abhiśāp* implicitly argues that the higher status of a "Dalit" needs to be earned through education and hard work.

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[128] Hindi original: *apʼnī pragati karʼnā hai to śikṣā prāpt karʼnā bahut zarūrī hai. laṛʼkā aur laṛʼkī donoṃ ko paṛhānā cāhie*.

[129] See page 137.

4 Tulsiram's *Murdahiyā* and *Maṇikarṇikā*

On the whole, *Murdahiyā* contains over 200 mentions of the word *dalit*, over 60 mentions of the word *brāhmaṇ*, 11 mentions of the word *camār* (the name of Tulsiram's own *jāti*) and about 10 mentions of the word *savarṇa.* Other caste-related terms, including names of *jāti*s and the word *achūt* and its derivatives, each appear less than 5 times in the first part of Tulsiram's autobiography.[130]

Contrary to the two works discussed above, both parts of Tulsiram's autobiography, *Murdahiyā* and *Maṇikarṇikā*, systematically use the term *dalit* as a collective term for all members of groups formerly labeled as "untouchable". Throughout the two parts of Tulsiram's autobiography, the term *dalit* continuously and consistently denotes every person and every abstract group of people that might in Valmiki's text have been called Chuhra or Bhangi and in Baisantri's Mahar, Mang, untouchable, or Dalit. The following excerpt taken from the description of Dharampur – the village in which Tulsiram spent his childhood – in the beginning of *Murdahiyā* contains an extremely apposite illustration.

> Surrounded by those [fields called] *sīvān*,[131] in the northernmost part of our Dharampur village there was an **Ahir**[132, 133] dominated *bastī*, in which there was a **Kumhar**[134] house, a **Noniya**[135] house, a **Gadaria**[136] house and a

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[130] Tulsiram's strategy of using caste-related terminology did not change in *Manikarṇikā*, which is why I did not deem it important to determine the total number of caste-related terms in the second part of his autobiography as well.

[131] Earlier on the same page an explanation of the term is given thus: "In this geography, the land that could be used as farmland and was spread in all directions was called the *sīvān* of the whole area, each of which had its own name". (*is bhūgol meṃ vibhinn diśāoṃ meṃ sthit khetī lāyak jamīn ko pūre kṣetr kā sīvān kahᵊte the jinᵊke alag-alag nām the*; Tulsiram 2014a: 41)

[132] Bold emphasis throughout this quote is mine, MR.

Gor (Bharbhunja)[137] house. In the middle there was the Babhnauti (**Brahmin** quarter) and, according to the custom of all villages, in the southernmost region was our **Dalit** *bastī*. According to a Hindu superstition, disaster, illness and epidemics come from the southern part of any village, thus **Dalits** were always settled in the southern part of villages. So, in our village, all the people like me were born in the southern **Dalit** *bastī* to become the first victims of those disasters and epidemics[138] (Tulsiram 2014a: 41).

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[133] The *ahīr* (Ahir) is a pastoral community, which, according to Russell, can be found throughout India but is particularly dispersed in the central and northern areas. The community was traditionally occupied in breeding cattle and dealing in milk and butter (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 13–29).

[134] The *kumhār* (Kumhar) or *kumbhār* (Kumbhar) is a community that was traditionally involved in making pottery. The name is derived from the Sanskrit word *kumbh*, meaning “water-pot” (Risley 1892: Vol. I, 517–526; Russell 2021: Vol. IV, 1–10).

[135] The *noniyā* (Nonia), also known as *nūniyā*, *lūniyā* and *loniyā* is a community that has traditionally been occupied in the extraction of salt and saltpeter from saline earth. Both Crooke (1896: Vol. III, 386–395) and Russell (2021: Vol. IV, 243–244) speak of them as being at “the bottom of the caste system”. It is not quite clear, though, what status the community currently has. Various internet sources suggest it might be listed as OBC and SC – probably in different states.

[136] The *gaṛeriyā* (Gadariya) is a shepherd community, mainly found in northern India. According to Russell, the name is derived from the Hindi *gādar* and the Sanskrit *gandhāra*, meaning “sheep”. The Sanskrit name was derived from the country of Gandhāra or Kandahār, from which sheep were first brought. The traditional occupations of the Gadaria included breeding and grazing of sheep and goats, and weaving of blankets from sheep’s wool (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 1–6).

[137] The *bhaṛbhū̃jā* (Bharbhunja) is a community of grain-parchers. According to Russell, the name is derived from the Sanskrit word *bhrāstra* (frying-pan), and *bhārjaka* (one who fries). They are dispersed in northern India (Russell 2021: Vol. IV, 202–204.).

[138] Hindi original: *inhīṃ sīvānoṃ se ghire hamāre dharamˈpur gāṃv ke sabˈse uttar meṃ ahīr bahul bastī thī jisˈmeṃ ek ghar kumhār, ek ghar noniyā, ek ghar gaṛeriyā tathā ek ghar goṛ (bhaṛbhūjā) kā thā. bīc meṃ babhˈnautī (brāhmaṇ ṭola) tathā tamām gāṃvoṃ kī paraṃparā ke anusār sabˈse dakṣin meṃ hamārī dalit bastī. ek hindū aṃdhaviśvās ke anusār kisī gā̃v meṃ dakṣiṇ diśā se hī koī āpadā, bīmārī yā mahāmārī ātī hai, isˈlie hameśā gāṃvoṃ ke dakṣiṇ meṃ dalitoṃ ko basāyā jātā thā. ataḥ mere jaise sabhī log hamāre gāṃv meṃ inhīṃ mahāmāriyoṃ-āpadāoṃ kā pratham śikār hone ke lie hī dakṣiṇ kī*

As is clearly seen in the above excerpt, all *jāti* names that are mentioned here – highlighted to make them stand out visually – are those of people not living in the Dalit *bastī*, but in the rest of the village. In other words, only names of “touchable” *jāti*s are mentioned in this passage. At the same time, the *jāti* names of people who live in the Dalit *bastī* do not find any mention at this point at all – people from the Dalit *bastī*, “all the people like me” (*mere jaise sabhī log*) are called here *dalit*.

However, Tulsiram does not seem to deny the phenomenon *jāti* its existence in the manner Valmiki partially appears to do on several occasions by putting the word *jāti* in single quotation marks. In Tulsiram’s autobiography, *dalit* is an umbrella term that combines all groups formerly labeled as “untouchable” without attempting to deprive the *jāti* concept of existence. Individual *jāti* names for different groups of Dalits exist in Tulsiram’s vocabulary as well, but they only appear in the narrative when it seems necessary, like in the following example:

> Among Dalits, people from the **Pasi**[139] *jāti* usually raised pigs[140] (Tulsiram 2014a: 19).

“People from the Pasi *jātī*” are explicitly mentioned here as a sub-group belonging to Dalits. Their *jāti* name appears in the text, because it discusses the traditional occupation of the people belonging to this group.

One of the major examples of the usage of actual names of “untouchable” *jāti*s in the first part of his autobiography, is Tulsiram’s account of his uncle Sommar’s work as the

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dalit bastī meṃ paidā hue the.

[139] The *pāsī* (Pasi) community’s hereditary occupation is the tapping of the Palmyra date and other palm trees for their sap. It is registered as a Scheduled Caste (Russell 2021: Vol. IV,309–313; Singh 1971).

[140] Hindi original: *sādhāraṇ'tayā dalitoṃ meṃ pāsī jāti ke log sūar pāl'te the*.

caudharī[141] of twelve villages of the Chamars: 8 instances of the appearance of the *jāti* name *camār* out of a whole of 11 in *Murdahiyā* appear on the 3 pages (Tulsiram 2014a: 40–42), on which the "twelve village system" (*bārahagāṃvā*) and Tulsiram's uncle Sommar's work are discussed.

> Father's eldest brother, whose name was Sommar, had been elected Chowdhury of the Chamars of twelve villages. Before India's independence, [I] don't know since when, according to a custom in many areas of the eastern Uttar Pradesh there used to be a "twelve village system" [(*bārahagāṃvā*)] of the Chamars, that is, the Chamars of twelve villages used to have a great *panchayat*,[142] in which a person was elected Chowdhury by unanimous approval – this Chowdhury customarily obtained the rights of a judge[143] (Tulsiram 2014a: 14f.).

Since it was a custom that, according to this book, existed among the Chamars in particular, and not among all "Dalits", it appears that on this occasion as well it was necessary for Tulsiram to use the *jāti* name instead of the broader term *dalit*, which would for him have been simply inaccurate on this occasion. Another such instance, when mentioning of *jāti* names seems essential, includes further names of "untouchable" *jāti*s:

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[141] According to Carmen Brandt, *caudharī* "is a title which was introduced by the Mughal rulers for certain officials and bestowed irrespective of religion. It usually denoted and may still denote an economically and socially superior position" (Brandt 2015: 259).

[142] A form of local government.

[143] Hindi original: *pitā jī ke sabˈse baṛe bhāī, jinˈkā nām sommar thā, bārah gāṃvoṃ ke camāroṃ ke caudhrī cune gaye the. bhārat kī āzādī ke pūrv na jāne kab se pūrvī uttar pradeś ke anek kṣetroṃ kī ek paramparā ke anusār camāroṃ kā "bārahagāṃvā" hotā thā, arthāt bārah gāṃv ke camāroṃ kī ek bṛhad paṃcāyat hotī thī, jisˈmeṃ koī ek vyakti sarvasammati se caudharī cunā jātā thā – is caudharī ko vyāvahārik rūp meṃ ek nyāyādhīś kī tarah adhikār prāpt hotā thā.*

During this time [(famine)], the worst state was that of the **Nai**,[144] the **Dhobi**,[145] the **Musahar**[146] and the **Nat**.[147] In our whole area, there was only one **Nai** family in the nearby village Ṭaṛvā̃. In that same village there lived two **Dhobi** families. In about a dozen villages of that area that same **Nai** family used to do the haircutting and the **Dhobi** used to wash people's clothes from all those villages. The shocking tradition was that all of them did the whole work for free. As wages, each of their houses got only one bundle of the spring and autumn crop. But in this famine they did not get the bundles of rice, because all the crops had dried up. So, those families were in a great predicament[148] (Tulsiram 2014a: 71).

[144] The *nāī* (Nai) is traditionally a Barber community which is widespread in northern India. It is a Scheduled Caste. See Crooke 1896: Vol. IV, 40–49; Russell 2021: IV, 217–233.

[145] The term *dhobī* (Dhobi) is the name of the *jāti* of washer people. The name is derived from the Hindi verb *dhonā* and Sanskrit *dhav*, "to wash" (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 431–436). The community is large and distributed all over the subcontinent, it is listed as a Scheduled Caste, though, to my knowledge, not in every Indian state.

[146] The *musahar* (Musahar) are listed as a Scheduled Caste. According to Crooke, "the name means 'rat-catching' or 'rat-eating'. It signifies 'flesh-seekers' or 'hunters'. They are now mostly landless agricultural labourers and sometimes still have to resort to rat catching to survive during lean times" (Crooke 1896: Vol. IV, 12–37).

[147] The *naṭ* (Nat) community is a Scheduled Caste. The word *naṭ* derives from the Sanskrit word *naṭa*, "dancer". Crooke states that it seems that "Nat is an occupational term which includes a number of different clans who have been grouped together merely on account of their common occupation of dancing, prostitution, and performance" (Crooke 1896: Vol. IV, 57).

[148] Hindi original: *is daurān sabˈse burī hālat nāiyoṃ, dhobiyoṃ, musaharoṃ tathā naṭoṃ kī hotī thī. hamāre pūre kṣetr meṃ mātr ek parivār bagal ke ṭaṛˈvāṃ gāṃv meṃ nāī kā thā. usī gāṃv meṃ do parivār dhobiyoṃ kā rahˈtā thā. us kṣetr ke karīb ek darjan gāṃvoṃ ke bāl kāṭˈne kā kām vahī nāī parivār karˈtā thā tathā dhobī in sabhī gāṃvoṃ ke logoṃ ke kapˈṛe dhote the. hairat meṃ ḍālˈne vālī paramparā yah thī ki ye sabhī sārā kām muft meṃ karˈte the. majˈdūrī ke rūp meṃ inheṃ sāl bhar meṃ rabī tathā kharīph kī phasˈloṃ se sirf ek ek keṛā har ghar se milˈtā thā. kiṃtu us akāl meṃ dhān ke keṛe inheṃ nahīṃ mile, kyoṃki sārī phasˈleṃ sūkh gayī thīṃ. ataḥ in parivāroṃ kī baṛī durdaśā hotī thī.*

Here, as in the previous examples, the appearance of *jāti* names (highlighted by me for emphasis) is explained by the need to elucidate why it was particularly people from these communities who suffered the most: their traditional occupations play a crucial part in this paragraph.

On the whole, in his autobiography Tulsiram does not seem to attach any negative connotation to names of *jāti*s, using them rather as an occupational category. There are, however, a few exceptional cases of someone other than the narrator using names of *jāti*s in a derogatory way. The following episode illustrates this difference and demonstrates that while the narrator uses the word *dalit*, his characters can choose other options:

> There was a Dalit student called Phulchand Ram who was doing his MSc. [...] He had entered his name for the hostel president election. [...] Suddenly, Sarvajit Singh from the RSS came there and started banging Phulchand Ram on the back with mud-smeared shoes. Abusing him, he kept saying, why have you entered your name to be hostel president being a Chamar?[149] (Tulsiram 2014b: 146f.).

A student, who is called “Dalit” by the narrator, is called “Chamar” by a character who abuses him. Phulchand Ram’s *jāti* is irrelevant from the point of view of the narrative, but since people from “lower *jāti*s” are frequently called by their *jāti* names in a derogatory way, it appears in the narrative on this occasion.

[149] Hindi original: *phulˈcaṃd rām nāmak ek dalit chātr jo em. esˈsī kar rahe the [...] unhoṃne hosṭal presideṃṭ ke cunāv meṃ apˈnā parcā dākhil kiyā thā. [...] acānāk ār.es.es. ke sarvajīt siṃg vahāṃ pahuṃcˈkar phulˈcaṃd rām ko pīṭh par dhaṛādhaṛ miṭṭī se sanī cappaloṃ se mārˈne lage. ve gāliyāṃ dekar, kahˈte rahe ki camār hokar hosṭal presīḍeṃṭ ke lie kyoṇ khaṛe ho gae?*

The word *achūt* (“untouchable”) is only used on two occasions: once in each volume of Tulsiram’s autobiography. Similar to the previous example, on both occasions it is someone other than the narrator, who considers the protagonist as “untouchable”.

> Especially children from Savarna *jāti*s started to hate me very much, its main reason was my being untouchable [(*achūt*)], and on top of that came my smallpox-afflicted face and my one blind eye[150] (Tulsiram 2014a: 59).

> After this, Rao Sahab started to say: “I invited you, because since you are from a poor untouchable [(*achūt*)] family, politics are not for a person like you... a person like you won’t get anything from politics… You need to earn money”[151] (Tulsiram 2014b: 139).

In both instances above the context is that of caste discrimination: the word “untouchable” (*achūt*) is used on the first occasion clearly as a reflection of how the young protagonist was called by other school children, while on the second occasion the same word (*achūt*) is used in direct speech uttered by a character rather than by the first-person narrator of the story. Thus, it appears that as far as Tulsiram’s autobiography is concerned, “untouchablity” as a phenomenon only exists as a form or a means of harassment.

The following instance suggests that “Dalit” is used by Tulsiram as a synonym for Scheduled Castes:

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[150] Hindi original: *khās karˈke savarṇ jātiyoṃ ke bacce mujhˈse bahut ghṛṇā karˈne lage the, jisˈkā pramukh kāran thā merā achūt honā tathā ūpar se cecak vālā cehˈrā tathā ek ā̃kh kā kharāb honā*.

[151] Hindi original: *isˈke bād rāv sāhab kahˈne lage: “maiṃne āpˈko isˈlie bulāyā hai, kyoṃki āp garīb achūt parivār se haiṃ, isˈlie āp jaise vyakti ke lie rājˈnīti se kuch nahīṇ hotā hai. ataḥ āpˈko paisā kamānā cāhie*”.

> Most of the workers there were Dalits or from other backward *jāti*s, but the contractors were Savarna[152] (Tulsiram 2014b: 25).

“Dalits” and “other backward *jāti*s” are clearly different categories for Tulsiram, but the above sentence makes their close connection obvious and very similar if not equivalent to the connection between Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes. However, this is the only occasion I could find where this connection is apparent. Neither Scheduled Castes nor Other Backward Classes are terms that repeatedly appear in Tulsiram’s autobiography.

The term *dalit* has been adopted by Tulsiram systematically throughout his autobiography regardless of whether or not it was in use at the time in question. Even a person referred to as Chandala (see introduction to this chapter above), a term which clearly belongs into an era when the term *dalit* was far from being invented, gets the designation “Dalit” in Tulsiram’s narrative.

> Today I also remember that on those same stairs there happened a polemic between Shankaracharya and a *Chandala* (Dalit) in the 9th century, but Pundits discredited it asking how a *Chandala* would have been able to have obtained such wisdom that he could have a discussion with Shankaracharya. Thus, they spread the rumor that in reality it was Lord Shiva disguised as a Chandala, who sat on the stairs of *Manikarṇikā* to test Shankaracharya[153] (Tulsiram 2014b: 12).

[152] Hindi original: *vahāṃ adhikˡtar majˡdūr dalit yā ati pichˡṛī jātiyoṃ ke hote the, kiṃtu ṭhekedār savarṇ the*.

[153] Hindi original: *āj yah bhī yād ātā hai ki inhīṃ sīṛhiyoṃ par navīṃ śatabdī ke ādi śaṃkarācārya kā ek cāṃḍāl (dalit) ke sāth śāstrārth huā thā, kiṃtu paṃḍitoṃ ne ise amānya karˡte hue yah kahānī joṛ dī ki cāṃḍāl ko itˡnī buddhi kahāṃ se ā sakˡtī thī, jo śaṃkarācārya se vārtālāp kare. ataḥ unhoṃne aphˡvāh phailā dī ki cāṃḍāl ke veś meṃ sākṣāt śiv jī the, jo śaṃkarācārya kī parīkṣā lene ke lie maṇikarṇikā ghāṭ kī sīṛhiyoṃ par baiṭhe the.*

The word “Dalit” in the parenthesis was included by the author and suggests that he does not expect his modern day readers to be familiar with the ancient term *cāṃḍāla*, which he explains with the term that has been chosen by him as a collective term for all representatives of the groups formerly labeled as “untouchable”, regardless even of the time period in which they lived.

Thus, Tulsiram can be said to be the only one of the three authors who consistently and uniformly uses the term *dalit* in the meaning which was suggested to me by the high-ranking Dalit functionary (see above), namely, synonym with members of the Scheduled Castes and/or people formerly labeled as “untouchable”, which, indeed, agrees with what I perceive as the principally accepted practice among scholars of Dalit studies today.

5 Conclusion

Caste-related terminology and particularly the usage of the term *dalit* in literature and scholarship is still extremely indefinite and far from unified. Not only do there exist numerous definitions of the term *dalit*, but its usage in Dalit literature itself is also extremely ambiguous and diverse. As I have demonstrated above, the three authors whose autobiographies are in the focus of this dissertation use the term *dalit* in their respective works in different ways. What is more, they use it in ways which do not always agree with the explicit definitions given by those same authors. This is particularly true in the case of Omprakash Valmiki – the only one out of the three authors who explicitly mentions his own definition of the term saying that a Dalit is a member of the community formerly labeled as “untouchable”, who has become aware of the oppression his community has been facing for centuries and stands up against it. Despite this statement, a closer look at the treatment of the term *dalit* in *Jūṭhan* reveals that Valmiki barely uses it as a designation for particular individuals, while rather preferring to employ it as a col-

lective term used in formal and abstract contexts as well as phrases such as "Dalit literature", "Dalit movement", "Dalit consciousness", etc. When it comes to particular individuals, however, in *Jūṭhan*, either names of *jāti*s find preference or the characters' *jāti* affiliation is not mentioned at all. Since in his autobiography, Valmiki performs the changes in his main protagonist's consciousness through his writing, the term *dalit* only begins to appear in the narrative after the main protagonist gets acquainted with it. Even then, however, there are only two occasions in the whole book, on which Valmiki (nearly) calls himself "Dalit" rather than using the *jāti* names Chuhra or Bhangi. A further noteworthy feature regarding caste-related terminology in Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography *Jūṭhan* is the fact that through his narrative, the author on several occasions suggests to the reader an incompatibility between the categories "Chuhra"/"Bhangi"/"Dalit" and the religious category "Hindu". Another peculiarity of Valmiki's autobiography in the context of caste-related terminology is the fact that after a particular page, the word *jāti* begins to appear in the text in single quotation marks as '*jāti*' thus leaving a faint impression of an uncertainty as to its usage, significance or even right to existence.

In Kausalya Baisantri's autobiography *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*, there initially appears a kind of a terminological blend, in which categories such as names of *jāti*s, occupational terms and religious affiliations are used without differentiation. A practice that seems to suggest a lack of importance of categories for Baisantri. On the first 120 pages of her autobiography – which constitute about five sixth of the whole book – Baisantri uses for herself and members of her family the terms Mahar as well as "untouchable" (*aspr̥śya* or *achūt*). Once her family finds itself in a better social position, however, the usage of the Hindi words meaning "untouchable" and names of *jāti*s is virtually substituted by the word *dalit*. The term *dalit* appears to have a very specific definition in Baisantri's vocabulary as a designation for people, who have become aware of the importance of education, have educated themselves and/or members of their families and have achieved a better socio-economic status.

Contrary to the two other authors, Tulsiram uses *dalit* as an umbrella term that encompasses every person or group of people belonging to a *jāti* formerly labeled as "untouchable". Tulsiram follows this practice regardless even of whether the said person or group has lived in the historic time period, in which the term was in use. Both, present day members of Scheduled Castes such as Chamar or Pasi *jāti*s as well as characters from Buddhist texts, who are labeled as Chandala in those texts, are called "Dalit" in Tulsiram's autobiography. Tulsiram uses names of *jāti*s for both Savarnas as well as Dalits, as occupational terms or as subcategories, and does not appear to attach any negative undertone to *jāti*s.

One noteworthy feature in this respect all three autobiographies have in common: towards the end of each of them, a high density of the word *dalit* can be observed. Both, in *Jūṭhan* as well as *Dohrā Abhiśāp*, there is a turning point, after which the term *dalit* is used in a far greater concentration than before. This is also true for Tulsiram, whose narrative rather concentrates on "the Dalit question" (*dalit praśn*; Tulsiram 2014b: 169) between the pages 169–188 of *Manikarṇikā*, in the last chronologic part of his autobiography.[154] This phenomenon might be explained by the fact that at this stage in their respective narratives, the authors consider their stories told and turn to their politics or activism, which is, after all, one of the main reasons for writing Dalit literature and the autobiographies in the first place (see Introduction to this dissertation).

[154] The rather special chapter that follows page 188 is discussed in chapter 3 "Tropes of Agency in Kausalya Baisantri's *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*".

Chapter 2

Buddhist Past and Future in Tulsiram's Autobiography

1 Introduction

In his essay "Self-making and world-making" Jerome Bruner outlines the structure of an autobiography with the following words:

> What after all is an autobiography? It consists of the following. A narrator, in the here and now, takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in the there and then, one who happens to share his name. He must by convention bring that protagonist from the past into the present in such a way that the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness (Bruner 2001: 27).

When authors experiment and deviate from predetermined patterns, their works become particularly complex. In the case of Tulsiram's two-volume autobiography, one of the most interesting deviations from the scheme outlined above is that a significant number of different Buddhist stories – by which I mean freely retold[155] excerpts from the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, the *Mahāvaṃsa* and other Buddhist texts – are used in *Murdahiyā* and *Maṇikarṇikā* as parables and generously distributed in his two autobiographical books. It is the aim of this chapter to reveal a purpose behind Tulsiram's usage of these parables.

[155] A comparative analysis of the originals of these stories with the manner in which they have been retold by Tulsiram might be worth an exploration, but is beyond the scope of this dissertation. All "Buddhist stories" related here are based solely on Tulsiram's narrative and may differ considerably from their original versions.

The construction of a new historical narrative in the Dalit discourse, which would enable Dalits to move away from the rhetoric of oppression of the powerless and downtrodden and "to re-imagine the greatness of their lineage" (Beth Hunt 2014: 41) has been used as a tool by more than one Dalit reformist. In the early 20th century, it was the famous Tamil intellectual, anti-caste activist and reformist Ayothee Thass[156] (1845–1914), who famously argued that members of the Paraiyar[157] *jāti* were "the original inhabitants of the land". Thass contended that, having been Buddhists, these people had been "pushed to the outskirts of villages by invading Brahminism as punishment for their refusal to practise caste" (Jayanth 2017: 94). Thass thus made "a claim for the origin of untouchability" and provided "a rationale for the vanishing of Buddhism from Tamil country" (ibid.).

In the Hindi sphere, Swami Achutanand[158] was one of the first leaders to attempt to unite all members of *jāti*s formerly labeled as "untouchable" and to employ this technique by creating a common past for them as Adi Hindu, i.e. the native inhabitants of the subcontinent, who had lost their status "due to an Aryan conspiracy" (ibid.). A few decades later, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar provided his own theory to the origin of untouchability, which used different argumentation (see below), but resulted in the same assertion: Ambedkar claimed that the origin of untouchability lay in the circumstance that people labeled as "untouchables" today had been Buddhists in a remote past. Subsequently, according to Sara Beth Hunt, "Dalit discourse in the 1950s constructed a historical narrative of the Dalit past, which included Buddhism and Bhakti[159] as a single

[156] In this dissertation, I follow the spelling used by Malarvizhi Jayanth in her 2017 article; another common anglicized version of the same name is Iyothee Thass.

[157] According to Hugo Gorringe, the *jāti* name *pariyār* (Parayiar) is etymologically connected to the *parai* drum and also to the English term "pariah". See Gorringe 2016.

[158] For more information on Swami Achutanand and his significance for the development of Hindi Dalit literature see Introduction to this dissertation.

[159] The term *bhakti* means, according to Bruce M. Sullivan, "devotion". The word is derived from the root "bhaj" and means "to participate in". It is first used in the sense of devotion to God in the *Śvetāśvara Upaniṣad* (4.23), where devotion to one's Guru and to Rudra as God are advocated. […] Later texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Gītagovinda* present Bhakti as an emotional experience of love for God, and a

stream of lower-caste assertion against Vedic Hinduism" (Beth Hunt 2014: 47). Furthermore, "[t]hese new efforts to incorporate Buddhism as the 'true Dalit religion' not only fed into earlier Adi Hindu notions of Dalits as the original inhabitants of India but added that their original religion (before the imposition of Brahmanical Hinduism) was, in fact, Buddhism" (Beth Hunt 2014: 46f.). In this chapter I demonstrate how Tulsiram joins in the assertions of these Dalit activists and leaders and participates in the construction of a Buddhist past for Dalits, thus "rendering an egalitarian future plausible by giving it a past" (Jayanth 2017: 86). I show how in his own narrative, Tulsiram presents as a given fact the supposition that before being labeled as "untouchable", Dalits have in fact been Buddhists. I show further how he proceeds to provide additional evidence in favor of the same hypothesis and encourages conversion of present day Dalits to Buddhism by didactically employing Buddhist stories as instructive parables in his two-volume autobiography.

2 Ambedkar: Who Were Untouchables?

In the year 1948, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the social reformer, initiator and principal inspiration of the Dalit movement and a prolific author, wrote *The Untouchables: Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?* (sic). This book was published one year after the publication of *Who were the Shudras?,* a work*,* in which Ambedkar attempted to establish a Shudra (*śūdra*)[160] genealogy according to which present day Shudras were former Kshatriyas (*kṣatriya*) demoted to the rank of Shudras as a form of revenge for violence and humiliation imposed by them upon Brahmins (*brāhmaṇa*). In *The Untouchables: Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?,* he estab-

theology developed around envisioning oneself in one of four possible loving relationships to God. Bhakti is a major influence also in traditions of worship of the Goddess, where she is revered as the creator and destroyer of the cosmos, and a loving Mother to the world (Sullivan 2003: 39).

[160] The lowest in the hierarchy of the four *varṇa*s. See chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?".

lishes the origins of the so-called Untouchables[161] by asking how they came to be living outside of villages: had they been living in the villages and were compelled to move outside after they became Untouchables? Or were they already living outside of villages for some other reason?

By explaining the inner workings of so-called primitive societies all around the world, Dr. Ambedkar argues that it was not uncommon for tribal wars to lead to the near-complete destruction of a tribe or clan.[162] Ambedkar calls the remaining members of such tribes Broken Men and argues that when the tribe that prevailed in the war settled down, Broken Men naturally stayed outside the borders at the fringe of this new settlement as they had no tribe of their own to establish a settlement with. Since the tribe of the new settlement still was in danger of being attacked by other tribes, and since Broken Men were in danger themselves due to their small numbers, Ambedkar argues that the two parties would come to an agreement, according to which Broken Men would settle outside village boundaries in order to keep watch and raise alarm in case of an invasion, while in this manner themselves becoming part of a bigger collective and being thus less vulnerable.

Following this argument, Ambedkar declares that Broken Men had been the ancestors of present day Untouchables and states that they became Untouchables because Broken Men had been Buddhists. He explains that Buddhists had been despised by Brahmins and presents evidence that they were treated as Untouchables by Brahmins by referring to the Sanskrit drama *Mr̥cchakaṭikā* – written by the poet Shudraka (Śūdraka) around the 5th century CE.[163] However, Ambedkar continues, since the stigma of un-

[161] In this section I follow Ambedkar's own writing style, in which he uses the terms "Untouchable" and "Broken Men" capitalized and without quotation marks.

[162] I refer to a book that is available online, which makes it impossible to name concrete pages for reference. However, the corresponding information can be found in Part II "Problem of Habitat", Chapter III "Why do the Untouchables live outside the village?" under the following link: http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/39A.Untouchables%20who%20were%20they_why%20they%20became%20PART%20I.htm#a03 (accessed on 3.10.2020)

[163] This play is discussed in more detail below.

touchability only stuck to Broken Men and not to all Buddhists, there must have been another reason for this development. After a subsequent analysis of the results of the Census of India and the beef eating habits of the people of India, Ambedkar determines that Untouchables by definition consume beef, a circumstance, which constitutes for him the only explanation for untouchability that is consistent with all known facts. He concludes that the Broken Men must have refused to give up eating beef and consequently were labeled as Untouchables by the dominating "upper caste" Hindus (see footnote 162 above).

While the question whether Ambedkar's theory is plausible or not is not relevant for the present dissertation, the fact that he endeavors to find respectable roots[164] for the so-called Untouchables and attempts to prove that their ancestors had been Buddhists is extremely significant. As Laura Brueck explains,

> …for Dalits, literature offers access not only to history but also to a world of individual and community progress and the means to construct a shared identity. First, Dalits must deconstruct the identity, crystallized over centuries, of the powerless, the lowly, the untouchable, and then replace it with a new kind of self-expression that will transform not only the way they see themselves but also the way society sees them (Brueck 2014: 63).

Both, Ambedkar's *Who Were The Shudras?* as well as *The Untouchables Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?* were attempts at such a deconstruction and the creation of a new collective identity for marginalized groups of Indian society. Ambedkar not only invented "a golden age for the lower castes" (Jaffrelot 2005: 38) but also conducted a thorough analysis of Hinduism and the caste system and came to the logical conclusion that "social hierarchy was consubstantial to the Hindu religion. To leave it was thus the only means to attain equality" (Jaffrelot 2005: 119). However, while

[164] See Jaffrelot 2005: 31–40.

his work *The Untouchables Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?* was published in 1948, he did not convert to Buddhism until eight years later. According to Christophe Jaffrelot (2005: 119), Ambedkar first mentioned conversion to a religion other than Hinduism as far back as in 1927. But his main goal was to renounce Hinduism:

> Our aim is to gain freedom. We are not interested in anything else at the moment. If we can gain freedom by conversion, why should we shoulder the responsibility of the reform of Hindu religion? And why should we waste our energy, time, labour and money on that? Let there be no misunderstanding that the object of our struggle is our liberation from Hinduism and not reform of Hinduism.
>
> The aim of our movement is to achieve freedom, social, economic and religious for Untouchables. So far as Untouchables are concerned, this freedom can not be achieved except through conversion (cited in Jaffrelot 2005: 121).

Choosing the most appropriate substitute for Hinduism was the next step and Ambedkar spent many years deliberating and studying several other religions in order to make his choice. Ambedkar finally selected Buddhism as the new religion for himself, his family and the Dalits who wished to follow him only a few months before his demise in 1956. He famously converted to Buddhism in an unprecedented ceremony on October 14th 1956 together with his second wife and almost half a million Dalits (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2011: 1; Jaffrelot 2005: 134). In his last work *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, posthumously published in 1957, Ambedkar formulated his own version of Buddhism, the *Navayāna*[165] Buddhism, the twenty-two oaths of which were first pronounced by him during his conversion ceremony:

[165] Corresponding to the classical "vehicles" of Buddhism, the *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna*, Ambedkar's "vehicle" or Buddhist path is called *Navayāna* or the "new vehicle".

1. I shall not recognise Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as gods, nor shall I worship them.

2. I shall not recognise Ram and Krishna as Gods [(sic)], nor shall I worship them.

3. I shall not recognise Gauri and Ganapati as gods nor shall I worship them.

4. I do not believe in the theory of incarnation of god.

5. I do not consider Buddha as the incarnation of Vishnu.

6. I shall not perform Shraddha [a Hindu rite that one carries out for the safety of the deceased] nor shall I give offerings to god.

7. I shall not do anything which is detrimental to Buddhism.

8. I shall not perform any religious rites through the agency of a Brahmin.

9. I believe that all human beings are equal.

10. I shall endeavour to establish equality.

11. I shall follow the eight fold path of the Buddha.

12. I shall observe the ten Paramitas (observances) of the Buddha [the virtues in which a follower of the Buddha has to restrain himself].

13. I shall be compassionate to all living beings and I shall nurture them with care.

14. I shall not steal.

15. I shall not lie.

16. I shall not commit adultery.

17. I shall not drink liquor.

18. I shall lead my life striving to cultivate a harmonious blend of the three basic principles of Buddhism [Enlightment [(sic)], Precepts and Compassion].

19. I thereby reject my old religion, Hinduism, which is detrimental to the prosperity of human kind and which discriminates between man and man and which treats me as inferior.

20. I fully believe that Buddhism is Saddhamma.[166]

21. By my embracing Buddhism I am being reborn.

22. I hereby pledge to conduct myself hereafter in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha (cited in Jaffrelot 2005: 135).

Eight of these twenty-two oaths (numbers 1–6, 8 and 19) are directly concerned with the renunciation of Hinduism, a circumstance which once again accentuates that Ambedkar found it crucial to move away from the Hindu religion and not merely to convert to another one. Arun Prabha Mukherjee suggests that Ambedkar's writings could be considered as a "pre-text" to contemporary Dalit literature (cited in Kumar 2018: 50). I argue that, when more than fifty years after the demise of Ambedkar, Hindi Dalit writer Tulsiram wrote his two-volume autobiography, he picked up where Ambedkar left off and not only provided another piece of evidence for the Dalits' Buddhist ancestry, but also implicitly encouraged conversion to Buddhism for modern day Dalits – even if seemingly not to what was termed *Navayāna* Buddhism by Ambedkar.

3 Our Ancestors Were Buddhists

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the two volumes of Tulsiram's autobiography – *Murdahiyā* and *Maṇikarṇikā* – contain numerous stories from Buddhist texts, which at the first glance seem disconnected from the main narrative. However, a closer look at these stories reveals that they were systematically chosen with a very specific objective in mind. These stories follow a pattern that exposes a distinct purpose, which, as I ar-

[166] The Pali language term *saddhamma* is a compound of *sad* "true" and *dhamma* "religion".

gue, is twofold: to provide further evidence for the Buddhist identity of Dalits' ancestors before they became labeled as "untouchable" and to implicitly advocate conversion to Buddhism as a means of being accepted into a larger group – the one of Buddhists. Through a close reading of relevant passages, I demonstrate how this is accomplished.

On page 49 of *Murdahiyā*, while talking about home remedies used by Dalit women, Tulsiram remarks that his grandmother, too, was this kind of a "physician" (*baidya*; Tulsiram 2014a: 49)[167] and that she, as well as other elderly women in the village, used to keep her preparations in animal horns. In fact, she used to keep any kind of small objects in them. No doubt, he continues, that during the times when it was allowed to eat *ḍāṃgar*,[168] his grandmother used to take home the biggest horns of dead animals in order to keep them as receptacles. Only years later, Tulsiram proceeds, did he learn about the ten amendments to Buddha's rules that were agreed upon during one of the early Buddhist councils, the very first one of which is that a Buddhist monk could gather salt in an animal's horn.

> Since then this Buddhist custom of collecting [objects] in horns was maintained. The fact that Grandma kept medicine, money and even threads and needles [in them] proves that centuries ago our ancestors at some time surely must have been real Buddhists. Those horns of Grandma's are evidence of this[169] (Tulsiram 2014a: 50).

[167] Though Tulsiram clearly uses the word *baidya* as meaning a healer or physician and not a member of the *baidya jāti*, it should be noted that this word is a complex, contested and unclear term, often used as another name of a community known as Bede (see Brandt 2018, esp. 210–214).

[168] According to *Murdahiyā*, "*ḍāṃgar*" is the meat of household animals (cows, buffaloes etc.) who died of natural causes – as opposed to being slaughtered. Before India's independence, approx. around 1860–70 it was usual for the "Chamars from our region" to eat this meat. The practice was later more or less abandoned under Ambedkar's influence (Tulsiram 2014a: 15).

[169] Hindi original: *tabhī se sīṃg meṃ saṃcay kī yah bauddh prathā jārī huī. Dādī dvārā davāeṃ tathā paisā, yahāṃ tak ki sūī ḍorā bhī rakh'nā siddh kar'tā hai ki hamāre khān'dān vāle sadiyoṃ pūrv kabhī khāṃṭī bauddh avaśya rahe hoṃge. dādī kī ve sīṃgeṃ is'kā pramāṇ hai*.

In this instance, Tulsiram explicitly states his opinion that Dalits' ancestors must have been Buddhists. He does not repeat this statement as plainly again, rather, the text seems to assume that the fact has been established. In the many instances of "Buddhist interventions" to follow, Tulsiram identifies his protagonist with characters from Buddhist stories, ever substantiating the reader's impression of the existence of an historical link between Dalits and Buddhists.

4 Buddhist Parables

The following Buddhist story used by Tulsiram in *Murdahiyā* is particularly remarkable as it is the same play written by Shudraka which was used by Ambedkar in his *The Untouchables Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?* (sic) as evidence that Buddhists had been despised by Brahmins and were consequently often treated as "untouchable". In the course of his narrative, Tulsiram relates an incident that occurred when his protagonist, as a young boy, traveled to another village to take part in school examinations. Upon arrival at a river's shore he attempted to wash himself and was attacked by an "upper caste" boy. Tulsiram comments on this incident with the following words:

> This, too, was one of those unhappy childhood memories which for years constantly kept irritating me. But when about two decades later I got the opportunity to read the eighth chapter of Shudraka's timeless play *Mr̥cchakaṭikā* (The clay cart) this bad feeling was quenched forever[170] (Tulsiram 2014a: 83f.).

[170] Hindi original: *bacˈpan kī asahāy yādoṃ meṃ yah bhī ek aisī yād thī, jo varṣoṃ tak mere dimāg ko harˈdam kuredˈtī rahī. kiṃtu isˈke lagˈbhag do dashak bād jab mahākavi śūdrak kā sadābahār nāṭak "mr̥cchakaṭikam" (miṭṭī kī gāṛī) ke āṭhˈveṃ aṃk ko paṛhˈne kā maukā milā, to sārī durbhāvˈnā hameśā ke lie miṭ gayī.*

Tulsiram then proceeds to tell a story from the *Mr̥cchakaṭikā* in which the meeting with a Buddhist monk is perceived as a misfortune by several characters. Subsequently, the monk is attacked, merely for his presence and because he had bathed in the nearby pond, just as the young protagonist had been attacked in the main narrative. Tulsiram points out that even though in the play the monk's words were polite, his assailant kept reacting as if he was being insulted.

> Evidently, in this play, that was written in the period of the campaign run by violent Vedics[171] against Buddhists in the ancient times, Buddhists, who opposed the caste system, were seen as bad omens. At that time, this was a common conception among Vedics about Buddhists. Shudraka expressed it in the *Mr̥cchakaṭikā* in an aesthetic form. What happened to me before my arrival at the lake of Babura Dhanua [(name of the village)] during the hard times of the famine, in it, Ramcharan Bhaiya was my present day Shakar [(the assailant's name)]. Had I known about the Buddhist monk from the *Mr̥cchakaṭikā* at that time, I may not have felt that much suffering, but when two decades later Buddhist philosophy found a home in every fiber of my being, then, when I got acquainted with the *Mr̥cchakaṭikā*, I felt as if the Buddhist monk from this centuries ago written play was I myself[172] (Tulsiram 2014a: 84).

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[171] In this episode, the binary Dalit-Brahmin (see chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?") is replaced with Buddhist-Vedic. I would argue that Tulsiram uses the word *vaidik* and not *brāhmaṇ* to emphasize the fact that he speaks about things that happened in the Vedic period, which is why I, too, decided to use this for the English language rather unusual term.

[172] Hindi original: *jāhir hai prācīnˈkāl meṃ vaidik hiṃsāvādiyoṃ dvārā calāye jā rahe bauddhˈvirodhī abhiyān ke daur meṃ likhe gaye is nāṭak meṃ jāti vyavasthā virodhī bauddhoṃ ko apˈśakun samˈjhā jātā thā. us jamāne meṃ vaidikoṃ kī bauddhoṃ ke bāre meṃ yah ām avˈdhārṇā thī, jisˈkī abhivyakti "mr̥cchakaṭikam" meṃ ek saundaryaśāstrīy vidhā meṃ śūdrak ne kī hai. baburā dhanˈhuvāṃ ke pokhˈre par pahuṃcˈne se pahˈle jo kuch mere sāth us akāl kī kaṛˈkī meṃ huā, usˈmeṃ rāmˈcaran bhaiyā mere ādhunik śakār hī the. yadi maiṃ us samay "mr̥cchakaṭikam" ke us bauddh bhikṣu ke bāre meṃ jānˈtā hotā, to śāyad utˈnī pīṛā kī anubhūti nahīṃ hotī, kiṃtu do daśak bād jab bauddh darśan mere rom rom meṃ ghar*

The fact that Tulsiram uses this particular story for his argument, indicates that he must have been influenced by Ambedkar's *The Untouchables Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?*, even if he does not state it in the narrative. In fact, in his autobiography, Tulsiram does not write much about Ambedkar and his ideology, but Buddha and to a lesser degree Karl Marx – the two people who influenced Ambedkar's *Navayāna* Buddhism profoundly (Jaffrelot 2005) – are ever-present in the narrative.

On several occasions throughout his autobiography (especially in the first volume) Tulsiram emphasizes that he was treated as "a bad omen" (*apˈśakun*) not only by strangers, but even by the members of his own family and household.[173] By identifying himself with the Buddhist monk and his present day attacker with Shakar, the 'upper caste' assailant from the Buddhist story, Tulsiram constructs an historical link between the interconnections between present day "upper" and "lower" *jāti*s and historical Vedics/Brahmins and Buddhists, thus implying that Buddhists of ancient times and present day Dalits are the same people.

Tulsiram identifies his main protagonist with several other characters from Buddhist stories throughout the two volumes of his autobiography. Moreover, many, if not all, of the Buddhist characters with whom he identifies his protagonist either already are Buddhists or undergo a transition from being in some sort of a bad situation to being accepted into the Buddhist *saṅgha*[174] as a consequence of what happens in the parable. Bearing in mind that the first part of these parables virtually mirrors the main protagonist's situation

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kar gayā thā, to "mr̥cchakaṭikam" se avˈgat hone par mujhe aisā lagā ki māno sadiyoṃ pūrv likhe gaye is nāṭak meṃ vah bauddh bhikṣu maiṃ hī thā.

[173] On the first pages of *Murdahiyā*, Tulsiram explains that this was due to the smallpox with which he was afflicted as an infant and, because of which he stayed blind in one eye for life.

[174] The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines *saṇgha* as "Buddhist monastic order, traditionally composed of four groups: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The sangha is a part – together with the Buddha and the *dharma* (teaching) – of the Threefold Refuge, a basic creed of Buddhism" (https://www.britannica.com/topic/sangha accessed on 01.08.22.).

at the given moment in the narrative, their second part, namely the acceptance into the Buddhist *saṅgha,* should be viewed as the desired consequence for the protagonist – as presented by the author. The following series of examples illustrates how Tulsiram utilizes Buddhist stories in order to determine that any person, however bad a situation they might be in, can be accepted into the Buddhist *saṅgha*.

For instance, when the adolescent protagonist, having run away from home to continue his education and living in a student hostel, is visited by two young relatives, the three of them end up in the notorious Kalinganj district of Azamgarh, trying to sneak a peek at a *mujˈrā* dancing girl[175] through the window. The young men are soon discovered and chased away, while the narrative continues with a Buddhist story about thirty men, who – having gone to the forest for amusement with their wives and a prostitute – ran around looking for the prostitute, who stole their jewelry. Buddha's "philosophic question" (*dārśanik praśn*): "Do all of you want to look for that woman or for yourselves?"[176] (Tulsiram 2014a: 176) awoke their sympathy and having listened to the Buddha's spiritual counsel all thirty of them became Buddhist monks.

> Later, they became known as 'Bhaddavaggiya monks'. Perhaps, if the three of us had been with them, surely, we, too, would have joined the group of 'Bhaddavaggiya monks'?[177] (Tulsiram 2014a: 176).

In this episode, the protagonist and his two friends are identified with men who are said to be looking for pleasure as a result of having lost themselves, an allegory for what is

[175] The term *mujˈrā* stands for a dance performance by women in a form that developed in India during Mughal rule, where local rulers and the elite of the Indian society visited courtesans for their entertainment. See Feldman & Gordon 2006.

[176] Hindi Original: *tum sabhī us strī ko ḍhūṛhˈnā cāhˈte ho yā svayaṃ ko?*

[177] Hindi Original: *bād meṃ calˈkar ve 'bhadr vargīy bhikṣu' kahˈlāe. sambhavataḥ yadi ham tīnoṃ unˈke sāth hue hote, to bhadr vargīy bhikṣuoṃ kī śreṇī meṃ avaśya ā gae hote?*

happening to the protagonist in the main narrative. The fact that the men from the parable agree that they should be looking for themselves and as a consequence are accepted into the Buddhist *saṅgha* reflects Tulsiram's desire for his protagonist to become a Buddhist as well.

Tulsiram not only portrays his protagonist as a "bad omen",[178] he also narrates how he ran away from home at the age of fifteen to be able to continue his education and how, living a lonely life, he first devoted himself to college education and then became a student at the Banaras Hindu University. It is thus not surprising that he chooses loneliness and a search for "his people" as one of the main motifs of his narrative. After an episode in which he was treated very kindly and affectionately by a new friend, the main protagonist proceeds to go to the Manikarnika *ghat*.[179] When he reaches the *ghat*, Tulsiram explains that "this place had become my favorite place in Banaras. Whenever I saw it, my *Murdahiyā*[180] danced before my eyes in the afternoon like a mirage"[181] (Tulsiram 2014b: 71). Here, the protagonist is reminded of the "great nun Patacara" (*mahān bhikṣuṇī paṭācārā*), who, before becoming a nun, had lost all members of her family in a single day and "would walk naked in a half-crazed manner here and there around the cremation ground of Śrāvastī like mad consumed by sorrow"[182] (Tulsiram 2014b: 71).

[178] For instance, Tulsiram 2014a: 49.

[179] One of the holiest cremation grounds among the sacred riverfronts (*ghats*), alongside the river Ganga.

[180] The namesake of the first part of Tulsiram's autobiography, *Murdahiyā* is the name of a "multipurpose working ground" (*bahuddeśīy karmasthalī*) of the village Dharampur (near Azamgarh), which combined a cremation and a burial ground, a grazing place, agricultural fields, a playing ground for Tulsiram and his friends – in short, it was a "strategic center" (*sāmarik kendr*) for the Dalits of the village (Tulsiram 2014a: 5). The author often uses it as a metaphor for "home".

[181] Hindi Original: *yah sthalī banāras meṃ merī sabˈse cahetī sthalī ban gaī thī. ise dekhˈte hī merī murdahiyā āṃkhoṃ ke sāmˈne nācˈtī dopaharī yānī mr̥gtr̥ṣṇā jaisī dikāī dene lagˈtī thī*.

[182] Hindi Original: *śrāvastī ke śmaśān meṃ śokagrast hokar ardhˈvikṣipt avasthā meṃ naṃgˈdhaṛaṃg pāgloṃ kī tarah cillātī-vilakhˈtī idhar-udhar ghūmā karˈtī thī*.

> One day, in this state, naked, she passed the place where Buddha was giving a council. The monks tried to chase her away, but upon Buddha's command she came closer. One monk threw his upper garment upon her, she wrapped it around herself, listened to the Buddha's council, was freed from sorrow and became a nun[183] (Tulsiram 2014b: 71).

As in the previous example, the first part of this parable reflects the reality, in which the there-and-then-protagonist finds himself. Tulsiram identifies his protagonist with the woman who lost all her family members, since, obviously, he also felt like he had lost all his family, when he ran away from home. The narrative continues thus:

> Afterwards, I went to Maṇikarṇikā many times and every time it seemed to me that at some point I will meet Patacara right there walking from somewhere or other[184] (Tulsiram 2014b: 71).

Consequently, according to the narrative, every time the protagonist goes to Manikarnika, a place that he identifies with "his Murdahiyā",[185] which *is* home and a place of comfort in Tulsiram's vocabulary, he expects to meet the Buddhist nun, who despite having lost her entire family, became free from sorrow when she heard the Buddha's counsel and joined the *saṅgha*. There can be no doubt that Tulsiram implies that this is exactly what he wishes to happen for his younger self.

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[183] Hindi Original: *ek din isī avasthā meṃ naṃgˈdhaṛaṃg vah jahāṃ buddh upˈdeś de rahe the, udhar se gujˈrī. bhikṣuoṃ ne use bhagāne kī kośiś kī, kiṃtu buddh ke kahˈne par vah pās ā gaī. ek bhikṣu ne apˈnī saṃghātī yānī kamar ke ūpar vālā cīvar usˈke ūpar pheṃˈkā, jise usˈne oṛh liyā aur buddh ke upˈdeś ko sunˈkar vah śokˈmukt hokar bhikṣuṇī ban gaī.*

[184] Hindi Original: *isˈke bād maiṃ anek bār maṇikarṇikā gayā aur har bār mujhe aisā lagˈne lagˈtā thā ki kabhī na kabhī paṭācārā kahīṃ na kahīṃ se ghūmˈtī mujhe vahīṃ mil jāegī.*

[185] See, for instance, Tulsiram 2014b: 52.

Somewhat apart stands the story about thieves who were saved from a death sentence, because they had joined the Buddhist *saṅgha*. It is told after the episode in which the protagonist, a hungry student-to-be, stole forty paisa that were accidentally left lying outside by a neighbor and used it to buy some sweets. The incident reportedly caused the protagonist so much pain and suffering that he became "lifeless" (*nirjīv*). This revelation is followed by a passage in which the author explains the Buddha's views on theft and proceeds to narrate the following "historic incident" (*aitihāsik ghaṭ'nā*): a band of thieves robbed and killed some Buddhist monks and was consequently caught and sentenced to death. However, between the robbery and the thieves' arrest, some of them had joined the Buddhist *saṅgha*, and when those "thief monks" (*cor bhikṣu*) were watching their "associate thieves" (*ap'ne sah'yogī coroṃ ko*) being led to the place of execution, they said to one another how fortunate it was that they had joined the Buddhist *saṅgha*. Otherwise they, too, would have been executed. When the Buddha heard about this, he made a rule that no thief could become a member of the *saṅgha* and the thieves were forced to leave. Tulsiram does not exactly identify his protagonist with these thieves, nor does he elaborate on the consequences the expulsion had for the "thief monks" (*cor bhikṣu*); they may or may not have been executed subsequently. Instead, Tulsiram proceeds to tell his own story, according to which, he never forgave himself for the stealing of the forty paisa, but was initiated and accepted into the Buddhist *saṅgha* twenty-two years later. This development points toward Tulsiram's belief that under certain conditions everyone, even a "common thief" (*sādhāraṇ cor*), as he calls himself on this occasion, can become a member of the Buddhist *saṅgha* (Tulsiram 2014b: 20f.). Each of the parables quoted above leads to an instructive conclusion, which is that any person, however bad the situation they find themselves in – whether they have lost themselves, their family, or made a mistake which genuinely makes them suffer – can be accepted into the Buddhist *saṅgha* and freed from suffering.

5 Saved by the Buddha

On several occasions, particularly in the second part of his autobiography, Tulsiram claims to having been "saved" by the Buddha (e.g. *buddh ne mujhe bacā liyā* ("Buddha saved me"; Tulsiram 2014b: 82). This claim first appears in the beginning of *Maṇikarṇikā*, the second volume of his autobiography, when the protagonist finds himself in the transitional state between running away from his parental home and starting his life as a student at the Banaras Hindu University. Staying with his cousin in Calcutta during the summer, overcome by an uncertainty which is very nearly leading him to despair, he goes in the evenings to look at passing trains from the top of an abandoned crane.

> That view seemed very fascinating to me, but in the middle of scientific attraction, worrying about the future would force me to burst into tears. Sitting on that crane, my outcry became non-existent among the noise of the trains. Discouraged by the uncertainty of the future, I several times felt like jumping from the crane and throwing myself under a train, but Buddha appeared in front of me and I started to view suicide as a sin[186] (Tulsiram 2014b: 33f.).

The crises that Tulsiram claims to having been saved from by the Buddha range from suicide via becoming an existentialist to the plotting of a violent scheme of an "elimination of class enemy" (*varg duśman kā saphāyā*; Tulsiram 2014b: 114) as propagated by the protagonist's Naxalite[187] friends. As happens in all similar instances, in which Tul-

[186] Hindi Original: *vah dr̥śya mujhe bahut lubhāvꞌnā lagꞌtā thā, kiṃtu is vaijñānik ākarṣaṇ ke bīc bhaviṣya kī ciṃtā mujhe phūṭ phūṭꞌkar rone par majꞌbūr kar detī thī. us kren par baiṭhe-baiṭhe merā ārtꞌnād un relꞌ-gaṛiyoṃ ke śor meṃ astitvavihīn ho jātā thā. bhaviṣya kī aniścayꞌtā se ūbꞌkar kaī bār kren se kūdꞌkar ṭren ke nīce ā jāne kā man karꞌtā thā, kiṃtu buddh sāmꞌne ā jāte aur maiṃ ātmahatyā ko pāp samajhꞌne lagꞌtā thā*.

[187] See footnote 52.

siram’s protagonist is said to having been “saved by the Buddha”, this incident, too, ends with the Buddha’s victory in a bad situation with potentially disastrous results: “In the end, Buddha’s *ahiṃsa* won and I forever renounced the politics of the ‘elimination of class enemy’”[188] (ibid.).

Viewed in the context of the parables from Buddhist stories used by Tulsiram throughout the two volumes of his autobiography, his several times repeated claim to having been “saved by the Buddha” must be interpreted not only as a personal statement, but at the same time as another way of advocating conversion to Buddhism. Thus it can be concluded that, in his autobiography, Tulsiram advocates conversion to Buddhism while implying that any individual, no matter how grave the situation they find themselves in, can be accepted into the Buddhist *saṅgha* and consequently be “saved by the Buddha”.

6 Conclusion

The construction of a new shared and respectable identity for Dalits has been one of the distinctive characteristics of the Dalit discourse since the early 20th century. Several notable Dalit activists and leaders have attempted to create such an identity for Dalits and have particularly claimed that present day Dalits became labeled as “untouchable” as a consequence of their Buddhist identity and a refusal to adopt the Hindu religion. One of the most important and renowned of these Dalit activists was Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who studied Hinduism and the history of caste oppression for many years and authored a monograph entitled *The Untouchables Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?* Ambedkar came to the conclusion that the root of untouchability lay in the Hindu religion and that in order to obtain freedom and live in an egalitarian society, Dalits needed to renounce Hinduism and convert to an egalitarian religion. He

[188] Hindi Original: *aṃtataḥ buddh kī ahiṃsā jīt gaī aur ‘varg duśman kā saphāyā’ vālī rāj'nīti se hameśa ke lie maiṃne saṃnyās le liyā*.

proceeded to study all major religions of the world for many years before finally deciding to select Buddhism as such a religion. Thus, just a few months before his demise, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in 1956 in an extraordinary ceremony, joined by his wife and several hundred thousands of Dalits. In his autobiography, Hindi Dalit author Tulsiram joins Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders in their argumentation when he declares that centuries ago, before being labeled as “untouchable”, present day Dalits must have been Buddhists. Endeavoring to deconstruct the centuries old identity of the powerless and deprived “untouchables”, he uses a number of Buddhist stories as parables in the two volumes of his autobiography not only to provide another piece of evidence for this claim, but also to create a virtual link between present day Dalits and Buddhists of ancient times as well as to advocate conversion to Buddhism as a means to be accepted into a bigger group and to escape suffering.

Chapter 3

Tropes of Agency in Kausalya Baisantri's *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*

1 Introduction

In an article on Dalit women's autobiographies in Hindi, Laura Brueck states that "[w]estern feminist theorization of women's life writing has suggested" that "women's life narratives that emphasize domestic, kinship, and communal spheres are marginalized as 'relational'" as opposed to what is seen as "traditional", that is to say male-written, autobiographies (Brueck 2017: 9). Brueck cites, for instance, Mary Mason, who "argued that women's autobiographies are less ego-driven and more likely to position the self within a network of others" (ibid.). Similarly, Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley summarize several scholars' point of view, who suggest that autobiographies written by women are "more collective than individual" (Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley 2015: 9). Brueck warns against an uncritical acceptance of this view and challenges it when she writes that "we must be especially attentive to the language of a text and understand how the relationality and collectivity of experience is not accidental or necessarily organic to a woman's view on her world, *but is actively, politically, and consciously constructed in the course of the narrative*"[189] (Brueck 2017: 1). Supporting this opinion, Anita Bharti, a well-known Dalit feminist, writer and activist, argues that "there is no doubt that female Dalit writers' autobiographies are social despite being personal and personal despite being social. Their struggle is to achieve freedom not only for "me", but for "us", that is to say, for the whole *jāti* of women. Therefore, while the voice of their autobiographies is filled with Dalit consciousness, it is also filled with feminist consciousness"[190] (Bharti 2013). While suggesting that neither the personal nor the collective

[189] The emphasis is mine.

[190] Hindi original: *isˈmeṃ koī śak nahīṃ ki lekhikāoṃ kī ātmakathāeṃ vyaktigat hote hue bhī sāmājik haiṃ, aur sāmājik hote hue bhī vyaktigat haiṃ. unˈkā saṃgharṣ 'maiṃ' ke liye nā hokar 'ham' yāni saṃpūrṇ strī*

should be seen as the dominant realm of Dalit women's autobiographies, Bharti's statement also reflects another duality, which is also made apparent through the title of Kausalya Baisantri's autobiography *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* – the "double curse" – namely, the intersectional position of the Dalit woman.[191]

Kausalya Baisantri was born in Nagpur in 1926 in a Mahar[192] family and as such was greatly influenced by Ambedkarite ideology. Being one of the first Dalit women of her generation to receive formal education, she had a keen interest in social activism and Dalit rights and volunteered in student organizations such as the *aspr̥śy vidyārthī pariṣad* ("Untouchable Students' Council"; Baisantri 1999: 75) and the *śeḍˈyūlˈkāsṭ sṭūḍeṃṭ feḍˈreśan* ("Scheduled Caste Student Federation"; Baisantri 1999: 93). She ceased to be formally socially active after her marriage to Devendra Kumar Baisantri in 1947, but resumed her social activism when the family moved to Delhi in the 1970s and her children started to study in college[193] (Baisantri 1999: 120). She found that "there was no organization of Dalit women in Delhi"[194] (ibid.) and worked hard at establishing one. After a bumpy start, this organization developed and advanced to such a level that its members were able to organize a meeting with the then-president of India Giani Zail Singh[195] (*Jñānī Jailˈsiṃh*[196]) to "inform him about the problems of Dalit women"[197] (Baisantri 1999: 123). In this chapter, I argue that Baisantri's autobiography constitutes

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jāti kī mukti kī kāmˈnā ke lie hai. isˈlie unˈkī ātmakathāoṃ kā svar dalit-cetˈnā se pūrṇ hone ke sāth-sāth strīvādī cetˈnā se bhī labˈrej hai.

[191] For a detailed discussion of intersectionality see, for instance, Crenshaw 1989, Carland 2017 and Davis 1983.

[192] See footnote 43.

[193] Hindi original: *jab laṛˈke kolej meṃ paṛhˈne lage tab maiṃne thoṛā sāmājik kārya śurū kiyā*.

[194] Hindi original: d*alit mahilāoṃ kī dillī meṃ koī saṃsthā nahīṃ thī*.

[195] Giani Zail Singh (1916–1994) was president of India between 1972 and 1977.

[196] The transliteration of the name is according to its appearance in *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*.

[197] Hindi original: *dalit mahilāoṃ kī samasyāoṃ ke saṃbaṃdh meṃ jñāpan dene*.

a part of her Dalit feminist activism with which she endeavored to further support the independence of Dalit women.

From the very beginning of her book, Baisantri announces that this is a book written for women. Not only does she contend in the introduction (*bhūmikā*) to her work that four different women have asked her to write her autobiography,[198] she also states that while her mother tongue was Marathi, she decided to write her autobiography in Hindi, because there was a "lack of Dalit women autobiographies in Hindi, of the commencement of which I, too, want to be a part"[199] (Baisantri 1999: 8). *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp* certainly plays an important role in the emergence of Dalit women's autobiographies in Hindi, as in it, Baisantri not only narrates her own life story, but dedicates a number of pages to a detailed account of the life stories of her maternal grandmother as well as her mother, who remains a prominent character of *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp* until nearly its last pages. Furthermore, Baisantri explicitly assumes the role of a collective autobiographer when she writes:

> Son, brother, husband, all [of them] might be angry with me, but I, too, need independence to put my story before society. Other women must have had experiences like mine, but out of fear of society and family they are frightened to expose their experiences and live all their lives in suffocation. Such experiences need to come forward to open society's eyes[200] (Baisantri 1999: 8).

[198] See the introduction to this dissertation.

[199] Hindi original: *kyoṃki hiṃdī meṃ dalit mahilāoṃ ke atmakathā sāhitya kā abhāv hai jisˡkī śuruāt meṃ maiṃ bhī hissā honā cāhˡtī hū̃*.

[200] Hindi original: *putr, bhāī, pati sab mujh par nārāz ho sakˡte haiṃ, paraṃtu mujhe bhī to svataṃtratā cāhie ki maiṃ apˡnī bāt samāj ke sāmˡne rakh sakū̃. mere jaise anubhav aur bhī mahilāoṃ ko āe hoṃge paraṃtu samāj aur parivār ke bhay se apˡne anubhav samāj ke sāmˡne ujāgar karˡne se ḍarˡtī aur jīvan-bhar ghuṭan meṃ jītī haiṃ. samāj kī ā̃khеṃ kholˡne ke lie aise anubhav sāmˡne āne kī zarūrat hai*.

This statement is not only important, because it implicitly states Baisantri's intention to make society aware of not only her own, but many Dalit women's experiences, but also because it declares that Baisantri wrote her autobiography despite and against the wishes the men in her life might have had, who "might be angry" with her about publishing her autobiography. The statement that "there is a lack of Dalit women's autobiographies in Hindi" suggests furthermore that Baisantri was well aware of the existing Dalit autobiographies – at the very least those written in Marathi and Hindi – and of the role women characters played in them. The erasure of women from male-written literary production is a widely-studied universal phenomenon, not at all foreign to Dalit literature.[201] This erasure is the background against which I argue that Kausalya Baisantri, being the first female Dalit autobiographer in Hindi language, constructs her own narrative. Her autobiography, I suggest, challenges and gives an active response to the narrative erasure of female characters that she opposes. Baisantri has filled her book with women and women's stories not necessarily because being a woman this is her natural mode of writing, but out of a conscious decision to deflect female erasure and the passivity of women characters as it can be found in male-written Hindi Dalit literary texts.

There are effectively three main protagonists in *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*: as stated above, Baisantri begins writing her own autobiography with a meticulous account of her maternal grandmother's life, which continues with the life story of her mother. Baisantri actually starts to write about her own life on page 28 out of 124 pages on the whole. But even after page 28, whenever mentioning another woman, Baisantri almost invariably pauses her narrative to tell this woman's story – whether it is as long as a paragraph or as short as a sentence. I therefore read Kausalya Baisaṃtri's autobiography as a purposeful and active textual response not only to the men in her life, but also to male-written Dalit autobiographies.

In order to demonstrate what is meant by female erasure in male-written Hindi Dalit autobiographies, the next section provides a few examples and illustrations of the treat-

[201] For a detailed discussion of female erasure see, for instance, Anderson & Anderson 2021, Barrett 2016 and, Lutz 1990.

ment of women characters in Omprakash Valmiki's and Tulsitram's autobiographies. The subsequent sections proceed to demonstrate several narrative techniques employed by Kausalya Baisantri in order to counter erasure of women characters from literary production as well as to construct new literary tropes, which challenge male-written Hindi Dalit literary texts and redistribute the roles traditionally assigned to women and men.

2 Women Characters in Male-written Hindi Dalit Autobiographies

In an analysis of Hindi Dalit short stories, which feature narratives of atrocities against women, Laura Brueck has pointed out that in these short stories, "women […] have little voice and are often left by the wayside as the narrative focus turns towards the male agents of the recuperation of honor" (Brueck 2014: 163). Similarly, I found that Hindi Dalit autobiographies written by male authors, which I analyzed, largely neglect to mention women or to endow female characters with an active part in the narrative. The examples from Tulsiram's *Murdahiyā* and *Maṇikarṇikā* and Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan* illustrate this point and provide context to the erasure of women characters in Hindi Dalit autobiographies.

Anita Bharti's article *Murdahiyā ke strī pātr*[202] ("The women characters of *Murdahiyā*") lists most of the women mentioned in the first part of Tulsiram's autobiography and provides with it a concentrated and extremely useful illustration of a significant feature of *Murdahiyā* in the context of feminist theory. Bharti's article makes apparent that besides the author's mother and grandmother, and except for a small number of very specific incidents or anecdotes, female characters in *Murdahiyā* are for the most part represented by groups of women, rather than individuals. The examples include groups of women working in the fields, women singing during the drought or women participating in violent

[202] https://www.sahapedia.org/murdahiya-ke-stri-patra-मुर्दहिया-के-स्त्री-पात्र accessed on 19.07.2022.

confrontations between Dalits and Brahmins of the village. At the same time, hardly any groups of men can be found in *Murdahiyā*, while there is a great number of individual male characters in it.

In the first chapter of *Murdahiyā*, Tulsiram, who grew up in a big extended family, introduces the reader to the various members of his family as well as to the conditions he was surrounded with as a child. The introduction begins with his paternal grandparents, the grandfather being the first character introduced in some detail. Maternal grandparents themselves are not introduced in the autobiography at all; while their home is only mentioned when the main protagonist visits it in a later chapter. After the introduction of paternal grandparents, Tulsiram proceeds to introduce his own parents, then follow further family members. The following is representative of a number of passages from the first chapter.

> My father was the youngest of five brothers. All of them comprised an extended family, there were approximately fifty people in it, young and old, who were living together. Father's middle brother, the third in order of seniority, was an extremely angry and cruel person. Anyone became the victim of his coarse abuses without reason. His two sons were cruel just like him[203] (Tulsiram 2014a: 13).

In this introductory passage, the reader learns that Tulsiram grew up in a big extended family, which was composed of a great number of people – men as well as women. While it appears quite plausible that no sisters of Tulsiram's father are mentioned – traditionally, they will have been married and relocated to live with their husbands and their families – the father's "middle brother" at least must have had a wife and, conceivably,

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[203] Hindi original: *apˈne pā̃c bhāiyoṃ meṃ mere pitā jī sabˈse choṭe the. sabhī kā ek saṃyukt parivār thā, jisˈmeṃ choṭe baṛe lagˈbhag pacās vyakti ek sāth rahˈte the. pitā jī ke bīc vāle bhāī jo varīyatā kram meṃ tīsˈre nambar par the, atyaṃt krodhī evaṃ krūr puruṣ the. akāraṇ koī bhī vyakti unˈkī bhaddī gāliyoṃ kā śikār ban jātā. unˈke do beṭe ekˈdam unheṃ jaise krūr the*.

daughters. Yet, only the brother himself and his two sons are mentioned in the narrative. The introduction of further family members is carried out in a similar fashion.

> In my family the other four brothers of my father did not do plowing, because they had several grown up sons, five of whom worked in the Asansol coal mines, Kolkata jute mills and iron factories[204] (Tulsiram 2014a: 14).

As before, in this example only male relatives are mentioned. Four brothers are said to have had several sons. The following passages introduce the father's brothers and their sons in an even more detailed account:

> Father's eldest brother, whose name was Sommar, had been elected Chowdhury[205] of the Chamars[206] of twelve villages[207, 208] (ibid.).

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204 Hindi original: *mere parivār meṃ pitā jī ke anya cāroṃ baṛe bhāī har'vāhī nahīṃ kar'te the, kyoṃki un'ke baṛe baṛe kaī beṭe the, jin'meṃ se pā̃c āsan'sol kī koylā khadānoṃ, kalkattā kī jūṭ miloṃ evaṃ lohe ke kār'khāne meṃ kām kar'te the*.

205 See footnote 141.

206 See footnote 73.

207 See Tulsiram 2014a: 14f. for a discussion of the "twelve village system" (*bārahagāṃvā*) of the Chamars.

208 Hindi original: *pitā jī ke sab'se baṛe bhāī, jin'kā nām sommar thā, bārah gā̃voṃ ke camāroṃ ke caudhrī cune gaye the*.

> Father's second brother's name was Munessar and the third was that same quick-tempered Naggar. Both of them were "*dharmꞋguru*s"[209] of the famous Uttar Pradeshi "Shivnarayan Panth"[210, 211] (Tulsiram 2014a: 17).

> Father's fourth big brother's name was Munnar. He was – very differently from the Chowdhury uncle and the two Shivnarayan panth *guru* uncles – a person of an organized mind. Because of this characteristic he had been made the family's chief. Whatever property there was in the house, he kept account of it[212] (Tulsiram 2014a: 19).

In the above passages, Tulsiram's male family members are introduced in some detail: not only their names, but also their – and their sons – character traits and positions or places of work are discussed. However, there is no mention of female family members: the uncles' or their sons' daughters and wives are completely disregarded. In fact, the author's own mother and paternal grandmother are the only female family members introduced in the first chapter. In the subsequent chapters, too, neither aunts nor female cousins find any mention – with one or two very brief exceptions, i.e. when Tulsiram narrates a specific incident in connection with a female cousin. Tulsiram's mother's siblings are also never mentioned.

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209 The term *dharmꞋguru* is comprised of the Sanskrit/Hindi words *dharm* "religion, etc". and *guru* "teacher", as a compound, it thus means a religious teacher, in this case, of the Shivnarayan panth (see next footnote).

210 The Shivnarayan panth or Shiv Narayan panth is a religious congregation mostly associated with lower caste communities in northern India. For details, see Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp 2011: 187–233, especially page 189.

211 Hindi original: *pitā jī ke dūsꞋre nambar vāle bhāī kā nām munessar tathā tīsꞋre vahī gussail naggar. ye donoṃ uttar pradeś meṃ pracalit prasiddh "śivnārāyaṇ paṃth" ke "dharmꞋguru" the*.

212 Hindi original: *pitā jī ke cauthe baṛe bhāī kā nām munnar thā. ve caudhrī cācā yā donoṃ śivnārāyaṇ paṃthī guru cācāoṃ se bilkul bhinn ek samanvayꞋvādī kism ke vyakti the. isī vīśeṣꞋtā ke kāraṇ unheṃ parivār kā mālik banāyā gayā thā. ghar meṃ jo kuch sampadā thī, usꞋkā ve hisāb kitāb rakhꞋte the*.

The second book of Tulsiram's autobiography, *Maṇikarṇikā*, is even more striking in the context of female erasure from literary production as it appears that there is no space for women in this part of his autobiography at all. *Maṇikarṇikā* relates Tulsiram's years as a student at the Banaras Hindu University, it talks about the problematic housing situation, the author's many male friends, fellow students, fellow party members, his political interests, but there are hardly any women in the whole volume. Still more remarkable is the fact that the last chapter of *Maṇikarṇikā* gathers all the women who played an important role in his life in Banaras. While both volumes of Tulsiram's autobiography are arranged in a chronological order, the stories of these women are left for the last chapter as a kind of an afterthought, even though many of the incidents described in it happened at times already written about in previous chapters. This circumstance plainly shows Tulsiram's inclination to keep women apart from the rest of his narrative.

Something comparable to Tulsiram's introduction of male family members in chapter one of *Murdahiyā* can also be found in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*. Each of Valmiki's four brothers is mentioned over 20 times in his autobiography. Each of these brothers is depicted in some detail: the reader gets acquainted with their character traits, the work they did, there are several instances of direct speech uttered by Valmiki's brothers,[213] their respective families are mentioned as well. At the same time, Valmiki's sister Māyā is only mentioned ten times on the whole. Out of these ten, four times this happens in phrases like "my sister and I": having been the youngest children of the family, Omprakash and Māyā spent a big part of their early years in each other's company as they were looked after together. The other six times when Māyā is mentioned, this happens in the context of the arrangement of her wedding. There is not one occasion, on which Māyā herself plays an active part in the narrative and utters a word or does anything actively herself in the whole of *Jūṭhan*. There also is no mention of her husband or the children she might have had.

[213] This is a significant point considering that there are not many instances of direct speech in *Jūṭhan* on the whole. See chapter 4.

A further example from Valmiki's autobiography illustrates another form female erasure can take. An episode narrates the events of a day on which the young Omprakash and another boy, Bhikkhūrām, had to go on a journey of several hours to a different village on behalf of a school teacher. The one and a half pages on which this incident is narrated start with following paragraph:

> We arrived in Bṛjpāl Siṃh's village just before sunrise. When we got to his house, all the people had left for the fields. At home were only women and children[214] (Valmiki 1999: 64).

The boys arrive early in the morning and spend about half a day in the village. Women and children are said to be "at home", yet, none of them finds mention in the narrative. The only characters mentioned in this episode are men. The two boys meet the father and brother of Bṛjpāl Siṃh, i.e. the teacher, who sent them to this village. [215] While Omprakash sits outside waiting for Bhikkhūrām to come out of the house, it is only Bṛjpāl Siṃh's father who is mentioned in the text. The boys are served food, which appears on the terrace as if by magic. After the meal, another man joins the group. No women characters are mentioned in this episode at all.

This short demonstration of female erasure in male-written Hindi Dalit autobiographies is not meant as criticism, but rather as a demonstration of the phenomenon's existence in Hindi Dalit literature as well as in other literatures. As I show below, it is this erasure that Kausalya Baisantri challenges in her own autobiography by filling her work with a great number of women characters and by stripping particular male characters of agency in the narrative.

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[214] Hindi original: *dhūp caṛh'ne se pah'le hī ham log bṛj'pāl siṃh ke gā̃v pahũc gae the. jab un'ke ghar pahũce to sabhī log khetoṃ par jā cuke the. ghar meṃ sirf aurateṃ aur bacce the*.

[215] This incident is discussed in more detail in chapter 4 below.

3 The Women of *Dohꞌrā Abhiśāp*

As explained by Philippe Lejeune, one of the defining features of an autobiography is the fact that its author, its main character and its narrator are necessarily the same person (Lejeune 1989: 14). For the most part, this is true for Tulsiram's and Valmiki's autobiographies: when in their narratives people other than themselves are mentioned, it nearly always happens in connection with themselves. Other characters find mention, in most cases, when the main protagonist is either confronted with another character or the two characters act together in one way or another. This is often not the case in Kausalya Baisantri's autobiography. Not only does *Dohꞌrā Abhiśāp* tell the life stories of three women, as mentioned above, but also, on many occasions, when a woman is mentioned in Baisantri's narrative – whether this happens in connection with the main protagonist herself or not – the storyline is interrupted or expanded to tell this woman's story. This story can be several pages long or as short as one paragraph or even one sentence, but it often has no direct connection to the main narrative and Kausalya Baisantri herself. It can thus be said that in her autobiography, Baisantri experiments with form and, in a way, pushes at the boundaries of the autobiographical pact as formulated by Philippe Lejeune (1989: 14) to accommodate further "protagonists" in her own life narrative. In this section I demonstrate how through this accommodation of further female protagonists a new trope is created: the woman role model.

3.1 *Ājī* and the Construction of the Woman Role Model Trope

Baisantri starts constructing her woman role model trope with the story of her maternal grandmother, whom she calls *ājī* (Ājī),[216] beginning with the latter's childhood. She was the youngest child and only daughter in a family with a number of sons. The parents died before Ājī grew up, and she lived with the family of her oldest brother. She was married when she was six years old and became a child widow soon after: her child

[216] Marathi for "grandmother".

husband died having been bitten by a snake. As a widow, Ājī could now only be married in a subdued ceremony called *pāṭ* as someone's second wife – a tradition that, as Baisantri explains, was quite common among the Mahars at that time (Baisantri 1999: 17). A wealthy Mahar man named Moḍkūjī Koṭāṃgˈle, who was already married and had two children, became Ājī's new husband. In *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*, Moḍkūjī is described as a cruel man, whose first wife did not treat Ājī well either. Ājī had two daughters and one son. Since not only Ājī herself was mistreated in her husband's house, but her children were abused as well, one day she decided to leave. She left with her children secretly on foot one early morning. After an extremely strenuous journey which resulted in the death of one of Ājī's daughters, mother and her son and daughter arrived in the city of Nagpur. With the help from a nephew, Ājī and her son Śrāvaṇ found work at a building site, after which:

> Ājī lived very economically. She saved some money and having taken a little money as a loan from [her] nephew built at a short distance from his house on a piece of unoccupied land a hut worth living in out of clay, grass and straw[217] (Baisantri 1999: 20).

Having built this house, Ājī figuratively also built a future for herself and for her son and daughter in Nagpur. In *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*, this is the first example of a strong, independent and hardworking woman, who plays an active part in her own fortune and achieves a better living for herself and her children through hard work as well as her own agency. The fact that the subject of the above citation is Ājī herself ("Ājī lived very economically", "she saved money" and "built a house") and not she and her son as in the previous sentence ("Ājī and her son Śrāvaṇ found work at a building site") can hardly be accidental. Baisantri's grandmother died when the young Kausalya herself was only ten months old, her knowledge of Ājī's life was secondhand at best, yet, she chose to tell Ājī's life

[217] Hindi original: *ājī baṛī kiphāyat se rahˈtī thīṃ. unhoṃne kuch paise jamā kiye the aur thoṛe paise karj ke taur par bhatīje se lekar usˈke ghar se thoṛī dūrī par khālī zamīn par miṭṭī aur ghās-phūs se guzāre lāyak ek choṭī-sī jhopˈṛī banā lī.*

story in great detail. I argue that Baisantri's inclusion of her grandmother's life story in her own autobiography is a consciously chosen narrative technique which is meant as an aid in the construction of a new trope.[218] As several examples below will substantiate, through incorporating women characters in her narrative and portraying them as active and decision making agents, Baisantri creates what I call the "woman role model" trope, which makes the reader question traditional gender roles as represented in many male-written literary texts.

The story of Ājī's life is followed by an account of her search for a suitable husband for her daughter Bhāgerthī (i.e. Baisantri's mother). Once a suitable prospective husband is found, Baisantri – once again assuming the role of an omniscient narrator – includes in her narrative a description of his (i.e. Baisantri's father's) early years. This episode is remarkable in the context of distribution of agency between female and male literary characters. Baisantri's father Rāmā was orphaned as a young boy and lived as an unwanted and abused child in his uncle's family. A woman neighbor called Sākhˡrā Bāī decided to help the young orphan and let him live with her. A close reading of the episode elucidates how in the narrative, the story of Baisantri's father's early years in effect constitutes another story about a woman role model. In the following citations, I highlighted the woman's, i.e. **Sākhˡrā Bāī's**, and Baisantri's FATHER'S respective virtues, good qualities or emotions that imply virtues to demonstrate how Baisantri utilizes the story of her father's childhood in order to tell another "woman role model" story.

> Sākhˡrā Bāī lived in the neighborhood and saw all this [(i.e. how the boy was mistreated)]. She felt very **sad**. Sometimes she would **secretly give father food**. She wanted to keep father with her. She needed someone's help for work around the house. She had one cow and two goats. They needed to be taken to the woods for grazing. So she was looking for a

[218] See also Brueck's article on Dalit women's autobiographies, where she argues that Baisantri's "emphasis on the interconnectedness of multiple generations of Dalit women serves not to efface [… herself] as [a] narrative subject […], but rather to advocate for an expanded understanding of the narrative subject, indeed of the self" (Brueck 2017: 10).

> boy. **Very much afraid**, she said to father's uncle that she would keep father with her and give him work. Uncle wanted to get rid of father. He agreed immediately and father started to live with Sākhˈrā Bāī[219] (Baisantri 1999: 24).

Sākhˈrā Bāī is the subject of nearly every sentence in the above paragraph. She is portrayed as a kindhearted woman, who despite being "very much afraid" wants to help a poor orphan. The three sentences explaining that she needed a boy to help her with her cattle seem like a pretext: her wish to help the boy, whom she used to "secretly feed", appears to be primary, the need for a helper secondary. Furthermore, neither the boy (e.g. "father") nor his uncle plays an active part in this passage whatsoever. It is Sākhˈrā Bāī who first pities and then helps the boy, who decides to "keep the boy with her", and who talks to the uncle to achieve her objective.

> Sākhˈrā Bāī was a **compassionate** woman. She kept father with her **with a lot of love**. She **fed him well**. FATHER RESPECTED her, too, and whatever work she entrusted him with, he did WITH DILIGENCE AND HONESTY. He used to take her cow and goats for grazing into the jungle for the whole day. **Sākhˈrā Bāī used to give** him two millet *roti*s and sometimes vegetables or chutney or onions and pepper to take with him. Early in the mornings and evenings father used to go and sell Sākhrā Bāī's cow's milk and used to give her AN ACCOUNT FOR EVERY PENNY[220] (ibid.).

[219] Hindi original: *sākhˈrā bāī paṛos meṃ rahˈtī yah sab dekhˈtī thīṃ. unheṃ bahut duḥkh hotā thā. vah kabhī-kabhī bābā ko corī-chipe khānā khilā diyā karˈtī thīṃ. vah bābā ko apˈne pās rakhˈnā cāh rahī thīṃ. unˈko ghar ke kām meṃ kisī kī madad kī zarūrat thī. unˈke pās ek gāy aur do bakˈriyāṃ thīṃ. unˈko jaṃgal meṃ carāne ke lie le jānā paṛˈtā thā. isˈke lie unheṃ kisī laṛˈke kī talāś thī. unhoṃne ḍarˈte-ḍarˈte bābā ke cācā se kahā ki vah bābā ko apˈne pās rakheṃgī, kām deṃgī. cācā to bābā se piṃḍ chuṛānā cāh rahe the. ve ekˈdam taiyār ho gae aur bābā sākhˈrā bāī ke sāth rahˈne lage.*

[220] Hindi original: *sākhˈrā bāī dayālu vṛtti kī mahilā thīṃ. bābā ko unhoṃne apˈne pās bahut pyār se rakhā. vah unheṃ peṭ bhar khānā khilātī thīṃ. bābā bhī unˈkā ādar karˈte the aur jo bhī kām vah sauṃpatī thīṃ*

Baisantri's father plays a more active part in this passage, but while he is merely portrayed as an honest and conscientious worker, Sākhˈrā Bāī's role can also be seen as that of a caring and loving mother. While the boy in effect does what is expected of him (i. e. to work and be honest about it), Sākhˈrā Bāī cares for him in a way no one would expect from an employer. This tendency continues in the subsequent passages.

> He used to sweep Sākhˈrā Bāī's house, courtyard and cowshed. Together with Sākhˈrā Bāī he used to pat cow dung into cakes, to draw water from the well. By now Sākhˈrā Bāī **loved** father very much. She used to take him to the village market. Sometimes **she would give him** a shirt, sometimes a loincloth. Children of the village used to wear loincloths. **She also used to buy and give** him hats and vests. **She used to buy and feed** him *murmure ke laḍḍū* and *besan sev*.[221] Father grew up in Sākhˈrā Bāī's house and became a youth[222] (ibid.).

This passage concentrates almost in its entirety on Sākhˈrā Bāī's love and caring attention for the boy. The boy is active only in the first two sentences, in the second of which he "used to pat cow dung into cakes together with Sākhˈrā Bāī". The rest of the passage is dedicated to Sākhˈrā Bāī alone and to particulars relating not only to how she pro-

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use ve lagan aur īmānˈdārī se karˈte the. ve din bhar unˈkī gāy aur bakˈriyāṃ carāne ke lie jaṃgal meṃ le jāte the. sākhˈrā bāī bābā ko khāne ke lie sāth meṃ jvārī kī do roṭiyāṃ aur usˈke sāth kabhī-kabhī sabjī yā caṭˈnī yā pyāz-mirc detī thīṃ. savere-śām bābā sākhˈrā bāī kī gāy kā dūdh becˈne jāte aur sākhˈrā bāī ko pāī-pāī kā hisāb dete the.

[221] Types of sweets.

[222] Hindi original: *ve sākhˈrā bāī ke ghar-āṃgan, gāy ke goṭhe meṃ jhāṛū lagāte, sākhˈrā bāī ke sāth gobar se upˈle thāpˈte the, kueṃ se pānī khīṃc dete the. sākhˈrā bāī ko ab bābā se bahut sneh ho gayā thā. vah unheṃ gāṃv ke hāṭ meṃ le jātīṃ. kabhī kamīz, kabhī kacchā kharīd detīṃ. gāṃv ke bacce kacchā hī pahanˈte the. ṭopī-baniyān bhī kharīdˈkar detī thīṃ. khāne ke lie murˈmure ke laḍḍū yā besˈne sev kharīdˈkar khilātī thīṃ. bābā sākhˈrā bāī ke ghar pal kar javān ho gae.*

vided the boy with such necessary things as clothing, but also bought treats for the boy who spent years in her house.

> Father was fair, he had good facial features and was pretty tall. He looked very beautiful. If she didn't see father even for two minutes, **Sākhˈrā Bāī used to get very worried**, and go out to **look for him** in the whole village. She used to **ask everyone** whether they had seen Rāmā anywhere. Father's name was Rāmā[223] (ibid.).

In this passage, the father does not play any active part at all. It is once again Sākhˈrā Bāī alone, whose love and affection for the boy are emphasized in it. The father's name – Rāmā – is mentioned here, at the end of the entire episode, for the first time.

> Sākhˈrā Bāī had some gold and silver jewelry and some real silver coins. She had dug a hole in a corner and put a box with those rupees and jewelry in it. FATHER KNEW all this. Nevertheless, HE NEVER TOUCHED them. Sākhrā Bāī was very impressed with FATHER'S HONESTY and **accepted him as her own son**[224] (ibid.).

The fact that the father's name appears at the end of the whole passage dedicated to his childhood and adolescence for the first time, is, perhaps, less significant, but what is important is that in this whole episode, which describes a good part of his early years,

[223] Hindi original: *bābā kā raṃg sāf thā, nāk-nakś acche the aur ve acche-khāse laṃbe the. bahut suṃdar dikhˈte the. bābā agar do minaṭ bhī na dikhāī deṃ to sākhˈrā bāī bahut ciṃtit ho jātī thīṃ aur gāṃv bhar meṃ unheṃ ḍhūṃṛhˈne nikalˈtī thīṃ. sabˈko pūchˈtī thīṃ ki rāmā ko kahīṃ dekhā hai kyā. bābā kā nām rāmā thā.*

[224] Hindi original: *sākhˈrā bāī ke pās kuch sone aur cāṃdī ke jevar aur asˈlī cāṃdī ke paise the. un jevaroṃ aur rupayoṃ ko unhoṃne ek kone meṃ gaḍḍhā khodˈkar ek ṭīn ke ḍibbe meṃ bharˈkar rakh diyā thā. bābā ko yah sab mālūm thā. phir bhī unhoṃne inˈko kabhī chuā nahīṃ. bābā kī īmānˈdārī se sākhˈrā bāī bahut prabhāvit huīṃ aur unhoṃne bābā ko apˈnā beṭā mān liyā thā.*

he himself rarely plays a prominent part. Out of 36 sentences on the whole, “father” can be seen as playing an active part in just 6 of them, while Sākhˡrā Bāī is active in at least 21. She thus gets far more than fifty percent of the reader’s attention. The above close reading shows that Sākhˡrā Bāī’s character completely overshadows the character of Kausalya Baisantri’s father in a narrative, which is meant as an account of his background. Baisantri skillfully transforms the story of her father’s childhood into a “woman role model” story. Even though on the surface Baisantri’s father seems to be the main character of the story, a close reading reveals that its real main character is Sākhˡrā Bāī, the woman who self-sacrificingly took in a poor orphan, fed and dressed him, pampered him with treats, loved and trusted him and accepted him as her own son. Thus the woman who brought up Baisantri’s father is given a prominent role in the narrative to become another example of a woman role model: a woman who is independent and strong, who knows what she wants and acts in accordance with her wishes, who helps a poor orphan and gains an honest and grateful son. This son, having been brought up by a woman role model, turns out to be a suitable prospective husband for the daughter of *Ājī*. In this manner, unlike her male colleagues, who more often than not do not mention women in their narrative at all, Kausalya Baisantri does not neglect to mention male or female characters. There is a great number of male characters in *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*, but their seemingly prominent parts are frequently overshadowed by stronger female characters.

3.2 The Mother’s Agency

In the same way in which Sākhˡrā Bāī’s character overshadows the character of Baisantri’s father in the account of his childhood and adolescence, his character continues being overshadowed by the character of Baisantri’s mother in the rest of the autobiography. Apart from Kausalya Baisantri herself, the character of the author’s mother is the most prominent female character and important woman role model in *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*. In the whole book, she is the most independent and active woman character who

has a deep understanding of the importance of education as a means of achieving a better life. Her opinion is respected and valued not only in her family, but also in the whole *bastī*[225] they live in. As Brueck points out, the mother's character "shines through the narrative and demands a reevaluation – despite the title of the autobiography – of the idea that Dalit women live in abject submission to the dual hierarchies of caste and patriarchy" (Brueck 2017: 5). What is more, and particularly crucial in the context of re-distribution of agency between female and male characters, in *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* in most cases it is not the father, but the mother, who makes decisions and takes action with the rather silent approval of the father.

Still holding on to the role of an omniscient narrator, Baisantri proceeds to chronologically tell the story of her family. Once her mother and father's marriage is arranged, both of them work hard, have many children, lead a harsh life full of hardship and deprivation in a Dalit *bastī* in Nagpur and become inspired by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and his ideology. However, the following excerpts from the text show that even though both parents appear to have been motivated by Ambedkar's ideas and despite the fact that Baisantri portrays her parents as a happy couple who never seem to have disagreed in anything, the active position stays entirely in the hands of Baisantri's mother:

> **Mother**[226] started sending me and my big sister to her[227] school[228] (Baisantri 1999: 37).

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[225] See footnote 36.

[226] Here and in the following examples emphasis is mine.

[227] The word "her" (*unˈke*) refers to Jāī Bāī Caudharī – another woman role model – an "untouchable woman" (*achūt mahilā*) who opened a school for girls in a neighboring *bastī* and used to walk on foot even to "faraway places" (*bahut dūr tak*) to tell people to send their daughters to her school (Baisantri 1999: 37).

[228] Hindi original: *mā̃ ne mujhe aur merī baṛī bahan ko unˈke skūl meṃ bhejˈnā śurū kiyā*.

> If we neglected going to school, **mother** used to scold us[229] (ibid.).

> Now, **mother** had decided to educate all of us sisters. The remaining sisters were still little; they didn't go to school yet. Nevertheless, **mother** had made up her mind that **she** would educate them later on[230] (Baisantri 1999: 38).

> **Mother** liked to be around educated and good people. It was because of those people that **she** was encouraged to educate us[231] (ibid.).

> Now, **mother** had given up the thought of our marriages and made up her mind that, however many obstacles may come, [she] would give us all, brother and sisters, higher education[232] (Baisantri 1999: 75).

In all of the above examples – and in many more in *Dohʹrā Abhiśāp* – Baisatri's mother is portrayed as the decision maker of the family. The following passage demonstrates that similar to the dynamics between the father and Sākhʹrā Bāī characters, even when the father and mother characters are placed in the focus of the narrative together, the agency is nevertheless left to the mother.

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[229] Hindi original: *agar ham skūl jāne meṃ ānākānī karʹtīṃ to mā̃ ḍāṃṭʹtī thīṃ*.

[230] Hindi original: *mā̃ ne ab ham sab bahanoṃ ko paṛhāne kā niścay kar liyā thā. bākī bahaneṃ abhī choṭī thīṃ, abhī skūl nahīṃ jātī thīṃ. phir mā̃ ne bād meṃ unheṃ paṛhāne kā niścay kar rakhā thā*.

[231] Hindi original: *mā̃ ko paṛhe-likhe aur acche logoṃ ke sāth saṃpark rakhʹnā acchā lagʹtā thā. inheṃ logoṃ kī vajah se mā̃ ko hameṃ paṛhāne kī prerʹṇā milī*.

[232] Hindi original: *ab mā̃ ne hamārī śādī kī ciṃtā choṛ dī aur pakkā irādā kar liyā thā ki cāhe kitʹnī bhī aṛacaneṃ kyoṃ na āīṃ, ham sab bhāī-bahanoṃ ko uṃcī śikṣā deṃgī*.

> It was very hard for mother and father to bear the expenses for the education of all of us, but they kept on educating us nevertheless. They had listened to Baba Saheb Ambedkar's[233] speech in the Kasturchand Park, where he said that if you want to progress, then it is very important to get educated. One should educate both – boys and girls. **Mother** was impressed by this and decided to educate all of us children, no matter how many difficulties [she/they] would have to face. **father** didn't interfere in any of **mother's** work[234] (Baisantri 1999: 47).

The above passage begins with both parents having to pay for the children's education: the hardship falls on both of them, both of them maintain their children's studies despite the difficulties. It is also both of them, who listened to Baba Saheb Ambedkar's speech in the park. But it is the mother, who "was impressed" by his words and "decided to educate" all her children. At the same time, it is the father, who "didn't interfere in mother's work". The father only plays an active part – as opposed to passive presence – in the subsequent narrative, where he is said to help his children to go to school by repairing their broken shoes or an umbrella:

> Sometimes [we] didn't feel like going to school, so we would make excuses that a shoe had torn or an umbrella had broken in the rain, then he would immediately use a nail or a thread and repair the shoe or the um-

[233] Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is also often called Baba Saheb or Babasaheb (*bābā sāhab*) Ambedkar by his followers. The term is an honorific and endearing title.

[234] Hindi original: *mā̃-bābā ko sabˈkī paṛhāī kā kharcā uṭhāne meṃ bahut dikkat paṛˈtī thī, phir bhī unhoṃne hameṃ paṛhānā jārī rakhā. unhoṃne bābā sāhab āṃbeḍkar kā kastūrcaṃd pārk meṃ bhāṣaṇ sunā thā ki apˈnī pragati karˈnā hai to śikṣā prāpt karˈnā bahut zarūrī hai. laṛˈkā aur laṛˈkī donoṃ ko paṛhānā cāhie. mā̃ ke man par isˈkā asar paṛā thā aur unhoṃne ham sab baccoṃ ko paṛhāne kā niścay kiyā thā, cāhe kitˈnī hī musībatoṃ kā sāmˈnā karˈnā paṛe. Bābā mā̃ ke kisī kām meṃ dakhal nahīṃ dete the*.

> brella. [He] would not let us stay at home, [he] made sure to send us to school[235] (ibid.).

Yet, towards the end of this paragraph, it is once again the mother, who is being "encouraged to educate" her children and whose "morale is growing":

> Kisan Bhāgūjī Banˈsoḍe [(see below)] used to come to [our] home from time to time. He would encourage mother to educate us. Mother's morale was growing[236] (ibid.).

When money was needed to buy school books and paraphernalia, it is once again the mother who is mentioned in the text as the one who went out of her way to arrange for this money:

> After moving up to the next grade, the expenses for books and notebooks for all of us sisters and brother grew. When the school opened after the summer vacation, everyone had to buy new books. Then, mother would get money from the moneylender by pawning some of her jewelry. At the mill [(where both of the parents worked)] some people kept a *bhisī* (chit fund).[237] Mother asked for money from the chit fund, too. Sometimes, she

[235] Hindi original: *kabhī-kabhī skūl jāne kā man nahīṃ karˈtā thā to ham bahānā lagāte ki cappal ṭūṭ gaī yā bāriś meṃ chatrī ṭūṭī hai to ve turaṃt kīl, tār lagākar chatrī-cappal durust kar dete the. hameṃ ghar meṃ nahīṃ rahˈne dete the, skūl zarūr bhejˈte the*.

[236] Hindi original: *kisan bhāgūjī banˈsoḍe bīc-bīc meṃ ghar āte the. mā̃ ko hameṃ paṛhāne ke lie utsāhit karˈte the. mā̃ kā hausˈlā baṛh jātā thā*.

[237] A chit fund is a type of rotating savings and credit association system which can be found in many South Asian countries. The principle is that each member regularly pays a certain amount of money into the fund, so that from time to time one of the members can use a bigger sum than they could afford at a time to cover some irregular expenses. (Baisantri 1999: 115).

> took money from the chit fund and had jewelry made. This jewelry was her capital. When the need arose, she would pawn it and get money. A lot of interest had to be paid for it. But there was no other way[238] (ibid.).

While in the very beginning of the passage, both parents are mentioned as partners who had to face difficulties trying to pay for their children's education, when it comes to the actual decision to educate the children and the arrangement of the money required, the mother alone is mentioned. It is she, who is said to have been participating in chit funds, pawning her jewelry and making new jewelry to hold on to as security for future needs. Outside the narrative, the father might well have worked and participated in the decision making as well as the hardships, but the reader of *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* is barely made aware of it.

This peculiar balance between the mother's enthusiastic activity and the father's apparent passivity is maintained throughout Kausalya Baisantri's autobiography. On other occasions, the mother plays an active part as well: for instance, it is the mother, who literally drags her husband by the hand out of the bakery, in which he was employed at the time under extremely bad conditions. The owner of the bakery is said not to have raised her employee's salary even by one paisa in eighteen years (*bekrī vālī ne aṭṭhārah varṣ meṃ bābā aur naukaroṃ ko ek paisā bhī pagār meṃ nahīṃ baṛhāyā*; Baisantri 1999: 43). While Kausalya's father did not complain,

> mother was irritated by the attitude of the bakery's owner. Mother went to the bakery owner herself and told her to raise the salary, but she did not

[238] Hindi original: *naī kakṣā meṃ jāne par sab bahanoṃ aur bhāī kā kitāb-kāpiyāṃ kā kharcā baṛh jātā thā. garmī kī chuṭṭiyoṃ ke bād skūl khulˈne par sabˈko kitābeṃ kharīdˈnī paṛˈtī thīṃ. tab mā̃ apˈne kuch jevar sāhūkār ke pās girˈvī rakhˈkar paise le ātī thīṃ. mil meṃ kuch log bhisī (ciṭˈphaṃḍ) ḍālˈte the. mā̃ ciṭˈphaṃḍ se bhī paisā māṃgˈtī thī. kabhī-kabhī māṃ ciṭˈphaṃḍ se paise lekar jevar banˈvātī thīṃ. ye jevar hī unˈkī jamā-pū̃jī the. zarūrat paṛˈne par inheṃ girˈvī rakhˈkar paise lātī thīṃ. in par kāfī byāj denā paṛˈtā thā. paraṃtu dūsˈrā koī cārā bhī nahīṃ thā*.

> agree. Then mother grasped father's hand in front of her, dragged him out of the bakery and said to the bakery owner: 'You have my husband work so much and you don't even appreciate him. For several years, you haven't raised [his salary] even by one paisa. Now I won't let [him] work here. Even if we should stay hungry, I will not let him work here[239] (Baisantri 1999: 44).

Once again, on this occasion, it is the mother who plays an active part: a conflict between the father and his employer is re-scripted as a conflict between the two women, while the father character remains silent and passive. This enthusiastic and decisive mother brings up her daughters in the same spirit. In an episode which describes young Kausalya's way to and from school, she is confronted by a man, who harasses her:

> Once, I was returning home from my paternal aunt's house. My aunt lived in another line [(i.e. street)] in our *bastī*. Mom had sent me there on some errand. When I was coming back from her house, some hostile looking vagabond boys were sitting leaning against a wall and playing cards. One of those boys lived in our line, he was extremely respectable, he was married and the father of two children. He came up to me and put his arms into mine[240] (Baisantri 1999: 60).

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[239] Hindi original: *mā̃ ko bekʼrī vālī kā ravaiyā akharʼtā thā. mā̃ ne khud bekʼrī vālī ke pās jākar paisā baṛhāne ke lie kahā paraṃtu vah nahīṃ mānī. tab mā̃ ne usī ke sāmʼne bābā kā hāth pakaṛʼkar bekʼrī ke bāhar unʼko khīṃcā aur bekʼrī vālī se kahā: "tum mere pati se itʼnā kām karʼvātī ho aur unʼkī kadr bhī nahīṃ karʼtīṃ. kaī varṣoṃ se ek paisā bhī nahīṃ baṛhāyā. ab maiṃ yahā̃ naukarī nahīṃ karʼne dū̃gī. cāhe ham bhūkhe hī raheṃ, paraṃtu yahā̃ kām nahīṃ karʼne dū̃gī*".

[240] Hindi original: *ek bār maiṃ apʼnī būā ke ghar se ā rahī thī. merī būā hamārī bastī meṃ hī dūsʼrī lāin meṃ rah rahī thīṃ. mā̃ ne kisī kām se mujhe vahā̃ bhejā thā. maiṃ jab unʼke ghar se vāpas ā rahī thī tab ek ghar kī dīvār se saṭʼkar kuch guṃḍe kism ke āvārā laṛʼke baiṭhe tāś khel rahe the. un laṛʼkoṃ meṃ se ek laṛʼkā hamārī lāin meṃ rahʼtā thā aur nihāyat śarīf thā, śādīśudā aur do baccoṃ kā bāp bhī thā. vah mere pās āyā aur merī bā̃hoṃ meṃ apʼnī bā̃heṃ ḍāl dīṃ*.

This subtle way of writing about sexual harassment is typical for Baisantri's writing. The young man "put his arms into" hers, nothing more is said. On other occasions in the autobiography, comparable incidents are described with a similarly reserved wording and barely any particulars. The incident should nevertheless be regarded as a serious assault. Laura Brueck (2014) points out in her chapter entitled Re-Scripting Rape that, when scripting atrocities, male authors of Dalit literature portray female characters as silent and powerless victims of male violence who are first made to suffer from the attack, and then need to be protected or avenged by their male relatives. At the same time, according to Brueck, female authors of Hindi Dalit short stories endow their women characters with the power to defend and/or avenge themselves without the need for male protection. In a similar manner, Baisantri's main protagonist defends herself in this situation:

> With a lot of force, I freed my arms and gave him two hefty slaps on the cheek. When I came home, I told the whole story to mother. Mother became furious, she went to his house and told his wife and mother that she will give him a sound beating. That boy was respectable, but those vagabond boys had incited him. He didn't come home until very late that night. Mother kept checking whether he had returned. She was burning with rage. She went to his house early in the morning. Seeing mother, he became so frightened that he fell down at her feet. He begged for forgiveness. His wife and mother said [to her]: be sure to hit him with [your] shoes, we won't say anything. Girls from [one's] line are like [one's] own sisters. He should not have done this. Since that day he hasn't even come near us. Whenever he saw us, he would lower his head or go inside [his] house[241] (ibid.).

[241] Hindi original: *maiṃne bahut jor lagākar bā̃heṃ chuṛā līṃ aur do cā̃ṭe kasˈkar usˈke gāl par māre. ghar ākar maiṃne mā̃ se sārī bāt batāī. mā̃ āg-babūlā ho gaīṃ aur usˈke ghar jākar usˈkī patˈnī ko, mā̃ ko batā āīṃ ki vah usˈkī acchī marammat kareṃgī. vah laṛˈkā śarīf thā kiṃtu usˈko in āvārā laṛˈkoṃ ne bhaṛˈkāyā thā. bahut der tak vah rāt apˈne ghar āyā hī nahīṃ. mā̃ bār-bār use dekhˈne jātī thīṃ. mā̃ ke tan-man meṃ āg lag gaī thī. vah savere hī usˈke ghar gaīṃ. mā̃ ko dekhˈkar vah itˈnā ḍar gayā ki mā̃ ke carˈṇoṃ par gir*

This passage is exceptionally significant in the context of female agency. Not only does the female protagonist defend herself in it instead of passively letting things happen, but once at home, she tells the story to her mother and not her father or another male relative as would have been expected in a male-written text (see Brueck 2014). The mother, for her part, also does not resort to the help of her husband or another male relative, but becomes "furious" (*āg-babūlā*) herself and virtually stands guard in front of the assailant's house in order not to miss him when he comes home. At the same time, the assailant's wife and mother effectively permit Kausalya's mother to punish him. Thus, in the above episode, Baisantri transforms a typical situation, in which a Dalit woman is harassed by a man and looks for protection among her male relatives into a narrative of female assertion. In this narrative, a young Dalit woman first actively protects herself from her assailant, then asks her mother for assistance, while the assailant's female relatives are depicted as being in possession of the power to protect him, but recognize his fault and sanction the punishment. The assailant himself, once faced with such fierce consequences, becomes afraid, begs for forgiveness and does not so much as dare to approach Kausalya or possibly any members of her family from this time on.[242]

On another occasion when the young Kausalya is harassed by a different man, female agency is of similar importance. The offender of this story, is a young man from the neighborhood, who was displeased with the protagonist and her sisters,[243] because they

paṛā. māfī mā̃gī. usꞌkī patꞌnī aur mā̃ ne kahā ki ise beśak jūte māro, ham kuch nahīṃ kaheṃge. lāin kī laṛꞌkiyā̃ apꞌnī bahan ke samān hotī haiṃ. ise aisā nahīṃ karꞌnā cāhie thā. us din se vah hamāre āge ātā hī nahīṃ thā. hameṃ dekhꞌkar sir nīce kar letā thā yā ghar ke aṃdar calā jātā thā.

[242] The sentence *us din se vah hamāre āge ātā hī nahīṃ thā* literally means "since that day he didn't even come before us". However, the first person plural pronoun *ham* is also frequently used in Hindi instead of the first person singular pronoun *maiṃ*. It is therefore hard to say whether Baisantri only means herself, herself and her sisters or, possibly, all members of her family in this instance.

[243] The previous footnote applies in this case as well, but since the sentence begins with *ham logoṃ ne* ("we people"), a form which is usually used in the numerical plural, it can be assumed that the author means either herself and her sisters or the whole family, not herself alone.

had not shown any particular interest in talking to him (*ham logoṃ ne usˈke sāth bāt karˈne meṃ viśeṣ dilˈcaspī nahīṃ dikhāī thī. isˈlie vah ciṛh-sā gayā thā*; Baisantri 1999: 62).

> He saw that father is lying with a fever and there is no one else in the house and came to our home. [He] asked father about his fever. In [his] fever, father had closed his eyes and fallen asleep, as if unconscious. At that moment he took my photo that was hanging on the wall, and no one ever found out, when he came and put it back[244] (ibid.).

The male assailant uses a situation in which female family members are not at home, and the father of the family is incapacitated by an illness to gain access to the main protagonist's photograph. He proceeds to use this photograph in the following manner:

> He went to a photographer and made him fabricate my photo together with his. In the photo I was in a pose [as if] I was writing something and he was standing beside me[245] (ibid.).

The subsequent passage is, similar to the harassment incident discussed above, written in an extremely subtle and reserved manner, which is typical for Baisantri's writing, but which implies severe sexual harassment:

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[244] Hindi original: *bābā bukhār meṃ paṛe the aur ghar meṃ koī nahīṃ hai, yah dekhˈkar vah ghar āyā. bābā ke bukhār ke bāre meṃ pūchā. bābā bukhār meṃ ā̃kheṃ baṃd karˈke soye paṛe the, behoś-se. usī vakt vah dīvār par ṭaṃgā merā foṭo le gayā aur bād meṃ vah foṭo kab lākar vahīṃ rakh diyā, isˈkā kisī ko patā hī nahīṃ calā*.

[245] Hindi original: *usˈne foṭogrāfar se milˈkar mere foṭo ke sāth apˈnā foṭo banˈvāyā. foṭo meṃ maiṃ kuch likhˈne ke poj meṃ thī aur vah mere pās khaṛā thā*.

> When I and my sister were going to school via Kasturchand park, he came running and held out that photo in front of us. Seeing the photo, I became astonished. He started to walk, putting the picture in front of me again and again. I don't know where I got the courage from. I took off my shoe and hit him hard on the cheek. He got a little scared and moved to a distance, but he continued to hold out the photo and mumble something[246] (ibid.).

Like in the incident discussed previously, when harassed, the female protagonist proceeds to actively defend herself against her attacker. A nameless male character appears on the scene in the subsequent passage, but he is barely given any role in the narrative.

> Some boy saw this. He came running and got hold of him, and I hit him with my shoe two or three more times on the back. That boy took him away. Frightened, my sister was standing quietly. When I came home in the evening, I told Mother everything. Mother got furious, but what could she do. She told us to keep studying with courage and said that eventually they would stop harassing us themselves. Mother scolded my little sister for staying quiet. She, too, should have hit that villain with her shoe a couple of times[247] (ibid.).

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[246] Hindi original: *maiṃ aur merī bahan kastūrꞌcaṃd pārk se skūl jā rahī thīṃ, tab vah dauṛā-dauṛā āyā aur hamāre āge vah foṭo dhar diyā. maiṃ yah foṭo dekhꞌkar hairān rah gaī. vah bār-bār mere āge foṭo lekar calꞌne lagā. mujhꞌmeṃ kahāṃ se himmat āī, patā nahīṃ. maiṃne apꞌne pāṃv se cappal nikālī aur jor se usꞌke gāl par de mārī. vah thoṛā saham gayā aur dūr haṭā, phir bhī foṭo āge kar kuch baṛꞌbaṛ karꞌtā rahā*.

[247] Hindi original: *ek laṛꞌke ne yah dekhā. vah dauṛā-dauṛā āyā aur use pakꞌṛā aur maiṃne do-tīn cappaleṃ aur usꞌkī pīṭh par mārīṃ. vah laṛꞌkā use dūr le gayā. merī bahan ḍarꞌkar cupꞌcāp khaṛī thī. śām ko ghar ākar maiṃne mā̃ ko sab batāyā. mā̃ āg-babūlā ho gaīṃ, paraṃtu kyā kartīṃ. unhoṃne hameṃ himmat se paṛhꞌne ko kahā aur bolīṃ ki ve hameṃ taṃg karꞌke khud hī cup ho jāeṃge. mā̃ ne merī choṭī bahan ko ḍā̃ṭā ki vah kyoṃ cup rahī. use bhī us badꞌmāś ko do-cār cappaleṃ mārꞌnī cāhie thīṃ*.

Yet again, looked at in the context of distribution of female and male agency, the episode is remarkable. The unspecified “boy” who “comes running” to help is not asked to do so by a female character, but rather does this out of his own accord. Furthermore, his activity is restricted to the holding and the taking away of the offender, while it is the female protagonist who proceeds to slap her assailant with her shoe. Back home, it is once again the mother, who becomes “furious” when she is told about the incident, while the father remains absent from the narrative. Additionally, the sister’s passivity does not go unnoticed: she is scolded by the mother for not having been more active and self-assertive. The question of the importance of education is once again brought up in this episode thus completing the description of the woman role model trope as an active and confident woman, who understands the importance of education.

Besides Baisantri’s grandmother and mother, *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* is filled with short passages about active and hardworking women, who understand the importance of education, in particular for girls. Among these women are: the aforementioned Jāī Bāī Caudharī[248] as well as Jhūlā Bāī (Baisantri 1999: 37f), both of whom run schools for Dalit and Adivasi girls, “some Christian nuns” (*kuch īsāī bhikṣuṇiyā̃*; Baisantri 1999: 35), who people called *ammājī* and who came into the *bastī* to help people with medicine and medical treatment, and who also opened a “high school” for girls (*hāī skūl*; ibid.) and a small pharmacy (*davākhānā*; ibid.), where people could get medicine for free, as well as two Parsi women (*do pārˈsī mahilāeṃ*; Baisantri 1999: 38), who used come to to Jāī Bāī’s school to teach “girls guide” (*garˈls gāiḍ*; ibid.), i.e. first aid, survival skills, etc. Other examples include stories about women living in dire circumstances, but continuing their education in spite of it. For instance, “a girl from our community” (*hamāre samāj kī ek laṛˈkī*; Baisantri 1999: 55), whose mother “became a little crazy” (*usˈkī mā̃ thoṛī pāgal-sī ho gaī thīṃ*; ibid.), so that as the eldest daughter she was compelled to take care of her siblings, home and father. She also traveled to school “from faraway” (*vah bahut dūr se skūl ātī thī*; ibid.) and often fell asleep in class from exhaustion, for which she was scolded by the teacher and teased by her classmates. Despite all these difficulties she

[248] See footnote 227.

"passed her matric"[249] (*phir bhī usˡne maiṭrik pās kiyā*; ibid.). Another woman role model with a partially similar story is Lalitā (see below). Through the incorporation of all these women into her autobiography, Baisantri not only makes female characters more visible – thus at once challenging and countering female erasure in male-written texts – but also constructs a new trope, the trope of the woman role model, who works hard, is independent, particularly independent of men, does what she considers right and understands the importance of education. Simultaneously, as a direct result of *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp* being filled with these female characters, male characters often seem passive, submissive or even irrelevant in Kausalya Baisantri's narrative, so much so that the reader is at times left wondering what role a particular male character played in an episode where he is hardly mentioned.

4 The Men of *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*

As mentioned above, there is no shortage of male characters in *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*. However, there is a distinctive pattern discernible in the author's treatment of these characters. Besides creating the woman role model trope and redistributing female and male agency in her autobiography, Kausalya Baisantri also uses several narrative techniques to make certain male characters appear less significant or at times even unimportant for her narrative. On the other hand, at the same time, Baisantri also constructs the man role model trope, who, in parallel to the woman role model understands the importance of education whether it is for boys or girls, respects women and does not try to deprive them of agency.

[249] "In India, 'matriculation' (sometimes called 'matric') is a term commonly used to refer to the final year of high school, which ends at tenth standard (tenth grade) and the qualification received on finishing the tenth standard (tenth grade) of high school and passing the or the state board exams, commonly called 'matriculation exams'" (https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/9119055 accessed on 07.0822.).

4.1 What Happened to Lalitā's Husband?

One of the most striking examples of female agency versus male insignificance in *Doh'rā Abhiśāp* is the story of Lalitā, a young Dalit woman, who was the object of distrust and envy for other women because of her friendly and communicative nature and who had to endure the bad temper and physical violence at the hands of her jealous husband. Lalitā and the main protagonist – who by then is a married woman and mother – become friends. Influenced by this friendship, Lalitā decides to study and become a teacher. At this stage, the reader might have reasonably expected to learn about Lalitā's husband's reaction to such a decision being made by his wife. Especially a husband who is portrayed as violent and jealous must have had a strong opinion about his wife independently deciding to study. Yet, no reaction of the husband is mentioned in the narrative at all. Lalitā takes and passes several courses and gets admitted to university. At some point, she relocates into a hostel for Dalit students, because her husband "became kind of crazy, quit work and went away to Nagpur" (*us'kā pati vikṣipt-sā ho gayā aur naukarī choṛ'kar nāg'pur calā gayā thā*; Baisantri 1999: 113). Later, when Lalitā is thrown out of the hostel, because she rebelled when she found out that the hostel manager was embezzling money (another example of an active and self-confident woman), Baisantri takes her into her own home.

On other occasions in the book, Baisantri's own husband, Devendra Kumār, is portrayed as a man who harassed his wife, was very much against her freedoms, and especially as a stingy man who counted every paisa and didn't even leave enough money for his wife to run the common household. As a reader, one would expect such a husband to react to a new member of the household at least in some way. Yet, Baisantri does not mention her husband in this episode. The reader learns nothing whatsoever about his reaction to Lalitā's presence in his house. Staying at Baisantri's home, Lalitā studies for her exams, finishes her bachelor's degree, finds a position as a teacher in Nagpur and moves back in with her parents. This success story is accompanied by the following sentences: "her husband had gone crazy. He committed suicide having thrown

himself under a train" (*usˡkā pati pāgal ho gayā thā. usˡne rail ke nīce ākar ātmahatyā kī*; Baisantri 1999: 114). As a reader, one expects such a dramatic death to be commented upon at least in some way, but Baisantri obviously does not find it important or necessary to elaborate. What does it mean that he became "kind of crazy"? Why and how did this happen? Were there confrontations between wife and husband because of her decision to study, and was his becoming crazy connected to Lalitā's decision in any way? *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp* does not answer these questions. Baisantri's purpose is clearly to tell the story of Lalitā – another role model, a free, hardworking, independent and honest woman, who understands the importance of education. Since the fact that she had a husband could not be overlooked completely, his character is mentioned, but he is given so little prominence in the narrative that the reader is left wondering about his fate. What happened to Lalitā's husband? The fact that the author does not answer this question is a very important statement. *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp* is an active response to male-written Dalit literature and by means of giving prominence to female characters and mentioning male characters only in passing Baisantri in a way mirrors the male-female dynamics found in Hindi Dalit autobiographies written by male authors.

4.2 The Grandfather's Fate

Baisantri employs a different strategy to make a male character appear inconsequential or unimportant in the case of her maternal grandfather – i.e. the second husband of Ājī, the man whose house she fled from with her children before she came to Nagpur (see above). In *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*, this man is portrayed as a wealthy, moody and violent man, a drunkard, a man, who used to abuse and attack everyone around him, including his two wives and children. In the beginning of *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*, on the pages narrating the life of Baisantri's grandmother Ājī, the grandfather is mentioned on 4 consecutive pages. On page 18 – the first of those 4 pages – he appears 8 times before the first example cited below. The reader can be expected to be well acquainted with the grandfather character after the 8 mentions. Nevertheless, once on each of the 4 pages the

grandfather is mentioned on, he is treated as a new and unfamiliar character who requires an explanation in a parenthetical gloss:

> Grandfather (Moḍˈkūjī) had given this jewelry to grandmother, too […][250] (Baisantri 1999: 18).

> Sometimes something would happen to grandfather (Moḍˈkūjī), I don't know. He would scold grandmother because of the smallest things, sometimes he raised his hand to her, too[251] (Baisantri 1999: 19).

> The nephew was familiar with Moḍˈkūjī's (grandfather's) temper and had sympathy with grandmother[252] (Baisantri 1999: 20).

> Grandfather (Moḍˈkūjī) thought that grandmother must have gone to her brothers' place[253] (Baisantri 1999: 21).

Despite the fact that the reader can reasonably be expected to recognize the grandfather character without an explanation, in the examples above, parenthetical glosses keep appearing when he is mentioned, as if implying that the author does not expect the reader to be familiar with the character. Furthermore, the fact that at times the word "grandfather" is explained with his name "Moḍˈkūjī" while another time it is the other way around, hints at a certain discomfort or unwillingness on Baisantri's part to regard him in the narrative in the same way as other family members. It also might be a sign of the

[250] Hindi original: *ājī ko bhī ājobā (moḍˈkūjī) ne yah jevar die the* […]

[251] Hindi original: *ājobā (moḍˈkūjī) ko kabhī-kabhī na jāne kyā ho jātā thā, patā nahīṃ. vah choṭī-choṭī bātoṃ ko lekar ājī ko ḍā̃ṭˈte, kabhī hāth bhī uṭhāte the*.

[252] Hindi original: *bhatījā moḍˈkūjī (ājobā) ke svabhāv se paricit thā aur use ājī se sahānubhūti thī*.

[253] Hindi original: *ājobā (moḍˈkūjī) ne socā ki ājī apˈne bhāiyoṃ ke ghar gaī hoṃgī*.

author's uncertainty about how to treat this character. As mentioned above, on the first pages of her autobiography, Baisantri assumes the part of an omniscient narrator and recounts the life stories of her grandmother Ājī, her mother and her father. Yet, when writing about the grandfather character, she admits to not knowing what happened to him: "sometimes something would happen to grandfather (Moḍˈkūjī), I don't know". This treatment of the grandfather character, in whose place she seems to be unable to put herself, has to be viewed in the context of his personality and Baisantri's attitude towards it. Contrary to the other family members, the grandfather is not portrayed as a positive character. While implicitly treating him in this way as a kind of a foreign element Baisantri subtly suggests to the reader what their own attitude towards this character should be. In a later chapter, the grandfather's death is mentioned. Considering how infrequently the character is mentioned in *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* on the whole, this paragraph is unexpectedly long and detailed:

> Ājī's co-wife had died of some illness before *ājī*. Now grandfather rarely stayed in the village. Again and again he would come to Nagpur and stay with mother. Now all his arrogance was gone and his domineering manner did not impress anyone. His daughter-in-law, too, didn't take care of him properly. He had gotten quite old. Sometimes he would urinate and defecate inside his clothes. Still, he continued to abuse everyone. One day, hungry and thirsty he died in his bed in [his own] excrement. No one even noticed when he died. His end happened in very sad circumstances. But no one had compassion for him. Mom was saying that when her brother was dying he had told his mother (Ājī): "feed dogs and cats, but don't let my father come to your door. He has given you nothing but suffering all your life". This shows how much hatred for his father there was in his heart[254] (Baisantri 1999: 29f).

[254] Hindi original: *ājī kī saut kī ājī se pahˈle kisī bīmārī se mr̥tyu ho gaī thī. ab ajobā gā̃v meṃ kam rahˈte the. nāgˈpur meṃ mā̃ ke pās bār-bār ākar rahˈte the. ab unˈkī sārī akaṛ calī gaī thī aur unˈkā pahˈle jaisā rob kisī par nahīṃ calˈtā thā. bahū bhī unˈkī ṭhīk se dekhˈbhāl nahīṃ karˈtī thīṃ. ve kāfī būṛhe bhī ho gae the. kabhī-kabhī ve apˈne kapˈṛoṃ meṃ hī ṭaṭṭī-peśāb kar dete the. phir bhī sabˈko gāliyā̃ dete rahˈte the.*

Baisantri's grandfather might or might not have died in exactly the way stated above. It is not my intention to doubt this description. What is striking, however, is not only the fact that Baisantri chose to include this episode in her autobiography at all, but also the fact that such a long, detailed and graphic paragraph is dedicated to it. In it, I see a statement and a strategy that allows Baisantri to further suggest to the reader a certain disapproval of the grandfather character. Human excreta are mentioned in Baisantri's narrative on a few other occasions and in all of them, there is a boundary drawn between the clean family Kausalya Baisantri grew up in and the unclean surroundings they were compelled to live in.

The first chapter of *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* meticulously describes an apparently regular Sunday in Kausalya's family at the time of her childhood. Baisantri narrates in some detail how the mother washed and brushed her daughters' hair, how every family member worked and cleaned something or other: from the cleaning and plastering of the house, the washing and ironing of clothes to the sorting through rice grains. The two pages of this scrupulous account end with the exhausted parents each taking a bath after finishing this regular housework. Monika Browarczyk has pointed out that there is a narrative leitmotif in *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* concerned with cleanliness, which "is to be read in the context of a denial of Dalits' alleged uncleanliness" (Browarczyk 2013: 297). I argue that Baisantri not only demonstrates her family's cleanliness in order to challenge the "alleged uncleanliness" of Dalits, but also to demarcate between her "progressive" family and the rest of the *bastī* they lived in at the time. This is made apparent through several examples below. The first chapter does not only contain a very thorough description of a regular Sunday cleaning ritual, it also discusses everyday meals and mentions that the author's family, as well as the "people from the *bastī*" (*bastī ke log*; Baisantri 1999: 13), habitually consumed beef:

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ek din ve bhūkhe-pyāse, ṭaṭṭī-peśāb meṃ apˈnī khāṭ par mare paṛe the. kab unˈkī mr̥tyu huī kisī ko patā hī nahīṃ calā. unˈkā aṃt baṛī duḥkhad paristhiti meṃ huā. phir bhī unˈke prati kisī kī sahānubhūti nahīṃ thī. mā̃ kah rahī thīṃ ki unˈkā bhāī marˈte vakt apˈnī mā̃ (ājī) se kah gayā thā ki kutte-billī ko khānā khilānā paraṃtu mere pitā ko apˈne darvāje par nahīṃ āne denā. usˈne tumheṃ sārī umr duḥkh hī duḥkh diyā. isˈse usˈke man meṃ pitājī ke prati kitˈnī ghr̥̥ṇā thī isˈkā patā lagˈtā hai.

> This meat used to be cheap. There was a slaughterhouse just a short distance away from our *bastī*. This slaughterhouse was in a place called Gaddigodam. Muslim butchers sold the meat. The slaughterhouse had mesh windows and doors. A doctor used to come, check the cows and give permission to slaughter them. English people, Anglo-Indians and servants of Christians used to come here to buy meat. There was a small market in Gaddigodam. One could get there everything one needed[255] (Baisantri 1999: 13).

In this short paragraph Baisantri argues that the slaughterhouse was a hygienic place: not only did it have "mesh windows and doors" to prevent insects from entering, but also a doctor used to check that the cows were healthy and could be slaughtered without reservations. This excerpt also implicitly puts Baisantri's family as well as other beef-eaters in the same line with well-respected members of the Indian society: "English people, Anglo-Indians and servants of Christians", who also bought meat at this place. The subsequent narrative explicitly talks about the allegation of uncleanliness and the reasons for it.

> People from our *bastī* used to buy meat, wrap it in some cloth and carry it [home]. Blood would keep dropping out of the cloth all the way. It looked very repulsive. Mother didn't like to see this at all. She would stop whoever she saw carrying meat wrapped in a cloth. She used to explain to them that they should carry the meat in a tin or a bowl, covered. [Otherwise] people will see this and say that we are dirty people. When people from

[255] Hindi original: *yah mā̃s sastā hotā thā. hamārī bastī se thoṛī hī dūrī par kasāīkhānā thā. gaḍḍīgodām nāmak jagah par yah khasāīkhānā thā. muslim kasāī yah mā̃s becˈte the. kasāīkhāne kī jālīdār khiṛkiyāṃ aur darvāje the. dåkṭar ākar gāyoṃ kī jā̃c karˈke kāṭˈne kī anumati detā thā. aṃgrej, aiṃglo iṃdiyan, īsāiyoṃ ke naukar yahā̃ ākar māṃs kharīdˈte the. gaḍḍīgodām meṃ choṭī sī ek mārkeṭ thī. kām bhar kī jarūrat kī cījeṃ vahā̃ mil jātī thī. vahā̃ hiṃdū khaṭik bakˈriyoṃ kā mā̃s becˈte the*.

> the *bastī* liked what mother said and carried it out, she became very happy[256] (ibid.).

The paragraph suggests that one of the reasons for the “Dalits’ alleged uncleanliness” (Browarczyk 2013: 297) is not the fact that they consumed meat, but that they used to transport it in the manner described in the passage above. It also demonstrates that Kausalya Baisantri’s mother was aware of this professed uncleanliness and not only actively worked to change this state of affairs, but also possessed enough authority in the *bastī* for the people to listen and agree with her arguments. Still, Baisantri on several occasions mentions people from the *bastī*, who harassed the family because its members worked hard to better their life circumstances. In the next short episode, the boundary between the clean family of Kausalya Baisantri and the unclean others is made much more obvious.

> Now, mother had given up the thought of our marriages and made up her mind that, however many obstacles may come, [she] would give us all, brother and sisters, higher education. She was a very brave woman. People even came at night to our door to shit and piss, to wickedly point out their objections to our studying. Grumbling, mother would clean away the shit and piss, but she would not give up[257] (Baisantri 1999: 75).

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[256] Hindi original: *hamārī bastī ke log mā̃s kharīdᑊkar kisī kapᑊṛe meṃ bā̃dhᑊkar lāte the. kapᑊṛe meṃ se sāre rāste bhar khūn ṭapakᑊtā rahᑊtā thā. dekhᑊne meṃ bahut bhaddā lagᑊtā thā. mā̃ ko yah dekhᑊkar bahut burā lagᑊtā thā. vah jisᑊko bhī kapᑊṛe meṃ mā̃s bā̃dhᑊkar lāte dekhᑊtī, use ṭok detī thī. unheṃ samᑊjhātī thīṃ ki kisī ḍibbe yā bartan meṃ māṃs lāyā karo, ḍhakᑊkar. log yah dekhᑊkar kaheṃge ki ham gaṃde log haiṃ. bastī ke logoṃ ko mā̃ kī bāt acchī lagī aur unhoṃne is bāt par amal kiyā, tab mā̃ ko bahut khuśī huī.*

[257] Hindi original: *ab mā̃ ne hamārī śādī kī ciṃtā choṛ dī aur pakkā irādā kar liyā thā ki cāhe kitᑊnī bhī aṛᑊcaneṃ kyoṃ na āẽ, ham sab bhāī-bahanoṃ ko ū̃cī śikṣā deṃgī. vah bahut diler mahilā thīṃ. hamāre darᑊvāje ke pās log rāt meṃ ṭaṭṭī-peśāb tak kar jāte the, śarārat ke taur par yah jatᑊlāne ke lie ki ham kyoṃ paṛhᑊte haiṃ. mā̃ baṛᑊbaṛātī huī ṭaṭṭī-peśāb sāf karᑊtīṃ, lekin unhoṃne hār nahiṃ mānī.*

Not only are the "people from the *bastī*" portrayed in this excerpt as unclean, by leaving their excreta at the doorstep of Kausalya's family, they are also depicted as metaphorically trying to besmear the family, to make it dirty and with it, more like themselves. This episode vividly illustrates how Baisantri demarcates between her family and the people who objected to their getting educated. Read together with the previous example, it implies that cleanliness goes together with education and ignorance is at the root of uncleanliness.

In chapter thirteen, Baisantri reflects on the differences between the *bastī* she lived in and other neighborhoods. These differences became apparent to her once she started going to school in another part of the town. An apparent train of thought brings Baisantri to a particularly explicit and detailed description of the *bastī*'s public latrine.

> On rainy days, mud was visible everywhere in the *bastī*. But in front of the houses of those big people [(i.e. from other neighborhoods)], there were clean and tidy paved roads. Coming from Sitabuldi and other such places I didn't feel like entering the *bastī*. I had to pass right next to the latrine. Shitting children could be seen in front of it. The whole place kept being filled with shit. And in front of this there were people's houses. They used to see shit all the time. For such a big *bastī* there were only three latrines and in each of them there were eight flush toilets, which were continuously filled up with shit. There wasn't even a clean place to put a foot on. Tapeworms, ringworms were wriggling around. One could see shit of different colors – black, red, brown, because some pregnant women used to eat dirt or charcoal. Seeing this early in the morning, I felt nauseous. Early in the morning there was a huge crowd. I used to go only to the school latrine[258] (Baisantri 1999: 68f).

[258] Hindi original: *bastī meṃ bāriś ke dinoṃ meṃ sab or kīcaṛ nazar ātā thā. paraṃtu in baṛe logoṃ ke gharoṃ ke āge pakkī sāf-suthˈrī saṛakeṃ thīṃ. sītābarḍī ādi kī or se āne par merā man bastī meṃ ghusˈne ko nahīṃ karˈtā thā. sāmˈne hī pākhāne ke pās se guzarˈnā paṛˈtā thā. pākhāne ke sāmˈne bacce pākhānā karˈte nazar āte. sārī jagah pākhāne se bharī rahˈtī. aur usī ke sāmˈne logoṃ ke ghar the. uṭhˈte-baiṭhˈte*

This is one of the most intense descriptions of the unhygienic surroundings in which Kausalya Baisantri grew up in *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*. However, while describing the public latrine, Baisantri several times reiterates how repulsive she found it, how she “didn’t feel like entering the *bastī*”, “felt nauseous” and “used to go only to the school latrine”. By distancing herself from the vividly described uncleanliness, Baisantri once again demarcates between herself and the dirt she was surrounded with while living in the *bastī*. Thus, in *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* this kind of imagery is used as a boundary marker between the family Baisantri grew up in and the unclean, uneducated and ignorant others. Through the detailed and graphic description of the grandfather character’s death in his own excreta, Baisantri’s autobiography thus positions him in this second category and metaphorically deprives him of the status of Baisantri’s family member.

4.3 The Man Role Model Trope

As mentioned above, *Dohrā Abhiśāp* does not treat male characters in the same way male-written Dalit autobiographies treat female characters. There are numerous male characters in Kausalya Baisantri’s autobiography. As has been demonstrated in the previous sections, some of them are treated in the text as unimportant, insignificant or irrelevant. However, in parallel to the women characters, there also is a specific pattern discernible that is used to portray “good” male characters. Besides creating the trope of the woman role model, Baisantri’s autobiography also constructs the man role model. Like Baisantri’s mother, her father, whose character is frequently overshadowed by the agency of Baisantri’s mother, is the most important man role model in *Dohrā Abhiśāp.* He is a hard working man, understands the importance of education for all his children,

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unheṃ pākhānā nazar ātā thā. Itˈnī baṛī bastī ke lie sirf tīn pākhāne the aur har pākhāne meṃ āṭh flaś the jo pūre bhare rahˈte the pākhāne se. pāṃv tak rakhˈne ke lie jagah nahīṃ hotī thī. ṭep varm, riṃg varm bilˈ-bilāte rahˈte the. tarah-tarah ke raṃg kā pākhānā dīkhˈtā thā – kālā, lāl, brāun kyoṃki kuch garbhˈvatī mahilāeṃ miṭṭī, koyˈlā khātī thīṃ. savere-savere yah dekhˈkar jī macalˈne lagˈtā thā. savere-savere bahut bhīṛ rahˈtī thī. maiṃ skūl ke pākhāne meṃ hī jātī thī.

supports his wife and does not interfere in her endeavors. Other male family members, i.e. Ājī's brothers, nephew and son Śravaṇ, are mentioned only intermittently, nevertheless, being hard working and supportive towards women, their characters, too, constitute examples of this trope. The list of other "good men" encompasses several more or less minor characters, all of whom have been good or did a service to one or more members of the author's family and/or were particularly respectful towards women and supportive of the idea of education for everyone. For instance, in the beginning of chapter six, a Patel belonging to the Jaiswal Bania[259] is mentioned, who owned the land of the *bastī*, in which the family lived at that time. When the young Kausalya passed her "matric",[260] "he came to our home and gave me three rupees as a reward. He became very happy. He said, 'in my house neither boys nor girls study'. To mother, he said, 'you are very brave. You have educated [your] girls and you [still] keep the courage to educate them further'. Mother became very happy"[261] (Baisantri 1999: 30). Note that here, once again, it is the mother who is being praised for educating the children, not both parents. Another man role model is Kisan Bhāgujī Banˈsoḍe, a social activist, who "worked to bring about awakening among untouchables" (*aspr̥śyoṃ meṃ jāgr̥ti lāne kā kām karˈte the*; Baisantri 1999: 38). He also "prepared his wife to teach girls" (*laṛˈkiyoṃ ko paṛhāne ke lie apˈnī patˈnī ko taiyār kiyā thā*; ibid.). Like Kausalya's parents, this character is also said to have suffered hardship in the name of education: "Kisan Bhāgujī Banˈsoḍe's financial state was very bad, in spite of this, he dedicated his body, mind and funds to the community" (*kisan bhāgujī banˈsoḍe kī ārthik hālat bahut kharāb thī phir bhī unhoṃne apˈnā tan-man-dhan samāj ko arpit kiyā thā*; ibid.). In *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*, the man role model is invariably a man who supports the idea of education, particularly education for women. When, after a number of frustrating experiences and failures the family finally succeeds to have a water pipe installed in their house, the young Kausalya goes to thank the engineer who helped her in this endeavor, and who responds by say-

[259] See footnote 118.

[260] See footnote 249.

[261] Hindi original: *to vahī hamāre ghar āyā aur mujhe tīn rupaye ināma meṃ die the. aur khūb khuś huā. kahˈne lagā ki mere ghar na laṛˈkā paṛhˈtā hai na laṛˈkī. mā̃ se kahā ki tum bahut dhairyavān ho. laṛˈkiyoṃ ko paṛhāyā, aur bhī paṛhāne kī himmat rakhˈtī ho. mā̃ bahut khuś huī thīṃ*.

ing: “study well now, all of you sisters and brothers” (*tum sab bahan-bhāī ab khūb paṛho*; Baisantri 1999: 80). Baisantri mentions on several occasions that the family was persecuted by “some vagabond boys and some of our relatives, who had a jealous nature” (*kuch āvārā laṛˈke aur kuch hamāre riśtedār, jinˈkā svabhāv jalˈne kā hai*; Baisantri 1999: 61), because they could “not [stand to] see our progress” (*ve log hamārī pragati nahīṃ dekh sakˈte*, ibid.) and would thus “torture us in different ways” (*isˈlie ve hameṃ tarah-tarah se satāte haiṃ*; ibid.). On one occasion, a bogus complaint is filed with the police, after which an officer appears at the family’s house. However, being from “a backward community” (*vah samāj bhī bahut pichˈṛā thā*; ibid.) himself, the officer quickly realizes that the complaint is false. He advises the family to let him know, if anyone harasses them again (*usˈne kahā ki agar isˈke bād koī āpˈko taṃg kare to hameṃ khabar karˈnā*; ibid.). Thus, this character not only supports the idea of education for male and female members of “backward” communities, but also offers his support and protection in case the family is harassed on these grounds. A short time later, the police officer is transferred to another town, but “whenever he would come to Nagpur, he would visit us before he would leave. Once, he even brought his wife and mother to our home” (*vah kabhī nāgˈpur ātā, to ham logoṃ ko milˈkar jātā thā. ek bār apˈnī patˈnī aur mā̃ ko bhī hamāre ghar lāyā thā*; Baisantri 1999: 61f). This last sentence seems to highlight the exceptional qualities of the police officer: not only did he offer Kausalya’s family his help and protection, he even brought his female family members for a visit with him. In this way, similar to the woman role model Baisantri also constructs the man role model in her autobiography: a man who is hardworking, honest, upright towards women, and supportive of the idea of education for everyone.[262]

5 Conclusion

Using Tulsiram’s and Omprakash Valmiki’s autobiographies as case studies I have shown that autobiographies written by male Hindi Dalit authors tend to disregard female

[262] A further example of the man role model trope is discussed in chapter 1 “Who is a Dalit?”.

characters and often either do not mention them at all or mention them to a much lesser degree than male characters. In *Murdahiyā*, the first book of Tulsiram's two volume autobiography, women characters often appear in groups, while individual women hardly find any mention. In the second volume, *Maṇikarṇikā*, hardly any women characters appear in the main narrative, while at the end of the volume, a separate chapter gathers these characters under one umbrella. While in both volumes the events are narrated in a chronological order, this separate chapter seems to be cut out of the main narrative, as events narrated in it happened during times, which have already been covered in the narrative preceding this chapter. In Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography *Jūṭhan*, women characters often remain behind the scenes as well. While in Valmiki's work, all four brothers of the author are mentioned many times and portrayed in some detail, his sister is hardly mentioned at all and is given no narrative agency whatsoever. Another form of female erasure that can be found in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*, is the narrative absence of women characters in episodes, in which their presence is explicitly announced. An illustration of this phenomenon is constituted by an episode describing the events of an entire day, during which all the characters who are mentioned in the narrative are men, despite the fact that the episode begins with the statement that women and children were the only ones, who had stayed in the village, while men had left to work in the fields.

Kausalya Baisantri's autobiography is an active textual response to male written Dalit autobiographies and to female erasure from literary production as well as to the absence of narrative agency for women characters which she opposes. By expanding our understanding of the autobiographical pact as formulated by Philippe Lejeune and turning her maternal grandmother and mother into additional protagonists of her autobiography, she fills out the picture drawn by male Hindi Dalit writers, which frequently leaves empty spaces where women characters should be. The same objective is reached by including numerous female characters in *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp* – whether it is required from the point of view of the main narrative or not. In this manner, Baisantri is, as has been pointed out by many scholars, including the collective in her private story, but, as Laura Brueck has argued, this fact should not mean that Baisantri's writing is such due to her

being female, but rather constitutes a conscious and purposeful textual intervention with a clear goal. Many of the women characters portrayed by Baisantri in her autobiography, exhibit very similar characteristics, i.e. they are intelligent, active and enthusiastic, they work hard, understand the importance of education and often exert themselves to help others to get educated. I argue that by filling her autobiography with these women characters, Kausalya Baisantri creates a new trope, which I call the good woman trope, which challenges male-written Dalit literary texts as well as traditional views on gender roles.

Baisantri announces in the introduction to her autobiography that she “needs independence” to write her own story and that her husband, her brother and her son – her male relatives, that is – could disagree with her decision to publish her life story. I read the numerous examples of female agency, or, indeed, female independence, in *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp* as performed through Baisantri’s own agency of writing her autobiography. The instances in which the young protagonist of Baisantri’s autobiography is sexually harassed by male characters and to which she reacts by actively and fearlessly standing up and defending herself with force, are to be read in this context and seen as the equivalence of the act of her writing and publishing the autobiography.

As far as *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*’s male characters are concerned, Baisantri’s narrative does not neglect them in the way male Dalit writers tend to do with female characters. However, it subtly suggests to the reader a value judgment towards particular characters. Through the usage of several narrative techniques such as explanations in parenthetical glosses, employment of particular imagery or stripping individual characters of narrative agency, Baisantri is able to let specific characters appear insignificant or irrelevant. At the same time, in *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*, Baisantri also creates the man role model trope, whose characteristics are very similar to the ones of the woman role model. That is to say, in Kausalya Baisantri’s autobiography, the man role model is respectful towards women, understands the importance of education for both sexes and either helps or encourages others to get educated.

Chapter 4

Forms of Hindi as a Rhetorical Strategy: *Dalit Cetˡnā* in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*

This chapter deals with Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography *Jūṭhan*. It discusses the rhetorical strategy used by him to create a tension between the usage of standard and non-standard forms of Hindi in direct and reported speech. Using close reading as my method, I demonstrate through numerous examples how this practice implicitly marks the speakers either as formally educated vs. not educated or as competent vs. incompetent and thus suggests to the reader a value judgment towards these speakers and their statements.

1 Introduction

Marathi Dalit author and critic Sharankumar Limbale (Śaraṇˡkumār Liṃbāle) stated in *Dalit Sāhityāce Sauṃdaryaśāstra* ("Aesthetics of Dalit literature") – a book first printed in Marathi in 1996 which is widely considered to be the first effort in a theory of Dalit literature – that the language of Dalit literature is an "uncouth and rude language" (*gãvār-asabhya bhāṣā*; Limbale 2005: 45).[263] He went on to say that this language was the Dalits' speech (*bolī*) that didn't follow "rules of grammar and cultivated gestures" (*śiṣṭ saṃket aur vyākaraṇ ke niyam*). According to him, Dalit writers have rejected "standard language" (*pramāṇ bhāṣā*) and have chosen the "language of the *bastī*"[264] (*bastī kī bāṣā*) for their writings (ibid.). This was certainly true for early Marathi Dalit poetry of the Dalit Panthers, who used language as a weapon to attack casteist society and lay bare

[263] Limbale 2005 is the Hindi translation made by Ramanika Gupta of the original book which was first published in Marathi. Thus, the originals given in brackets, too, are Hindi translations of the Marathi original.

its crimes against the “lower castes”.[265] Hindi Dalit literature has since developed a far more nuanced approach to the usage of language, but it has, “nevertheless, inherited a focus on language as a tool of differentiation and political commentary” (Brueck 2014: 101). Manipulations with language as a stylistic device are among the most important narrative strategies used by Hindi Dalit authors in their writings and warrant therefore a close examination.

Contrary to Limbale’s claim that Dalit writers have rejected standard language, Hindi Dalit authors, and particularly the three authors whose works are in the focus of this dissertation, for the most part, use Modern Standard Hindi as their primary language – a standardized form of the *khaṛī bolī*[266] dialect of Hindi as it is taught in schools and at universities. While Kausalya Baisantri’s Hindi appears to be more colloquial and Tulsiram’s language is more akin to scholarly language – unsurprising facts since Hindi was not Baisantri’s mother tongue and Tulsiram’s long academic career had to have an effect on his choice of language – Omprakash Valmiki’s choice of speech forms and manipulations with language are more complex and intricate.

This chapter explores ways in which Omprakash Valmiki employs the usage of different varieties of Hindi in his autobiography. I will show how Valmiki’s usage of “marked speech” changes throughout *Jūṭhan* and how he uses it to highlight the differences between various speakers and the main text corpus. “Marked speech”, in this context, is any sentence or phrase that is written in something other than Modern Standard Hindi – the main language of *Jūṭhan* – which effectively “marks” the speaker in a certain way.

As outlined by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, “character, as one construct within the abstracted story, can be described in terms of a network of character-traits. These traits,

[264] For the term *bastī*, see footnote 36.

[265] See, for example, Omvedt 1995, Zelliot 2015 and Hovell 1989.

[266] R. S. McGregor translates *khaṛī bolī* as “established speech”, see McGregor 2004: XIII.

however, may or may not appear as such in the text" (Rimmon-Kenan 2005: 61). A character's speech can serve as a means of indirect characterization, particularly when it is different from the voice of the narrator: "The form or style of speech is a common means of characterization in texts where the characters' language is individuated and distinguished from that of the narrator. Style may be indicative of origin, dwelling place, social class, or profession" (Rimmon-Kenan 2005: 66). In the case of *Jūṭhan*, however, characters' speech is rarely used for characterization of individual characters, but rather of particular groups of characters.

The famous Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the term "heteroglossia" as a theoretical concept which is rather useful in this context. The term first appeared in his essay "Discourse in the Novel" written in 1934–35 and refers to the simultaneous existence in a single language of particular lects or varieties of language, which reflect "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" (Bakhtin 1981: 291). What defines heteroglossia is not merely the existence of these lects, but rather the tension and contrast between different varieties of language as they represent disparate world views. I argue that it is these world views that Valmiki endeavors to style through his usage of characters' speech as indirect characterization in *Jūṭhan*.

Laura Brueck has shown that while Hindi Dalit authors use Modern Standard Hindi in their short stories in first- or second-person narration, in monologue or dialogue they frequently use marked forms of Hindi to give emphasis to the difference of the marked passages of spoken or reported language and thus to "exhibit nuanced political perspectives" (Brueck 2014: 105). She has shown further that "for a character to speak in a 'marked' (simplified, non-modern-standard) version of Hindi is to exhibit a deficiency of Dalit *chetnā*,[267] to be characterized not only as 'rural' or 'traditional', but specifically to be condemned as 'backward'" (ibid.).

[267] For the term *dalit cet'nā* (Dalit consciousness) see the introduction to this dissertation and footnote 5.

In a similar manner, in *Jūṭhan* “marked speech” is exclusively used in direct speech, i.e. in dialogue or monologue. This “marked speech” is only twice represented by another language.[268] On all other occasions it is a non-standard variant of Hindi, which in actual speech in many cases might not draw any particular attention to itself. It does, however, clearly stand out in writing. I argue that this “marked speech” cannot be seen as Valmiki’s “attempt at truthfulness”, an attempt, in other words, to let the characters speak in exactly the same way they did when he witnessed them in his actual childhood. For one reason, because just as no text and no autobiography can be an exact representation of reality, no person’s memory can be expected to be perfect to an extent that would allow them to reproduce speech exactly as they heard it many years previously. More importantly, Valmiki’s usage of “marked speech” in his autobiography holds a distinctive structure: direct speech is scarce in *Jūṭhan* and each case of it is strategically placed to reflect distinct ideas or ideology. I argue that the interplay between different variants of Hindi is a specific stylistic device which is consciously employed by Valmiki as a means of indirect characterization with a very definite objective in mind.

I prefer not to refer to this non-standard variant or form of Hindi either as “dialect” or as “sociolect”. To call it a dialect one would need to have more information than the small amount of separated sentences presented in *Jūṭhan*. It would also need to have more features distinguishing it from standard Hindi than is discernible from the available examples. In addition, there is no true consensus about the term ‘dialect’ and its precise characteristics, for which reason I choose to abstain from its use.[269] To call it a sociolect also appears problematic, since it is not a type of speech that is used by a specific social group, at least not one that is generally regarded as a group. While a *jāti* can undoubtedly be called a social group, in *Jūṭhan*, characters who use this speech belong to

[268] Marathi and Punjabi, see chapter 5 “Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment”.

[269] See, for instance, Alexander Maxwell (2018) and a thorough discussion of the famous witticism “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy” attributed to the linguist Max Weinreich (apparently, originally made in Yiddish in 1945).

different *jāti*s, and furthermore, different characters belonging to the same *jāti* use different kinds of speech in different situations. I would venture to regard this kind of marked speech and particularly the way in which Valmiki uses it in his autobiography as a "constructed sociolect", a lect, that is, which is used by a certain kind of people, whether they regard themselves as a group or not. However, since this is not a sociolinguistic work, I will refrain from using these terms. Omprakash Valmiki himself refers to this form of Hindi at one point in his narrative as a "rural accent" (*dehātī lahˈjā*; Valmiki 1999: 86). It is very probable that the form of Hindi which was spoken in Valmiki's village at the time of his childhood and adolescence constitutes the base for the form of Hindi he chose to use in his autobiography,[270] but since, as pointed out above, this form of Hindi stands out in writing more than it would in actual speech, I prefer not to use the term accent as well. I will thus proceed to refer to the non-standard variant of Hindi that is used by Valmiki in his autobiography as a "non-standard form" of Hindi, or "marked speech".

2 Marked Speech in "the Village"

Like in his short stories, throughout *Jūṭhan* Omprakash Valmiki also uses non-standard forms of Hindi in direct speech as shown by Brueck (Brueck 2014: 107ff.); there exist, however, gradations of marked speech in *Jūṭhan*, which allow the author to use it as a more intricate rhetorical strategy. I call the two main settings of *Jūṭhan* "the village" and "the city". The first part of the autobiography is set in the "village" setting, where the protagonist grows up and goes to school. The "city" setting starts after the protagonist leaves his village Barla to go to college in Dehradun. Valmiki's usage of language after this crucial moment changes abruptly, which is why I will analyze it separately.

[270] This same form of Hindi is also used by Valmiki in his short story *Paccīs caukā deṛh sau* (Valmiki 2000: 78–84).

2.1 Non-standard “rural” Hindi

At first glance, it looks like all village residents in *Jūṭhan* speak a kind of a non-standard rural form of Hindi that is characterized – to give just a few examples – by the usage of retroflex *ṇa* instead of dental *na*, shortening or lengthening of vowels, changing of verb forms or combining of their parts (*paṛhā hai* instead of *paṛh rahā hai*), loss or addition of aspiration (*bī* instead of *bhī, mhāre* instead of *mere*) and use of non-standard words[271] (*jākat*), which are often stressed by synonyms in parenthetical glosses as an indication that the author does not expect his standard Hindi readers to be familiar with them.

This is how young Omprakash’s father asks the school principal for his son to be admitted to school:

> Example 1.1[272]
>
> Translation: Master *jī*,[273] I will be grateful to you, if you will also teach this child of mine two letters.

[271] By “non-standard” I mean both usage in Modern Standard Hindi, as well as, and more importantly so, the standard usage of language in the main text corpus of *Jūṭhan*.

[272] Examples are numerated throughout this chapter to allow easier discussion of and comparison between them on later occasions.

[273] The word *jī*, used with a name or a title, is a formal appellation similar to “sir” or “madam”.

Hindi original:[274] *māsṭarʼjī,* ***thārī meharʼbānnī*** *ho* ***jāgī*** *jo* ***mhāre*** *is* ***jākat*** *(baccā)* ***kū bī*** *do akṣar sikhā doge* (Valmiki 1999: 12).

Standard: *māsṭarʼjī,* ***terī/tumhārī meharʼbānī*** *ho* ***jāegī*** *jo* ***mere*** *is* ***bacce ko bhī*** *do akṣar sikhā doge.*

Here, in some words, aspiration is added (*mhāre* instead of *mere*), while in some it is removed (*bī* instead of *bhī*), some vowels are flattened (*kū* instead of *ko*), a consonant is doubled (*meharʼbānnī* for *meharʼbānī*), the verb *jāegī* is shortened to *jāgī*, *terī*/*tumhārī* is clipped to *thārī*, a non-standard word *jākat* is used and explained in a parenthetical gloss.

On another occasion, when the young protagonist needs to climb on top of the house to mend the roof, his father addresses him in a similarly non-standard form:

Example 1.2

Translation: Careful, *Muṃśī jī*,[275] steady feet… don't go on the roof… stay right next to the wall.

[274] Throughout this chapter, whenever non-standard usage of Hindi is of importance, the structure of quotes from *Jūṭhan* is as follows: In the transliterated quote from the Hindi original the words marked **bold** are non-standard. This quote is followed by a standard Hindi version of the same, in which the replaced words are also marked **bold**. However, it must be kept in mind that it is not always possible to replace each non-standard word with an exact standard equivalent, several variations might be possible. In cases, when I am aware of the possible variations, they are separated by a / sign: *tere*/*tumhare*. An English translation precedes the Hindi versions. In cases when it is not the register of Hindi that is discussed, the regular practice of quoting the English translation in the main text continues, while Hindi originals are quoted in footnotes.

[275] The words *muṃśī jī* stand for the father's affectionate form of address for the young Omprakash. Its meaning and significance are discussed in more detail in chapter 5 "Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment".

Hindi original: *saṃbhāl* ***ke****, muṃśī jī,* ***pairā*** *jamā* ***ke****… chat par mat* ***jāṇā****…* ***dīvāl*** *kī taraf hī* ***rahˡṇā*** (Valmiki 1999: 31).

Standard: *saṃbhāl* ***kar****, muṃśī jī,* ***pair*** *jamā* ***kar****… chat par mat* ***jānā****…* ***dīvār*** *kī taraf hī* ***rahˡnā.***

Like in the first example, the dental *na* is replaced here with the retroflex *ṇa* (*jāṇā* instead of *jānā*, *rahˡṇā* instead of *rahˡnā*), additionally, two words have non-standard forms: *pairā* instead of *pair* and *dīvāl* instead of *dīvār*. The two absolutives *saṃbhāl ke* (carefully) and *jamā ke* (steady) have colloquial forms, which in the case of *Jūṭhan* appears to be an indication of non-standard usage.[276]

Valmiki's father is not the only character who uses this form of Hindi. Other people use this kind of non-standard form of Hindi in direct speech, too. In the following example Sukkhan Singh (Sukkhan Siṃh), the young protagonist's school friend, addresses Omprakash thus:

Example 1.3

Translation: Why did you stop going to school? Won't you study further?

Hindi original: *kyoṃ madˡrāse* ***jāṇā*** *choṛ diyā,* ***āgge nī*** *paṛhegā*? (Valmiki 1999: 24).

Standard: *kyoṃ madˡrāse* ***jānā*** *choṛ diyā,* ***āge nahīṃ*** *paṛhegā*?

[276] The colloquial form *ke* of the absolutive suffix *kar* as well as the colloquial form *pe* of the postposition *par* are often used in spoken Hindi and could well be considered standard Hindi in writing, as well. However, in the case of *Jūṭhan* I tend to interpret them as non-standard, because, as will be shown in more examples to come, the colloquial forms *ke* and *pe* are only used in those instances in which the speech is marked as non-standard. While in examples where speech is standard, the standard forms *kar* and *par* are used. The main text corpus uses the standard forms exclusively.

Here, too, the dental *na* is replaced with the retroflex *ṇa* (*jāṇā* instead of *jānā*), a consonant is doubled in *āgge* instead of *āge* and the negation *nahīṃ* is shortened to *nī*.

On another occasion, when a washerman (*dhobī*)[277] refuses to iron young Omprakash's clothes, he utters the following sentences.

> Example 1.4
>
> Translation: We don't wash Chuhra's and Chamar's clothes, and we don't iron them. If we iron your clothes, the Tagas won't give us their clothes to wash. There goes my daily bread…
>
> Hindi original: *ham cūhˈṛe-camāroṃ ke kapˈṛe nahīṃ dhote, na hī istrī karˈte haiṃ. jo tere kapˈṛe* ***pe*** *istrī kar deṃge to tagā hamˈse kapˈṛe na dhulvāẽge.* ***mhārī*** *to roji-****roṭṭī*** *cālī jā* ***gī****…* (Valmiki 1999: 28).
>
> Standard: *ham cūhˈṛe-camāroṃ ke kapˈṛe nahīṃ dhote, na hī istrī karˈte haiṃ. jo tere kapˈṛe* ***par*** *istrī kar deṃge to tagā hamˈse kapˈṛe na dhulvāẽge.* ***merī*** *to roji-****roṭī*** *cālī jā* ***gaī****…*

This is the only instance in which a person belonging to a *jāti* other than Chuhra (*cūhˈṛā*)[278] or Taga (*tagā*)[279] uses direct speech in the village setting of the book. I use this example despite the fact that it constitutes somewhat of an exception. Apart from the colloquial form *pe* of the postposition *par*, the other non-standard words in the washerman's speech – *mhārī* instead of *merī*, the double *ṭ* in *roṭṭī* instead of *roṭī*, the shortened verb *gī* instead of *gaī* – appear only in the last sentence and seem to have been added at the end as an afterthought. The two first sentences do not contain any words

[277] The term *dhobī* (Dhobi) is the name of the *jāti* of washer people. The name is derived from the Hindi verb *dhonā* and Sanskrit *dhav*, "to wash" (Russell 2021: Vol. II, 431–436). The community is large and distributed all over the subcontinent, it is listed as a Scheduled Caste, though, to my knowledge, not in every Indian state.

[278] See footnote 35.

[279] See footnote 80.

or word forms that I would consider non-standard Hindi. This peculiarity has to do with the fact that the washerman neither belongs to Valmiki's own Chuhra *jāti*, nor to the dominant Taga *jāti*, which is seen and portrayed as the main oppressor of the Chuhras throughout the book. As I will show below, usage of non-standard vocabulary or word forms in direct speech in *Jūṭhan* often has to do with the context of caste oppression, and thus the *dhobī*, standing as it were between the two extremes, is not heavily marked with non-standard word forms. This aspect is discussed below in sections 2.2 and 2.3. What is important at this point is to demonstrate that this non-standard form of Hindi is used in direct speech in the village setting of *Jūṭhan* by people from all *jāti*s.

Savarnas (*savarṇa*) or people from "high *jāti*s" also use this form of non-standard Hindi in their speech. On page 75f. a village resident called Camanlāl Tyāgī addresses the young Omprakash thus:

> Example 1.5
>
> Translation: [I] have heard [that] you go to school to study? […] take [this], read this page and show [me] […] Choṭan, your son can even read the Ramayana.
>
> Hindi original: ***suṇā*** *hai, tū paṛhˡne jātā hai skūl meṃ*? […] *le, is panne* **pe** *paṛhˡ**ke** dikhā* […] *choṭan, terā **beṭṭā** to rāmāyaṇ bhī paṛh* **leve** *hai* (Valmiki 1999: 75f.).
>
> Standard: ***sunā*** *hai, tū paṛhˡne jātā hai skūl meṃ*? […] *le, is panne* **par** *paṛhˡ**kar** dikhā* […] *choṭan, terā **beṭā** to rāmāyaṇ bhī paṛh* **letā** *hai.*

Camanlāl Tyāgī's speech, too, is characterized by the usage of a retroflex *ṇa* instead of dental *na* in *suṇā* instead of *sunā*, the double *ṭ* in *beṭṭā* instead of *beṭā* as well as the non-standard verb form *leve* instead of *letā*. The colloquial forms *pe* instead of *par* and *ke* instead of the absolutive suffix *kar* add to the non-standard feeling of this example.

The fact that this particular example appears to contain fewer non-standard forms than other similar examples is discussed in section 2.3 below.

2.2 Standard vs. Non-standard Hindi

However, not all people in the village use non-standard speech: school teachers in particular often speak Modern Standard Hindi. When headmaster Kalīrām is searching for the young Omprakash, he uses the following phrase:

Example 2.1

Translation: *abe*, hey *Chuhre ke* [(see below)], where have you gone [(lit.: entered)] motherfucker… your mother…

Hindi original: *abe, o cūhˈṛe ke, mādarˈcod kahā̃ ghus gayā… apˈnī mā̃…* (Valmiki 1999: 15).

While a pupil answers thus:

Example 2.2

Translation: Master *sāhab*,[280] he is sitting in the corner.

Hindi original: **māssāb**, **vo baiṭṭḥā** hai **koṇe** meṃ (Valmiki 1999: 15).

Standard: **māsṭar sāhab**, **vah baiṭhā** hai **kone** meṃ.

While the word *māssāb* alone does not necessarily constitute non-standard usage – in Hindi literature, school children often call their teachers *mātsāb* or *māssāb* as a short

[280] The word *sāhab*, used with a name or a title, means today much the same as "sir", "mister".

form of *māsṭar sāhab* – its usage together with *vo* instead of standard *vah* and the retroflex *ṇ* in *koṇā* instead of *konā*, as well as the doubling of the *ṭa* in *baiṭṭhā* instead of *baiṭhā* does mark this sentence as definitely non-standard. The teacher's speech, however, is not non-standard at all, but rather highly irregular and abusive.

This irregular and abusive type of speech is another kind of speech form employed by Valmiki in *Jūṭhan*. It almost invariably starts with the Hindi word *abe*. The *Oxford Hindi-English* dictionary gives its translation as "interj. pej. you! you rascal! wretch!" (McGregor 2014: 46). The English translator of *Jūṭhan,* Arun Prabha Mukherjee, leaves it untranslated as "abey" (Valmiki 2003: p. 3). In Hindi, this word is used as a form of highly impolite and rude address. In *Jūṭhan*, the word *abe*, which is only used in direct speech, is frequently followed by *cūhˡṛe ke* or *cūhˡṛe kā*. The words *kā* and *ke* are forms of the Hindi possessive postposition, so *cūhˡṛe ke* or *cūhˡṛe kā* means "belonging to Chuhra".

Valmiki states on page 12 that most residents of his native village Barla used this kind of language when addressing a member of the Chuhra community. "No one used to call [us] by name. The custom or form of address for an older [person] was "*o cūhˡṛe*" [(hey Chuhra)], for one of the same age or younger "*abe cūhˡṛe ke*" [(literally: "you Chuhra's", meaning the offspring of a Chuhra)]"[281] (Valmiki 1999: 12).

Headmaster Kālirām is not the only school teacher who uses Modern Standard Hindi in his speech. Other school teachers from Valmiki's native village Barla portrayed in *Jūṭhan* also speak standard Hindi for the most part. What makes the teachers' speech different? I argue that through the usage of Modern Standard Hindi in the teachers' speech Valmiki marks them as educated people. In a rural environment in the 1950s and 60s in northern India school teachers can safely be assumed to belong to the most educated people of a village. The accentuation of the difference between formally educated and not educated people in the very beginning of the book helps Valmiki on later

[281] Hindi original: *nām lekar pukārˡne kisī ko ādat nahīṃ thī. umr meṃ baṛā ho to 'o chūhˡṛe', barābar yā umr meṃ choṭā hai to 'abe chūhˡṛe ke' yahī tarīkā yā saṃbodhan thā.*

occasions to immediately suggest to the reader a kind of moral superiority and/or inferiority as well as trustworthiness of the speakers.

On the other hand, the abusive form used by most teachers as well as on many occasions other “upper caste” villagers, serves as a tool that allows Valmiki to mark their speech as not neutral, i.e. not quite the same as the straightforward Modern Standard Hindi that is the language of the main text corpus.

On a few occasions, like in examples 2.1 and 2.2 above, the school teachers’ standard speech is contrasted with non-standard speech used by other characters. There is not much direct speech in *Jūṭhan* in general, and even less direct speech that is directed at someone other than the main protagonist. It is therefore barely possible to say with any amount of certainty whether or not it was Valmiki’s intention to imply that some of the non-standard Hindi speakers in *Jūṭhan* spoke in this manner on a daily basis or only switched to the non-standard form of Hindi for the benefit of the people they meant to abuse or discriminate. But examples 2.1 and 2.2 above, as well as several examples to follow allow me to argue that the non-standard form of Hindi is employed by Valmiki not as a symbol for the usage of non-standard speech as a means to discriminate people from “lower castes”, but is rather used consciously by the author as a rhetorical device to highlight the difference between formally educated and not educated persons – at least in the village setting.

In examples 2.3 and 2.4 below, the teacher Bṛ̥jpāl Siṃh speaks Modern Standard Hindi to his class (2.3) as well as to the young Omprakash personally (2.4), while his wife (2.5) uses such an emphatically non-standard form of Hindi that one simple sentence requires two explanations in brackets.

Example 2.3

Translation: Should any student have a question or a doubt, he can ask [me] without hesitation. He can come to [my] house. I want every student from my class to get good grades.

Hindi original: *kisī bhī vidyārthī ko kuch pūchˈnā ho yā śaṃkā ho to binā hi-cak pūch sakˈtā hai. ghar meṃ ā sakˈtā hai. maiṃ cāhˈtā hūṃ, merī kakṣā kā har vidyārthī acche aṃk lāe* (Valmiki 1999: 70).

Example 2.4

Translation: Put your books on the parapet in front, there is wheat in this canister, just have it ground and bring it back. By then I will be free.

Hindi original: *apˈnī kitābeṃ sāmˈne muṃḍer par rakh do, is kanastar meṃ gehū̃ haiṃ, jarā inheṃ pisākar le āo. tab tak maiṃ khālī ho jāūṃgā* (Valmiki 1999: 71).

Example 2.5

Translation: I don't know where he went! He didn't tell [me] before going.

Hindi original: *patā nahīṃ* ***kiṃgghe*** *(kahā̃)* ***kū likaṛˈge*** *(nikal gae)! batā* ***ke*** *nahīṃ gae* (Valmiki 1999: 71).

Standard: *patā nahīṃ* ***kahā̃/kidhar nikal gae****! batā* ***kar*** *nahīṃ gae*.

The five-word sentence uttered by teacher Bṛjpāl Siṃh's wife contains several non-standard forms: the standard *kahā̃* or *kidhar* is replaced by *kiṃgghe*, the postposition *ko*, as in some previous examples, is flattened to *kū* and used after the interrogative pronoun, which in itself constitutes non-standard usage; the perfective verb form *nikal gae* is transformed to *likaṛˈge*. In addition, the second sentence contains the colloquial form *ke* of the absolutive suffix *kar*. In fact, the short speech made by the teacher's wife contains one of the most extreme examples of non-standard Hindi in *Jūṭhan* on the whole. At the same time, the teacher's speech is represented as standard to such an extent that even

standard forms of the postposition *par* as well as the absolutive suffix *kar* (*pisākar*) are used. The teacher's wife addresses the young Omprakash, but there is nothing to indicate that she speaks in this manner because of the person she is addressing. Overall, the contrast between the teacher's and his wife's speech is very prominent and makes it hardly possible for the reader to come to another conclusion than that the teacher's wife must, unlike her husband, be not formally educated.

The following example is particularly interesting because the people speaking non-standard Hindi on this occasion are the father and the brother of the same Bṛjpāl Siṃh from the examples 2.3 and 2.4 above.

> Example 2.6
>
> Translation:
>
> [father:] Who is it sitting? […]
>
> [brother:] He came from Barla. Birijˈpāl[282] sent [him]… They came to get wheat. One is inside, [he] is filling a sack with wheat. […]
>
> [father to Omprakash:] Son, why are you sitting there… Come here and sit on the cot.
>
> [Omprakash:] …*Abbā jī*,[283] I am fine right here. […]
>
> [father:] No, son, come and sit here. […] Are you studying? […]
>
> [Omprakash:] Yes. I'm in the tenth [grade].
>
> [father:] Does my Birajˈpāl teach you?
>
> [Omprakash:] Yes…!

[282] Note that the name Bṛjpāl, which is written is this form throughout the book, appears in this short episode as "Birijˈpāl" and "Birajˈpāl" – another hint at the non-standard register used by teacher Bṛjpāl Siṃh's father and brother.

[283] Literally, "father", a form of respectful address to an elderly man.

Hindi original:

[father:] ***yo koṇ baiṭhṭhā*** *hai*? […]

[brother:] *bar'lā se āyā hai.* ***birij'pāl*** *ne* ***bhejjā****… gehũ* ***leṇe*** *āe haiṃ. ek* ***bhittar*** *hai, kaṭṭe meṃ gehũ bhar* ***riyā*** *hai*. […]

[father to Omprakash:] ***beṭṭe****, vahā̃* ***kyũ beṭhṭhā*** *hai…* ***ĩghe*** *(yahā̃) ā****ke*** *cār'pāī* ***pe*** *baiṭh jā*.

[Omprakash:] …*abbā jī, maiṃ yahīṃ thīk hũ*. […]

[father:] *nā* ***beṭṭe****, yahā̃ ā****ke*** *baiṭh*. […] ***paṛhe*** *hai*? […]

[Omprakash:] *jī. das'vīṃ meṃ hũ*.

[father:] ***mhārā biraj'pāl paṛhāve*** *hai*?

[Omprakash:] *jī*…! (Valmiki 1999: 64).

Standard:

[father:] ***yah kaun baiṭhā*** *hai*? […]

[brother:] *bar'lā se āyā hai.* ***bṛj'pāl*** *ne* ***bhejā****… gehũ* ***lene*** *āe haiṃ. ek* ***bhi-tar*** *hai, kaṭṭe meṃ gehũ bhar* ***rahā*** *hai*. […]

[father to Omprakash:] ***beṭe****, vahā̃* ***kyoṃ beṭhā*** *hai…* ***yahā̃*** *ā****kar*** *cār'pāī* ***par*** *baiṭh jā*.

[Omprakash:] …*abbā jī, maiṃ yahīṃ thīk hũ*. […]

[father:] *nā* ***beṭe****, yahā̃ ā****kar*** *baiṭh*. […] ***paṛh rahe*** *hai*? […]

[Omprakash:] *jī. das'vīṃ meṃ hũ*.

[father:] ***merā bṛj'pāl paṛhātā/paṛhāte*** *hai*?

[Omprakash:] *jī*…!

Both Br̥jpāl Siṃh's brother and father speak a non-standard form of Hindi, which is in no way different from the one spoken by Valmiki's father in example 1.1. In the beginning of the dialogue, Br̥jpāl Siṃh's father talks to his son, after this he addresses the young Omprakash. His choice of language is the same on both occasions. Additionally, neither father nor son are aware of young Omprakash's *jāti* affiliation when they talk to him. Hence it is obvious that on the one hand, Br̥jpāl Siṃh speaks Modern Standard Hindi not for the reason that this was the language members of his family used to speak, while on the other hand, it is irrefutable that the "upper caste" men do not speak non-standard Hindi condescendingly to discriminate or for the benefit of the Chuhra boy.

The next example contrasts the standard Hindi of a (former) teacher with the non-standard speech of his friend. When the young Omprakash finds himself stranded in Muzaffarnagar, a city about 20 km away from his native village Barla, he is lucky to meet his former teacher, *māsṭar* Vedpāl, who agrees to put him up for the night. All of his utterances are in Modern Standard Hindi.

Example 2.7

Translation: Come, we'll put you on the first bus in the morning.

Hindi original: *calo, subah kī pahˈlī bas meṃ baiṭhā deṃge* (Valmiki 1999: 68).

Translation: Go, lie down on that cot. I will put you on the 6 o'clock bus in the morning. You will arrive at home by half past six.

Hindi original: *jāo, us cārˈpāī par leṭ jāo. subah chah baje kī bas meṃ baiṭhā dū̃gā. sāṛhe chah baje tak ghar pahũc jāoge* (Valmiki 1999: 68).

Translation: It's just a matter of one night, lie down on the floor. These people have come unexpectedly.

Hindi original: *rāt bhar kī to bāt hai pharś par leṭ jāo. ye log acānak ā gae haiṃ* (Valmiki 1999: 69).

The teacher's guest, however, speaks differently:

Example 2.8

Translation: Who is this lad? Send him, too, *yār*[284]… he, too, will have a taste…

Hindi original: *ye lauṃḍā* ***koṇ*** *hai? ise bhī bhej de yār…* ***yo*** *bhī cakh legā svād…* (Valmiki 1999: 69).

Standard: *ye lauṃḍā* ***kaun*** *hai? ise bhī bhej de yār…* ***yah*** *bhī cakh legā svād…*

The teacher speaks an impeccable form of Modern Standard Hindi in which, similarly to example 2.4 above even the standard form of the suffix *par* is used twice. Yet, his guest, who with his speech addresses Vedpāl, uses non-standard forms *koṇ* instead of *kaun* and *yo* instead of *yah* as well as the informal or colloquial words *lauṃḍā* and *yār*. Here too, the different speech forms are used to mark the former teacher as an educated person as opposed to his friend.

Even on occasions when teachers use non-standard vocabulary, their speech is rarely as richly packed with non-standard words or word forms as the speech of other persons. On page 28f Valmiki writes about his teacher Yogeṃdra Tyāgī, who was a "nice man" (*ādʹmī to bhale the*; Valmiki 1999: 28) and used to tell Valmiki's father:

Example 2.9

[284] The word *yār* m., means "friend"; it is an emphatically informal Hindi word.

Translation: Choṭan, don't stop your boy from studying.

Hindi original: *Choṭan, apˡne laṛˡke ko paṛhˡne se mat rokˡnā* (Valmiki 1999: 29).

However, at school, as a form of punishment for mistakes he used to humiliate Om-prakash by threatening to tear his shirt and saying:

Example 2.10

Translation: How many pork joints (pieces of pork meat) have you eaten? You must have eaten at least one leg?

Hindi original: *sūar kī kitˡnī* ***sāṃṭeṃ*** *(sūar kī gośt kī boṭī) khāī haiṃ? ek pāṃv to khā hī lete hoge?* (Valmiki 1999: 29).

Yogeṃdra Tyāgī speaks standard Hindi in both examples. But example 2.10 contains the word *sāṃteṃ,*[285] which is not frequently used in Hindi and which is marked by Valmiki himself as non-standard through the explanation in the parenthetical gloss. Yet, its usage alone does not constitute non-standard language.

On another occasion, an unnamed teacher (called "*masṭar sāhab*" throughout the episode) scolds the young protagonist, because he allowed himself to ask a question that compared the situation of the starving Chuhras with the story of Dronacharya (Droṇāchārya).[286]

Example 2.11

[285] Pl. of *sāṃṭ*, f. 1. joining, sticking. 2.contact. 3. a liaison […]. 4. plot. (McGregor 2004b: 1000).

[286] Dronacharya (Droṇāchārya) plays a central role in the Mahabharata, where he is portrayed as an ascetic and a *guru* to both, the Pandavas (Pāṇḍava) and the Kauravas (Kaurava).

Translation: Terrible times have come [upon us]... if an untouchable [(*achūt*)] is daring to speak out. *Chuhre ke*, you're comparing yourself to Dronacharya… There, I will write an epic on you[r skin]…

Hindi original: *ghor kaliyug ā gayā hai… jo ek achūt jabān jorī kar rahā hai*. […] *cūhˈṛe ke, tū droṇācārya se apˈnī barābarī* ***kare*** *hai… le tere ūpar maiṃ mahākāvya likhū̃gā*… (Valmiki 1999: 34).

Standard: *ghor kaliyug ā gayā hai… jo ek achūt jabān jorī kar rahā hai*. […] *cūhˈṛe ke, tū droṇācārya se apˈnī barābarī* ***kar rahe*** *hai… le tere ūpar maiṃ mahākāvya likhū̃gā*…

Like in the previous example, the teacher's speech in this instance is mostly standard – but for the one shortened continuous verb form *kare hai* instead of *kar rahe hai*.

In the next few examples, however, teachers use more non-standard forms. When teacher Phūlsiṃh is beating up a Chuhra pupil, he utters the following sentences.

Example 2.12

Translation: *Abe*, *sāle*,[287] Chuhra's offspring, tell [me] when you die. You pretend to be a great hero, today [I] will take out the oil from your hair.

Hindi original: *abe, sāle, cūhˈṛe kī aulād, jab mar jāegā, batā denā. bahut hīro* ***baṇe*** *haiṃ, āj* ***kāṛhū̃gā*** *(nikālū̃gā) terī julphoṃ se tel* (Valmiki 1999: 61).

Standard: *abe, sāle, cūhˈṛe kī aulād, jab mar jāegā, batā denā. bahut hīro* ***bane*** *haiṃ, āj* ***nikālū̃gā*** *terī julphoṃ se tel*.

On this occasion, there appears in the teacher's speech a retroflex *ṇa* in the verb *banˈnā*, instead of a dental *na* (*baṇe* instead of *bane*) very similarly to the non-standard

[287] The word *sālā* m. means "brother-in-law", but is widely used as an abusive address in Hindi.

form of Hindi as it has been show above. The verb *kāṛhū̃gā*[288] is another instance of a Hindi word that is not frequently used in standard Hindi, but can easily be found in a dictionary. Nevertheless, the author's explanation in brackets suggests that he considers this a non-standard word that requires explanation. Teacher Phūlsiṃh's speech on this occasion is still standard Hindi for the most part, but the two non-standard forms in this example suggest a peculiarity that is worth a closer look.

Earlier in the book, when the new headmaster Kalīrām speaks to Omprakash, he starts by speaking standard Hindi, but changes his speech midway to non-standard.

Example 2.13

Translation: *Abe*,[289] what is your name? […] Good… there is a teak tree standing over there, go climb it, break some twigs and make a broom. Make a broom with leaves. And make the whole school shine like a mirror. After all, this is your hereditary occupation. Go… start working at once.

Hindi original: *kyā nām hai be terā*? […] *thīk hai… vah jo sāmˈne śīśam kā peṛ khaṛā hai, us par caṛh jā aur ṭahˈniyā̃ toṛˈ**ke** jhāṛū **baṇā** le*. *pattoṃ vālī jhāṛū **baṇānā**. aur pūre skūl **kū** aisā camˈkā de jaisā **sīsā**. terā to **yo** khānˈdānī kām hai. jā… phaṭāphaṭ lag jā kām **pe*** (Valmiki 1999: 14f.).

Standard: *kyā nām hai be terā*? […] *thīk hai… vah jo sāmˈne śīśam kā peṛ khaṛā hai, us par caṛh jā aur ṭahˈniyā̃ toṛˈ**kar** jhāṛū **banā** le. pattoṃ vālī jhāṛū **banānā**. aur pūre skūl **ko** aisā camˈkā de jaisā **śīśā**. terā to **yah** khānˈdānī kām hai. jā… phaṭāphaṭ lag jā kām **par***.

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288 Future 1st person singular of *kāṛhˈnā*, "v.t. 1. to pull, […] 2. to take out, to draw (water, or milk from a cow), to draw off (liquid) […]" (McGregor 2004b: 188).

289 The word *be* is a short form of *abe*.

This is the only occasion in *Jūṭhan* in which a teacher's speech is marked by this many non-standard forms. Remarkably, the shift in the headmaster's speech occurs around the word *jhāṛū*, "broom", the very symbol of the occupation that is considered "traditional" for members of the Chuhra *jāti*. Speaking about it, the teacher starts to pronounce dental *na* retroflex as *ṇa*: *baṇā*, *baṇānā*, he also flattens *ko* to *kū*, as we have seen on numerous occasions before; *śa* turns to *sa*: *sīsā* instead of *śīśā*, the non-standard *yo* replaces the standard *yah*, the postposition *par* is used in its colloquial form *pe*.

If we look back at the examples in which teachers use standard Hindi (2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 2.9) and compare them to the ones, in which they use some forms of non-standard Hindi (2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13), it becomes obvious that what is common between the examples in the first group is that they are neutral with regard to caste discrimination. In contrast, what is common between the examples of the second group, is that they all have a context of caste oppression. Thus one can say that while Modern Standard Hindi is used in the village setting of *Jūṭhan* as an indicator of formally educated persons, in cases with a context of caste discrimination, non-standard vocabulary and/or non-standard word forms are used in direct speech as a marker, even if the person is a formally educated one.

In the case of the "nice man" (*bhale ādˈmī*; Valmiki 1999: 28) Yogeṃdra Tyāgī (example 2.10) the non-standard marker is only one not very common Hindi word – the level of caste discrimination in his case can be regarded as rather light in comparison. In the case of "*māsṭar sāhab*" from example 2.11, the marker is a non-standard verb form – after all, his is a more serious case of caste discrimination: he denies the "untouchables" (*achūt*) the right to speak, ask questions and compare themselves to persons he regards as socially above them. Teacher Phūlsiṃh from example 2.12 resorts to physical violence: he threatens (and then proceeds) to beat up an "offspring of a Chuhra" (*cūhˈṛe kī aulād*) and thus his speech is marked by two different markers (a non-standard word form as well as an uncommon word). And in the last example (2.13), headmaster Kalīrām denies the main protagonist the right to education and forces him to do unpaid

labor – arguably, one of the highest forms of caste discrimination, which requires for his speech to be marked as non-standard nearly to the same extent as that of "uneducated" village residents.

Since a non-standard form of Hindi is used in the village setting of *Jūṭhan* as an indicator of formally uneducated people, every usage of this speech form leaves the impression of a lack of formal education and, as such, of incredibility and even incompetence. Using non-standard word forms or vocabulary as a marker, Valmiki is thus able to signal or suggest to the reader a value judgment towards the speakers: whom to consider as trustworthy, whom to regard with suspicion or to dismiss as uninformed. The higher the level of caste discrimination, the heavier is the speech marked as non-standard. Using non-standard Hindi in this way, Valmiki effectively suggests that the practice of untouchability and caste oppression is limited to incompetent individuals and is to be dismissed by educated rational people.

2.3 *Dalit Ceṭnā* Context

Having argued that non-standard speech marks the speaker as uneducated or uninformed, in the following section, I take the reverse case into account. In the following subsection I show that through the tension created in *Jūṭhan* by the usage of standard and non-standard Hindi in direct speech, persons who have been marked as not formally educated, on several occasions are made sound more credible, informed or knowledgeable by virtue of the usage of a more standard form of Hindi.

One such person is Camanlāl Tyāgī from example 1.5. He is portrayed in *Jūṭhan* as the only village resident from the dominant land-owner Taga *jāti*, who supports the idea of young Omprakash's education. In example 1.5 above, when he asks the boy to read something for him and praises his ability to the boy's father, his speech appears to be

marked as non-standard to a somewhat lighter degree than that of other village residents. Or, to put it in another way, his speech contains more standard Hindi forms than the speech of other village residents. In the following example, Camanlāl Tyāgī comes to Omprakash's home to congratulate him on the occasion of his finishing high school. He proceeds to invite the boy to his own house where he serves him lunch from his own dishes.[290] On this unequivocally non-casteist occasion Camanlāl Tyāgī prevents the protagonist from putting away his own dirty plate and addresses his daughter using unmarked Modern Standard Hindi.

Example 3.1

Translation: Take *bhaiyā*'s[291] utensils and bring them away.

Hindi Original: *bhaiyā ke bartan uṭhākar le jā* (Valmiki 1999: 75).

The sentence is very short and hardly lets one come to a definite conclusion, but the usage of the standard form of the absolutive suffix *kar* (*uṭhākar*) – and not *ke*, as in many examples marked by non-standard speech above – does imply that in this case, too, the Hindi is standard not by accident. In other cases, too, the language becomes more standard in direct speech in cases with a pronounced *dalit cetˈnā* context.[292] That is to say, in cases where the importance of education is underlined, or where the emerging political awareness of the speaker or the awareness of oppression and a rebellion against it is stressed.

[290] One of the main expressions of caste discrimination is the refusal to let people who are labeled as "untouchable" eat or drink from the same kitchenware as people who consider themselves as "high caste" or Savarna.

[291] The word *bhaiyā* m. means "brother" and is used in Hindi as a form of friendly address of a younger person or one of the same age.

[292] For the term *dalit cetˈnā* (Dalit consciousness) see the introduction to this dissertation and footnote 5.

When Omprakash's father sees his son sweeping the schoolyard instead of sitting in class after headmaster Kalīrām forces him to do this work, the father's speech becomes far less non-standard than on other occasions. Since there are several examples, in which the father speaks to a teacher using many non-standard words and word forms, his usage of a more standard language in the following examples cannot be explained by mimicry as theorized by Homi Bhabha (2004).

Example 3.2

Translation: Which teacher is that progeny of Dronacharya, who makes my son sweep…

Hindi Original: ***kauṇ***-*sā māsṭar hai vo droṇācārya kī aulād, jo mere laṛᑊke se jhāṛū* ***lagᑊvāve*** *hai…* (Valmiki 1999: 16).

Standard: ***kaun***-*sā māsṭar hai vo droṇācārya kī aulād, jo mere laṛᑊke se jhāṛū* ***lagᑊvāe*** *hai…*

Arun Prabha Mukherjee has pointed out that by making Omprakash's father call headmaster Kalīrām "Dronacharya" and hence "by showing his father's ability to deconstruct the story, Valmiki portrays Dalits as articulate subjects who have seen through the cherished myths of their oppressors" (Valmiki 2003: XLII). But the emerging *dalit cetᑊnā* in the father's consciousness is also revealed by the language he uses. The father's speech appears to be non-standard to a far lesser degree than on other occasions (e.g. examples 1.1, 1.2). Here, there are only two non-standard forms: the retroflex *ṇa* instead of dental *na* in *kauṇ* and the non-standard verb form *lagᑊvāve* instead of *lagᑊvāe* or, possibly, *lagᑊvāte*/*lagvātā*. The same pattern is discernible in his subsequent speech – after a confrontation with the headmaster, who forces him to leave the school with his son.

Example 3.3

Translation: You are a teacher… therefore I am leaving… But remember this, teacher… this offspring of a Chuhra will study right here… in this school. And not only this one, more will come to study after him.

Hindi Original: *māsṭar ho… is'lie jā rahā hū̃… par it'nā yād rakhie māsṭar…* ***yo*** *cūh'ṛe kā yahīṃ paṛhegā… isī mad'rase meṃ. aur* ***yo*** *hī nahīṃ, is'ke bād aur bhī* ***āveṃge*** *paṛh'ne* ***kū*** (Valmiki 1999: 16).

Standard: *māsṭar ho… is'lie jā rahā hū̃… par it'nā yād rakhie māsṭar…* ***yah*** *cūh'ṛe kā yahīṃ paṛhegā… isī mad'rase meṃ. aur* ***yah*** *hī nahīṃ, is'ke bād aur bhī* ***āeṃge*** *paṛh'ne* ***ko****.*

Here, similarly to example 3.2, the father's speech contains much more standard forms than is usual for his character. The above example contains whole sentences in standard Hindi. The commonest of non-standard forms, one that is characteristic for Valmiki's father's speech on several other occasions (including example 1.2 above) – the retroflex *ṇa* – does not make its appearance in this speech at all.[293] The only three non-standard forms include two occurrences of the non-standard *yo* instead of *yah*, the non-standard future verb form *āveṃge* instead of *āeṃge* as well as the postposition *kū* instead of *ko*.

I argue that in parallel to the usage of non-standard markers in direct speech with context of caste discrimination, Valmiki uses more standard forms in the speech of people who are otherwise marked as not formally educated in cases with a *dalit cet'nā* context to make these speakers sound more competent. More examples help to substantiate this argument.

On page 21 the young Omprakash's mother waits for "leftovers" (*jūṭhan*) outside Sukh'dev Siṃh Tyāgī's house on the occasion of a wedding and asks him for some food

[293] According to the pattern of the non-standard speech form as it has been shown above, one could have expected the words *it'nā* and *paṛh'ne* to contain retroflex *ṇa*s instead of the standard dental *na*s.

for her children. Initially, both speakers use approximately the same number of non-standard word forms.

Example 3.4

Translation: Chowdhury ji,[294] now that everyone has eaten and left… put some [food] on a leaf plate for my children, too. After all, they, too, have been waiting for this day.

Hindi Original: *caudharī jī,* ***īb*** *to sab* ***khāṇā*** *khā* ***ke*** *cale gae…* ***mhāre jākatoṃ*** *(baccoṃ)* ***kū*** *bhī ek pattal par dhar* ***ke*** *kuch de do.* ***vo bī*** *to is din kā iṃtazār kar* ***re*** *te* (Valmiki 1999: 21).

Standard: *caudharī jī,* ***ab*** *to sab* ***khānā*** *khā* ***kar*** *cale gae…* ***mere baccoṃ ko*** *bhī ek pattal par dhar* ***kar*** *kuch de do.* ***ve bhī*** *to is din kā iṃtazār kar* ***rahe*** *te.*

Most of the non-standard forms used by the mother have appeared in previous examples: retroflex *ṇa* instead of dental *na* (*khāṇā*), colloquial form *ke* of the absolutive suffix *kar* (*khā ke*, *dhar ke*), *mhāre* instead of *mere*, *kū* instead of *ko*, *bī* instead of *bhī*; the non-standard word *jākat* appears with an explanation (*baccā*) in a parenthetical gloss. Additionally, the non-standard word *īb* appears instead of *ab*, the colloquial form *vo* instead of *ve* and the shortened continuous suffix *re* instead of *rahe*. Sukhˈdev Siṃh Tyāgī's reply is similarly marked.

Example 3.5

[294] In this case used as a form of respectful address. See also footnote 141.

Translation: You are taking a basket full of leftovers… And on top of that you are asking for food for your children? Stay in your place, Chuhri.[295] Take your basket and get away.

Hindi Original: *ṭokʼrā bhar to jūṭhan le jā **rī** hai… **ūppar** se **jākatoṃ** ke lie **khāṇā** māṁg **rī** hai? **apʼṇī** aukāt meṃ rah cūhʼṛī. uṭhā ṭokʼrā darʼvāze se aur **calʼtī ban*** (Valmiki 1999: 21).

Standard: *ṭokʼrā bhar to jūṭhan le jā **rahī** hai… **ūpar** se **baccoṃ** ke lie **khānā** māṁg **rahī** hai? **apʼnī** aukāt meṃ rah cūhʼṛī. uṭhā ṭokʼrā darʼvāze se aur **calʼtī ban***.

Like the mother, Sukhʼdev Siṃh Tyāgī uses *jākat* instead of *baccā*, retroflex *ṇa* instead of dental *na* (*khāṇā, apʼṇī*) and – twice – the shortened form of the continuous suffix *rī* instead of *rahī*. In addition, the character doubles the *pa* in *ūppar* instead of *ūpar* and uses the rather rare and extremely rude form *calʼtī ban*. After hearing Sukhʼdev Siṃh Tyāgī's words the mother not only turns into a "Durga"[296] and throws away the basket full of *jūṭhan*, her speech, too, becomes far less marked with non-standard forms.

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[295] The word Chuhri *(cūhʼṛī)* is the female form of *cūhʼṛā.* It is a very impolite way of addressing a woman from the Chuhra *jāti*.

[296] "On that day Durga emerged in the eyes of my mother". Hindi original: *us roj merī mā kī ā̃khoṃ mẽ durgā utar āī thī* (Valmiki 1999: 21). Mukherjee explains this in the introduction to her translation of *Jūṭhan* thus: "How consciously Dalit writers use language became evident to me when, during our interview, Valmiki explained that he used the analogy of the goddess Durga in *Joothan* to describe his mother's anger when she throws away the basketful of *joothan* after the higher-caste character Sukhdev Singh Tyagi insults her. This is the only place in the text where he draws on traditional Hindu mythology. Like the goddess, who is the embodiment of *shakti* or power, his mother will not be submissive against such an insult but will avenge herself. Valmiki said that he used the analogy under duress, because he could not find another equivalent that would appropriately describe his mother's heroic action and her anger. (The goddess Durga is the protective mother who will also use her power to rid the world of evil)" (Valmiki 2003: XXXVII).

Example 3.6

Translation: Pick it up and put it inside your house. Serve it to your guests as breakfast tomorrow morning.

Hindi Original: *ise* ***ṭhāke*** *apꞌne ghar meṃ dhar le. kal taṛꞌke bārātiyoṃ ko nāśte meṁ khilā* ***deṇā****…* (Valmiki 1999: 21).

Standard: *ise* ***uṭhākar*** *apꞌne ghar meṃ dhar le. kal taṛꞌke bārātiyoṃ ko nāśte meṁ khilā* ***denā****…*

There are only two non-standard forms in this example: the shortened and colloquial form of the absolutive verb *ṭhāke* instead of *uṭhākar* and well as the retroflex *ṇa* instead of dental *na* in *deṇā*. The retroflex *ṇa* is missing, however, in the standard word *apꞌnā*. Thus, while the mother is marked as a person who has not been formally educated in example 3.4 as well as on other occasions, her usage of more standard Hindi in example 3.6 indicates the emergence of *dalit cetꞌnā* in her character's consciousness and makes her sound more competent as well as authoritative, and hence above the "high caste" man who insulted her.

In example 1.3 above young Omprakash's school friend Sukkhan Siṃh's speech has been shown as an example of the non-standard speech used by village residents. On that occasion, he asks Omprakash why he stopped going to school. Valmiki explains in the book that his family could not afford to send him to school after his eldest brother had died. After the encounter with Sukkhan Siṃh, however, Omprakash comes back home and says to his mother:

Example 3.7

Translation: Mom, I have to go to school.

Hindi original: *mā̃,* ***mainne*** *skūl* ***jāṇā*** *hai* (Valmiki 1999: 24).

Standard: *mā̃,* ***mujhe/mujhꞌko*** *skūl* ***jānā*** *hai*.

The forms of Hindi used by the main protagonist himself are discussed in section 2.4 below. This particular example is discussed there in more detail. At this point, it should be enough to say that I understand the usage of non-standard forms in this example – *mainne* instead of *mujhe/mujhᵎko* and the retroflex *ṇa* instead of dental *na* in *jāṇā* – as a means to emphasize the main protagonist's need to get back to school and get educated.

The family understands the boy's distress and starts looking for a way out. *Bhābhī*,[297] the widow of Omprakash's eldest brother, offers his mother the only valuable object she possesses, a silver anklet, with the following words:

Example 3.8

Translation: Sell this and get *lallā jī*[298] admitted.

Hindi original: *ise bec* ***ke*** *lāllā jī kā dākhilā karā do* (Valmiki 1999: 25).

Standard: *ise bec* ***kar*** *lāllā jī kā dākhilā karā do.*

Remarkably, the *bhābhī*'s speech is merely marked by the colloquial form *ke* of the absolutive suffix *kar*. In the whole book there is, unfortunately, only one other instance on which the *bhābhī* character uses direct speech. On this other occasion, she stands up for the young Omprakash and asks his mother not to let him do work which is considered traditional for members of the Chuhra *jāti*, like the skinning of a dead animal.

Example 3.9

[297] The word *bhābhī* is commonly used in Hindi for a sister-in-law.

[298] Form of affectionate address used by the sister-in-law for her husband's youngest brother.

Translation: Don't make him do this [work]… We will bear the hunger… Don't drag him into this dirt…

Hindi original: *inˡse ye nā karāo… bhūke rah leṃge… inheṃ is gaṃdˡgī meṃ nā ghasīṭo…* (Valmiki 1999: 48).

This instance also has a strong *dalit cetˡnā* context; there are no non-standard words or word forms in it at all. The text provides no evidence that would make it possible to interpret the *bhābhī* character's speech according to the pattern provided above. This is due to the fact that Valmiki's autobiography – similar to other male-written texts particularly from South Asia – is deeply characterized by female erasure, and hence in it, direct speech is used by women extremely rarely and only on strategic occasions. Nevertheless, the changes in the direct speech used by the protagonist's father and mother allow me to speculate that it is that said *dalit cetˡnā* context, which makes the *bhābhī* character use standard Hindi in the examples above.

To *bhābhī*'s selfless gesture in example 3.8, Omprakash's father replies:

Example 3.10

Translation: No *bahū*…[299] don't sell this… I will do something to send him to school. Don't you worry… You only have this one thing… You would sell it, too… Keep it.

Hindi original: *nā bahū… ise nā bec… maiṃ kuch na kuch karˡke ise skūl bhejū̃gā. tū phikar nā kar… ek yahī to cīj hai tere pās… use bhī bec deṃ… rakh le ise* (Valmiki 1999: 25).

Here, the father's speech uses Modern Standard Hindi throughout. Similarly, on page 48, when the young boy's mother lets him keep the money that was earned by him do-

[299] Daughter-in-law; a traditional form of address.

ing the hard work of skinning a dead animal – a task she was forced to let Omprakash do, because the family desperately needed money and no one else was available – she, too, uses standard Hindi.

Example 3.11

Translation: You don't have school books, buy whatever you can with this [money]. We will manage the household expenses somehow or other.

Hindi original: *tere pās skūl kī kitābeṃ nahīṃ, in'se jo bhi āe kharīd le. ghar kā kharcā to jaise-taise cal hī jāegā* (Valmiki 1999: 48).

The last two examples above have a distinctive *dalit cet'nā* context and both Omprakash's father and mother characters use standard Hindi in them. Just a few lines later, however, when the context is familial and has nothing to do with Dalit politics or *dalit cet'nā*, Omprakash himself speaks standard Hindi,[300] while the mother goes back to using non-standard forms.

Omprakash replies to his mother's offer saying that some money should also be shared with his uncle, who participated in the skinning of the animal with him.

Example 3.12

Translation: Give some of it to uncle, too.

Hindi original: *is'meṃ se kuch cācā ko bhī de do* (Valmiki 1999: 48).

His mother, who is not satisfied with the part the uncle character played, responds:

[300] See subsection 2.4 in this chapter below for a detailed discussion of speech forms used by the main protagonist.

Example 3.13

Translation: Don't [even] mention his name, let your father come, I will make him break his bones.

Hindi original: *usˡkā nām mat lenā, tere bāp* ***kū āṇe*** *de, isˡke hāṛ tuṛˡvāū̃gī* (Valmiki 1999: 48).

Standard: *usˡkā nām mat lenā, tere bāp* ***ko āne*** *de, isˡke hāṛ tuṛˡvāū̃gī*.

Once the context is no longer associated with *dalit cetˡnā*, Dalit politics or the importance of education, the main protagonist's not-formally-educated mother once again starts using non-standard word forms: *kū* instead of the postposition *ko* and retroflex *ṇa* instead of dental *na* in *āṇe*.

Thus, Valmiki uses more standard words and word forms in the speech of people who have been marked as not formally educated to make speakers who support the idea of education for Dalits, who reject caste-based oppression, who stand up for their rights and are prepared to accept difficulties in the name of education and advancement sound more competent. This strategy helps the author to promote one of the main messages of his autobiography, namely, the importance of *dalit cetˡnā* and education.

2.4 Speech Forms Used by the Main Protagonist

There is one feature common to all narrative strategies in Valmiki's autobiography, namely that there is a progression in all of them. Through his writing Valmiki constantly performs the gradual changes in his protagonist's mind and consciousness as he develops and becomes more mature and experienced in the timeline of the narrative. At the same time, Valmiki demarcates between his main protagonist and other characters in the book, as this same main protagonist is the only character who from being an unedu-

cated person turns into an educated one as the narrative progresses. I argue that it is for this reason that the young protagonist – while he is a child and an adolescent in the timeline of the narrative – only uses direct speech on very few occasions. Instead, on several occasions, Valmiki lets his main protagonist use reported and not direct speech. Several dialogues that have to do with the child Omprakash being first admitted to school, contain no direct speech by Omprakash himself. Instead, his responses are either monosyllabic or written as reported speech.

When the young Omprakash is spoken to by his teachers or other village residents,[301] his replies are extremely short. He doesn't say more than "yes" (*jī*), his name or "in fourth [grade], sir" (*jī, cauthī meṃ*; Valmiki 1999: 17), when he is asked what grade he is in. It is thus impossible to label the main protagonist's speech on these occasions as either standard or non-standard. When the young protagonist is forced by the school headmaster to sweep the schoolyard and his father finds him complying with this order, the conversation between the two is as follows:

> Example 4.1
>
> Translation: "*Muṃśī jī*,[302] what are you doing?" He used to lovingly call me *muṃśī jī*. Seeing him, I burst into tears. He came to me in the schoolyard. When he saw me crying, he said: "*Muṃśī jī*… why are you crying? Tell [me] properly, what happened?"
>
> My sobbing had stopped. Between hiccups I told father the whole story that for three days [the headmaster] is making [me] sweep. And [he] doesn't let me study in class.
>
> Hindi original: *"muṃśī jī,* ***yo*** *kyā kar* ***rā*** *hai?" ve pyār se mujhe muṃśī jī hī*

[301] Pp. 14–15, see examples 2.1, 2.2, 2.13; p. 68, see example 2.7; as well as p. 17.

[302] The words *muṃśī jī* is the father's affectionate form of address for the young Omprakash. Its meaning and significance are discussed in more detail in chapter 5 "Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment".

kahā karˈte the. unheṃ dekhˈkar maiṃ phaphak paṛā. ve skūl ke maidān meṃ mere pās ā gae. mujhe rotā dekhˈkar bole, "muṃśī jī… rote kyoṃ ho? ṭhīk se bol, kyā huā hai?"

merī hicˈkiyāṃ baṃdh gaī thīṃ. hicak-hicakˈkar pūrī bāt pitājī ko batā dī ki tīn din se roz jhāṛū lagˈvā rahe haiṃ. kakṣā meṃ paṛhˈne bhī nahīṃ dete (Valmiki 1999: 16).

In the above example, the only non-standard word forms appear in the father's direct speech: the by now familiar *yo* instead of *yah* as well as the shortened continuous suffix *rā* instead of *rahā*. The rest of the text is standard Hindi, whether it is the voice of the narrator or the reported speech through which the young Omprakash tells his father what happened. The fact that the author chooses reported speech over direct in a dialogue, suggests that he implicitly looks for a way to avoid marking the protagonist's speech as either standard or non-standard on this occasion.

Valmiki choses the same tactic on page 34. In example 2.11 above, a teacher gets angry with Omprakash for comparing life led by the Chuhras with the life of Dronacharya. On this occasion, the young Omprakash once again speaks only through reported speech, while the teacher – like the father in example 4.1 – uses direct speech.

Example 4.2

One time, the schoolmaster was teaching a lesson about Dronacharya. Nearly crying, the master told [us] that Dronacharya gave to Ashwatthama,[303] who was restless from hunger, floor mixed with water instead of milk. Having heard the painful portrayal of Drona's poverty, the whole class broke out in sighs. […]

I got up and had the insolence of asking *masṭār sāhab* a question. Ash-

[303] Ashwatthama (Aśvatthāmā) is Dronacharya's son, who has a difficult childhood as a result of his father's simple and ascetic life.

watthama was given floor mixed with water, and we got rice *māṛ* [(water left over from boiling rice)]. Then why were we not mentioned in some epic? Why had no poet written a word about our life?[304] (Valmiki 1999: 34).

On this occasion, Valmiki's choice of reported speech and thus standard Hindi for the voice of the main protagonist seems particularly apt, since the young Omprakash's criticism can reasonably be understood as a criticism that the author aims at the casteist system and all who supported it in the past and continue to do so in the present. Choosing non-standard Hindi on this occasion would have meant depriving his criticism of a sense of authority and making it sound implausible. In fact, non-standard Hindi as the voice of the main protagonist appears only twice in the whole book: once in the village setting and once in the city setting (see section 3 below). In the village setting, this happens on the occasion discussed above in example 3.7, on which the boy is pleading with his mother to let him go back to school.

Example 4.3

Translation: As soon as I came back home, I told mom: "Mom, I need to go to school".

Hindi original: *ghar pahũcᵊte hī maiṃne mā̃ se kahā, "mā̃,* ***mainne*** *skūl* ***jāṇā*** *hai"* (Valmiki 1999: 24).

Standard: *ghar pahũcᵊte hī maiṃne mā̃ se kahā, "mā̃,* ***mujhe/mujhᵊko*** *skūl* ***jānā*** *hai"*.

---

[304] Hindi original: *ek bār skūl meṃ māsṭar sāhab droṇācārya kā pāṭh paṛhā rahe the. māsṭar sāhab ne lagbᵊhag ruā̃sā hokar batāyā thā ki droṇācārya ne bhūkh se taṛapᵊte aśvatthāmā ko āṭā pānī meṃ gholᵊkar pilāyā thā, dūdh kī jagah. droṇa kī garībī kā dāruṇ nakśā sunᵊkar pūrī kakśā hāy-hāy kar uṭhī thī.* [...]

maiṃ khaṛā hokar māsṭar śahab se ek savāl pūch lene kī dhṛśṭᵊta kī thī. aśvatthāmā ko to dūdh kī jagah āṭe kā ghol pilāyā gayā aur hameṃ cāval kā mā̃ṛ. phir kisī bhī mahākāvya meṃ hamārā jikr kyoṃ nahīṃ āyā? kisī mahākavi ne hamāre jīvan par ek bhī śabd kyoṃ nahīṃ likhā?

Here, the main protagonist's short direct speech is marked by two non-standard forms: *mainne* instead of *mujhe/mujhᵎko* as well as *jāṇā* instead of *jānā*. Since, as I have shown earlier, non-standard Hindi is used by Valmiki in the village setting to mark the speakers as not formally educated, by choosing this speech form for the main protagonist on this occasion Valmiki emphasizes his protagonist's need of formal education and expertly accentuates with it the context in which it is used. Later in the book, starting from page 40,[305] direct speech is used for the main protagonist's voice and it is standard Hindi in all instances, except for one deviation which is discussed in section 3 below.

One could speculate that since non-standard Hindi is mainly used in the village setting to mark people as uneducated, the author might have found it difficult to decide when and how exactly the main protagonist's speech should transform from non-standard to standard, being, as mentioned before, the only person in *Jūṭhan* who undergoes the transformation from an uneducated to an educated person in the course of the narrative. This might be a reason for Valmiki to have chosen not to let his main protagonist as a young boy use direct speech at all. Another reason might be that Valmiki chose reported speech over direct, because it helped his main protagonist sound more competent or authoritative than he would sound were he to use non-standard speech. Whatever the author's reasons, the effect that is achieved by this approach is that the main protagonist's voice – whatever his age – never sounds like the voice of an uneducated or incompetent person. And since, according to Philippe Lejeune (1989: 14), the main protagonist, the author and the narrator of an autobiography are (with some reservations) identical, this approach also adds credibility and a sense of competence to the narrator's voice and the author himself.

[305] On pages 40, 42, 43, 47, 55, 71, *inter multa alia.*

3 Marked Speech in "the City"

The main protagonist relocates from his native village Barla to go to college in Dehradun, where he lives with his uncle, whom he calls *māmā* (maternal uncle), and his older brother Jasbīr. What I call the "city setting" of *Jūṭhan* starts at this point and continues until the end of the book. There are very few examples of non-standard Hindi in the city setting and on the first pages of it, Valmiki's usage of standard and non-standard forms of Hindi changes to accommodate another aspect.

The first of these examples contains a single non-standard word used by the main protagonist himself, while all the other speakers use standard Hindi. In the context of the episode, Omprakash, who is the new boy in a city school now, is bullied by some other boys due to the appearance of his clothes. When Omprakash is spoken to by a city boy, it is standard Hindi that is being used:

> Example 5.1
>
> Which tailor was this made by? Give us his address, too[306] (Valmiki 1999: 85).

But when Omprakash answers, a non-standard word form slips out:

> Translation: [It] will tear… let it go...
>
> Hindi Original: *phaṭ* ***jāgī****… ise choṛ do…* (ibid.)
>
> Standard: *phaṭ* ***jāegī****… ise choṛ do…*

[306] Hindi original: *kis ṭelar se silᑊvāī hai? hameṃ bhī usᑊkā patā de do*.

The fact that Omprakash's use of the non-standard future form *jāgī* instead of *jāegī* is not an accidental one is made clear by the subsequent sentence: "They laughed out loud at my rural accent"[307] (Valmiki 1999: 86). To this, another city boy replies mockingly, while also using standard Hindi: "Which village did you arrive from, sir?"[308] (ibid.). I argue that on this and the following occasions, Valmiki uses the tension between non-standard and standard forms of Hindi in direct speech to accentuate the difference between "people from the city" and "people from the village".

In the next instance, the city residents Omprakash, his brother Jasbīr and their uncle all speak standard Hindi, despite the fact that of the three, Omprakash is the only one who has been formally educated. Each of the characters speak in the context of a conflict that arose between Omprakash and his uncle.

> Example 5.2
>
> [Uncle:] Should something happen to you, what will I tell my brother-in-law and sister? […]
>
> [Jasbīr:] You came here to study… Leave these useless things. […]
>
> [Omprakash:] *Māmā*, all my friends are educated boys. I don't roam around with louts and rogues. I don't do anything else but study. […]
>
> [Uncle:] Tell him he is not to return here. Let him go to the village[309] (Valmiki 1999: 90f.).

[307] Hindi original: *mere dehātī lahˈje par ve jor se hãse the*.

[308] Hindi original: *kis gā̃v se padhāre ho jī?*

[309] Hindi original: [Uncle:] *tumheṃ kuch ho gayā to maiṃ apˈne jījā aur bahan ko kyā javāb dū̃gā*?

[Jasbīr:] *tū yahā̃ paṛhˈne āyā hai, aise phālˈtū ke kām choṛ*.

[Omprakash:] *māmā, mere sabhī dost paṛhˈne-likhˈnevāle laṛˈke haiṃ. maiṃ guṃḍe-badˈmāśoṃ ke sāth nahīṃ ghūmˈtā hūṃ. paṛhāī-likhāī ke alāvā maiṃ koī kām nahīṃ karˈtā hūṃ*.

[Uncle:] *isˈse kah de lauṭˈkar yahā̃ na āe, gā̃v calā jāe*.

All three characters use grammatically correct standard Hindi without any non-standard words or word forms. The uncle character even uses the standard absolutive suffix *kar* – and not *ke*, as it has appeared in several examples with non-standard forms – when he says *isˡse kah de lauṭˡkar yahā̃ na āe* ("tell him he is not to return here"). While there are no previous occasions on which the uncle uses direct speech, the Jasbīr character uses non-standard Hindi on other occasions. In addition, the utterances are complete and long enough to allow one to argue that it was the author's intention to let the characters use standard Hindi on this occasion. In contrast, when Omprakash goes to the village to let his father give him advice on the situation, the father's response is particularly long and non-standard.

Example 5.3

Translation: Do what seems right to you. After all, I am an uneducated villager. But don't discredit my name. You need to study further. Go from here directly to Dehradun. Tell Harˡphul (my uncle) that [I] had given him refuge that time in Barla, when he didn't know anything. After that, I kept his lad (Surˡjan) in Barla for two years. He has forgotten… If he won't keep you with him, I will arrange something else. Why do you worry?

Hindi original: *terī samajh meṃ jo thīk lage, tū kar. maiṃ to anˡpaṛh-gãvār hū̃. par merā* ***nā*** *(nām) badˡnām na karˡnā, rahī* ***āgge*** *paṛhˡne kī bāt. tū yahā̃ se* ***sidhyā dehˡre*** *(dehˡrādūn) hī* ***jāṇā****. harˡphūl (mere māmā)* ***te kahˡṇā****, use us* ***ṭem*** *barˡle meṃ panāh dī thī,* ***jib*** *vah kuch* ***bī*** *nā* ***jāṇe*** *thā. bād meṃ usˡke lauṃḍe (surˡjan) ko do sāl barˡlā rakhā. use bhūl* ***giyā****... vah apˡne sāth nahīṃ rakhegā, to maiṃ terā alag iṃtajām kar dū̃gā. tū* ***phikir kyūṃ kare*** *hai?* (Valmiki 1999: 92).

Standard: *terī samajh meṃ jo thīk lage, tū kar. maiṃ to anˡpaṛh-gãvār hū̃. par merā* ***nām*** *(nām) badˡnām na karˡnā, rahī* ***āge*** *paṛhˡne kī bāt. tū yahā̃ se* ***sidhe dehˡrādūn*** *(dehˡrādūn) hī* ***jānā****. harˡphūl (mere māmā)* ***se***

***kahˡnā**, use us **ṭāim** barˡle meṃ panāh dī thī, **jab** vah kuch **bhī** nā **jāne** thā. bād meṃ usˡke lauṃḍe (surˡjan) ko do sāl barˡlā rakhā. use bhūl **gayā**... vah apˡne sāth nahīṃ rakhegā, to maiṃ terā alag iṃtajām kar dū̃gā. tū **phikar kyoṃ kar rahe** hai?*

As mentioned before, Valmiki does not use much direct speech in *Jūṭhan* as a rule and each instance appears to be strategically placed. It is therefore remarkable that the father's speech in this case is significantly longer than on any other occasion and that it is so emphatically non-standard as to contain several forms that have not appeared before. There are many word forms in this excerpt that appeared in instances of non-standard speech earlier in the book: the retroflex *ṇa* in several verb forms (*kahˡṇā* instead of *kahˡnā*, *jāṇā* instead of *jānā*, etc.), the *i* in *giyā* instead of *gayā*, the absence of aspiration in *bī* instead of *bhī*, the shortened continuous verb form *kare hai* instead of *kar rahe hai*, etc. But there are also several new non-standard forms: *sidhyā* for *sidhe*, *te* instead of *se*, *nā* instead of *nām*, which is explained in a parenthetical gloss and, interestingly, the English word "time" that has been written in a non-standard way: *ṭem* instead of *ṭāim*. This is the only occasion on which a villager uses an English word in direct speech in the whole book. Additionally, the grammar seems to be non-standard on several occasions as well: the verb form of "***jib** vah kuch **bī** nā **jāṇe** thā*" seems peculiar: instead of the perfective participle *jāne* one would expect the verb to be imperfective: *nā jānˡtā thā*. Similarly, in "*use bhūl **giyā***" standard usage would be to use the personal pronoun *vah*, not *use*.

On the whole, the reader is left with the impression that the author goes out of his way to emphasize the non-standard nature of the "uneducated villager's" speech in contrast to the standard speech used by city residents. Valmiki doesn't leave room for interpretation, when he lets the father himself explain his choice of words: "After all, I am an uneducated villager" (*maiṃ to anˡpaṛh-gãvār hū̃*).

Later, when Valmiki describes his life in a student hostel, he writes about students who were dissatisfied with the state of rotis[310] (*rotī*) they were served at the student mess (*mais*). He writes that his and his friend Vijay Bahādur's point of view regarding the rotis was different. When a fight broke out and rotis flew through the air, his friend could not contain his anger and said:

Example 5.4

Translation: You ass! You don't know the price of this roti! How much hard work it takes to grow it in the field… do you know?

Hindi original: *oe,* ***khotte****! tū is* ***roṭṭī*** *kī kīmat* ***nī jāṇˈtā****! ise khet meṃ ugāne meṃ kitˈnī mehˈnat lagˈtī hai… tujhe patā hai* (Valmiki 1999: 101).

Standard: *oe, khotte! tū is* ***rotī*** *kī kīmat* ***nahīṃ jānˈtā****! ise khet meṃ ugāne meṃ kitˈnī mehˈnat lagˈtī hai… tujhe patā hai*.

Valmiki's friend Vijay Bahadūr uses direct speech on several other occasions in the book, yet, it is only on this occasion that he uses any non-standard word forms. On this occasion, his short speech is marked by four non-standard forms: in the word *rotī* the *ta* has been doubled and changed to retroflex instead of dental: *roṭṭī*; the negative particle *nahīṃ* has been shortened to *nī*, the dental *na* in *jānˈtā*, too, is retroflex instead of dental. In addition, Vijay Bahadūr's speech uses the Punjabi word *khottā* ("ass, donkey"[311]) instead of a Hindi word. Vijay, like Omprakash, is a boy who comes from a village, and since the context on this occasion points to the previously mentioned difference between people from the city and people from the village, it seems obvious that his choice of words should be attributed to it.

[310] A flat, round bread usually cooked on a griddle.

[311] https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/singh_query.py?page=603 accessed on 14.09.22.

All previous examples in this section suggest one conclusion: in the city setting Valmiki uses a non-standard form of Hindi in direct speech to differentiate between village and city residents. In the cases when Omprakash himself and his friend Vijay Bahadūr use non-standard Hindi, it happens only when there is a need to emphasize the difference between “people from the city” and “people from the village”. On other occasions their speech is standard. At the same time, the same person – Omprakash himself, his brother Jasbīr or Vijay Bahadūr – can be marked as one or the other depending on what is necessary according to context. When, in the first example used in this section, Omprakash is a new boy from a village, who is being bullied by city boys in his new school, his speech is non-standard, but when he is a young man, who knows what is best better than his “uneducated” (*anˈpaṛh*) father, his speech is standard, while the father’s speech is heavily marked.

At times, it looks like what is being accentuated through the tension between the two speech forms is the “progressive” aspect of the city and the “backward” aspect of the village, while other examples suggest that what is being stressed is a gap between the village and the city, which has more than one defining feature. Examples quoted above imply that people from the city might dress better (example 5.1) and be better educated (example 5.3), but they do not understand life in the village, do not know the value of bread and pay too much attention to outer appearances (examples 5.4 and 5.1).

Non-standard forms of Hindi virtually disappear from the book after the first pages of the city setting. On a few later occasions Valmiki’s mother uses non-standard Hindi in direct speech, when the main protagonist is said to have returned to his village for a visit. Her usage of this form is in no way different from previously discussed instances and stresses the difference between the formally not educated mother and her educated son.

Valmiki falls back on the usage of a non-standard form of Hindi in direkt speech once more on page 149, when he writes about an official he met in the course of his professional life, who turned out to be from the same region as Valmiki himself. Seeing the name "Valmiki", this man exclaims:

Example 5.5

Translation: *Abe*, wretch, you have made it this far!

Hindi Original: *abe,* ***sauhˈre*** *(sasure) yahā̃ tak pahũc* ***giyā***! (Valmiki 1999: 149).

Standard: *abe,* ***sasure*** *(sasure) yahā̃ tak pahũc* ***gayā***!

The very short exclamation is marked by the non-standard verb form *giyā* instead of *gayā*, the non-standard word *sauhˈre* which is explained in a parenthetical gloss as *sasure*[312] and by the pejorative interjection *abe*.[313] Without these words, the exclamation could have had a positive connotation; as it is, however, by virtue of the non-standard speech and pejorative vocabulary the speaker is made sound not only abusive, but also incompetent. It can be said that on this occasion Valmiki returns to the village setting definition of his usage of non-standard speech forms of Hindi as being used by formally not educated people or at least, people who are being made sound uninformed in the contest of caste oppression.

The only other instances of marked speech in *Jūṭhan* are two appearances of another language – Marathi in one case, Punjabi in the other – which are discussed in chapter 5 "Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment".

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[312] The word literally means "father-in-law", but it is often used as a form of abusive address.

[313] See section 2.2 in this chapter above.

4 Conclusion

In his autobiography *Jūṭhan*, Omprakash Valmiki uses standard and non-standard forms of Hindi in direct speech to suggest to the reader particular differences between speakers. In the village setting, he uses a non-standard form of Hindi to mark speakers as not formally educated, this form of speech is contrasted with the speech used by school teachers, who are implicitly marked as educated through the usage of standard Hindi in direct speech. At the same time, in the context of caste discrimination school teachers are marked as less knowledgeable or competent through the usage of some non-standard forms in direct speech. In contrast, people who have been marked as not formally educated in other instances are made sound more credible or authoritative in the context of *dalit cetˡnā* or Dalit consciousness by the usage of more standard forms in their speech.

For the main protagonist himself, Valmiki's autobiography on several occasions in the beginning of the book choses reported speech instead of direct, for example, when the main protagonist is a child and could not possibly be regarded as formally educated or more knowledgeable than his elders. As the narrative progresses, the main protagonist's speech becomes direct and standard, with two minor strategic exceptions. One of them is meant to emphasize the protagonist's need to continue his education, while the other – in the city setting of *Jūṭhan* – serves as a means to accentuate the difference between village and city residents.

In the city setting of *Jūṭhan*, the same difference – between people from the village and people from the city – is highlighted by the same means, that is, through the usage of standard and non-standard forms of Hindi in direct speech. Depending on the requirements of the context, the same person might be marked as "rural" or "urban" on different occasions.

Chapter 5

Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment

1 Introduction

This chapter examines another distinctive narrative technique used by Omprakash Valmiki in his autobiography *Jūṭhan*. While still relying on the tension between standard and non-standard forms of Hindi created by Valmiki in his autobiography, which is discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter analyzes how through his narrative, Valmiki challenges and contradicts the message of the short story *Dūdh kā dām* written by Munshi Premchand, and in particular, an infamous phrase uttered by one of its characters.

1.1 Premchand and Dalit Literature

Dhanpat Rai Srivastava (Dhanˈpat Rāy Śrīvāstava) (1880–1936), better known by his pen name Munshi Premchand (Muṃśī Premcaṃd) can today still be called the best known and most prominent modern Hindi writer. In her book *Untouchable Fictions. Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*, Toral Jatin Gajarawala writes that “modern Hindi literature, it is said, begins with Premchand” (Gajarawala 2013: 32). Similarly, in her work entitled *Writing Resistance. The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*, Laura Brueck states that “it is impossible to overstate the prominence of Premchand in north Indian literary and cultural imagination” (Brueck 2014: 45). The significance of Premchand for Dalit literature is also enormous and, according to Gajarawala, “if modern Hindi prose literature ‘begins’ with Premchand, Hindi Dalit literature might be said to begin with opposition to Premchand” (Gajarawala 2013: 33). She proceeds to explain that, though Hindi Dalit writing began much later, “an ideological opposition to Premc-

hand and the rhetoric of sympathy he is seen to represent may be where we can locate the first affective stirrings of Dalit literary opposition" (ibid.). This opposition culminated on July 31, 2004, when members of the Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Akademi (BDSA, "Indian Dalit Literary Academy") organized a symbolic burning of several copies of the Premchand novel *Rangbhūmī* (1924). Gajarawala states that with the burning of copies of the novel, Dalit writers also burned "an icon, a worldview, a genre, an ideology" (ibid.).

Premchand was the first notable Hindi writer to introduce realism as a literary genre and to depict "lower caste" characters in his writings. However, his characters are often seen as passive, lacking in agency objects to be pitied by the readers rather than active and angry subjects who refuse to submit to caste hierarchy. Dalit writers have accused Premchand of a "lingering faith in *varnavyavastha*, the caste system as a whole", of having a "feudal" outlook, of being a "Chamar-hating Kayastha" (Gajarawala 2013: 37) and of favoring Gandhian ideas (Valmiki 2010: 144ff.).[314]

One of several short stories written by Premchand dealing with the notion of caste oppression and untouchability, in which characters from "untouchable" *jāti*s figure prominently, is *Dūdh kā dām* (*The Price of Milk*, first published in 1934). In this short story, a woman from the Bhangi[315] *jāti* called Bhungi (Bhũ̃gī) rears the son of the village zamindar (*zamīnˈdār*)[316] Babu Maheshnath (Bābū Maheśˈnāth) with her breast milk, while her own infant son doesn't get enough motherly attention and nourishment. Several years later Bhungi dies while working at Babu Maheshnath's house leaving her son Mangal (Maṃgal) an orphan. With only a dog as companion, he lives in the proximity of the house, being dependent on food leftovers (*jūṭhan*) from the big house. When Mangal is

[314] For more detailed discussions see Gajarawala 2013: 1–68 and Brueck 2014: 43–61.

[315] See footnote 84.

[316] "A tax collector or landlord in India under the Mogul empire. The landlord system formed the basis of a system of land-settlement developed in India under British rule". (cited from: https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803133350561, accessed on 30.06.22.)

wrongly accused of hurting Maheshnath's son Suresh (*Sureś*), he is insulted and contemplates leaving. However, at night, hunger brings him back. When, after this ordeal, Mangal, who has been waiting in darkness outside the door of the big house, finally gets the leftovers from Maheshnath's table, his eyes are "full of humble gratitude" (Premchand 2004: 232).

Brueck (2014: 12f.) has pointed to a link between *Dudh Kā Dām* and *Jūṭhan* insofar as, in Valmiki's autobiography, food leftovers also play a critical part. In the vital passage that gave *Jūṭhan* its title young Omprakash's mother first begs for and then, after being insulted by an "upper caste" neighbor, in whose house she does menial labor, proudly rejects food leftovers (*jūṭhan*) that members of the Chuhra *jāti* traditionally received from "upper caste" houses on occasions of big feasts in Valmiki's native village Barla.[317]

In this episode, Valmiki's mother is "sitting outside the door"[318] of the "upper caste" house, in the same way in which, in Premchand's *Dūdh kā dām*, Mangal and his dog wait outside the door for the *jūṭhan* from Maheshnath's table.[319] If one looks at the two episodes in contrast, Valmiki's mother's rejection of the *jūṭhan* she has been waiting for, becomes doubly significant, as it can also be seen as a rejection of Mangal's passive acceptance of his fate. For Brueck (2014: 13), "Valmiki […] sees his mother's angry denial of her own humiliation as the revolutionary spark that defines […] his life's journey out of mental slavery of untouchability". Debjani Ganguly mentions the same episode as the defining moment in Valmiki's "transformation from a little *churha* [(sic)] boy reconciled to assuaging his hunger from upper caste 'leftovers' to a battler against the

[317] This incident is also mentioned in section 2.3 in chapter 4 "Forms of Hindi as a Rhetorical Strategy: *Dalit Cetˡnā* in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*", where the dialogue between the mother and the Taga neighbor is reproduced.

[318] "Mother was sitting outside the door with a basket". (Hindi original: *mā̃ ṭokˡrā lie darˡvāje se bāhar baiṭhī thī*; Valmiki 1999: 21).

[319] "They both […] stood outside Maheshnath's door concealed in the darkness". (Hindi original: *donõ [...] maheśˡnāth ke dvār par ādhere meṃ dabakˡkar khaṛe ho gae*; Premchand 1996: 289)

scourge of untouchability, a transformation that […] is captured in a narrative frame quite akin to a *Bildungsroman*" (Ganguly 2009: 436). In other words, Valmiki's depiction of his mother's outraged action represents exactly that, which according to Dalit writers, is lacking in Premchand's writing. The mother, a member of an "untouchable" *jāti* is portrayed in this episode of *Jūṭhan* as an active subject, contrary to the meek and passive Mangal from *Dūdh kā dām*. The notion of "waiting outside the door" is reiterated in *Jūṭhan* on two further occasions. On page 26, Valmiki writes that as a school boy, he has been forced to wait outside the door at school functions:

> I was kept away from cultural programs and activities. On such occasions, I just stood on one side and became a spectator. When on occasion of the school annual festival, there was a rehearsal of a play, etc., I too wished I could get a role. But I always had to stand outside the door. The so-called descendants of gods cannot understand this pain of standing outside the door[320] (Valmiki 1999: 26f.).

Significantly, Valmiki's main protagonist is portrayed here as someone who looks to play an active part, but is being forced by the "so-called descendants of gods" to stand outside the door – just like Mangal is forced to stand outside the door by casteist society in *Dūdh kā dām*. Yet, there is a clear difference between Mangal and young Omprakash: Omprakash wishes to actively participate in the school play and is not reconciled with his passivity. The "standing outside the door" is once again mentioned on the very last page of *Jūṭhan*:

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[320] Hindi original: *mujhe sāṃskr̥tik kāryakramoṃ, kriyākalāpoṃ se dūr rakhā jātā thā. aise vakt, maiṃ sirf kināre khaṛā hokar darśak banā rahˡtā thā. skūl ke vārṣik utsav meṃ jab nāṭak ādi kā pūrvābhyās hotā thā, merī bhī icchā hotī thī koī bhūmikā mujhe bhī mile. lekin hameśā darˡvāje ke bāhar khaṛā rahˡnā paṛˡtā thā. darˡvāje ke bāhar khaṛe rahˡne kī is pīṛā ko tathākathit devˡtāoṃ ke vaṃśaj nahīṃ samajh sakˡte*.

> Poverty, lack of education, broken harsh lives, the pain of standing outside the door – how will the high-born possessed of good qualities Savarna Hindus be able to know these?
>
> Why is '*jāti*'[321] my identity?[322] Some friends point to my loudness, my being arrogant in my writings. Their intimation is that I am trapped in a narrow circle. Literary expression should be comprehended in broader meanings. One should leave constriction behind. That is, my being a Dalit and forming [my own] point of view on a subject in accordance with my surroundings and social and cultural situation means being arrogant, because in their view I am just an SC, one who stands outside the door[323] (Valmiki 1999: 160).

In this excerpt Valmiki equates "one who stands outside the door" with a Scheduled Caste[324] member and the notion of "standing outside the door" with "poverty, lack of education, broken harsh lives". Standing outside the door clearly means in Valmiki's vocabulary being excluded from society[325] – an evil of which he accuses people who adhere to casteist principles. Looking once again at the parallel between *Jūṭhan* and *Dūdh*

[321] Single quotation marks in original, see chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?".

[322] The word *pahˈcān* means "recognition, distinguishing mark, identity, etc". With this word Valmiki refers to his chosen surname Valmiki, which constitutes a *jāti* marker. See chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?".

[323] Hindi original: *garībī, aśikṣā, chinn-bhinn dāruṇ jiṃdagī, darˈvāje ke bāhar khaṛe rahˈne kī pīṛā bhalā abhijātya guṇoṃ se saṃpann savarṇ hiṃdū kaise jān pāẽge? 'jāti' hī merī pahacān kyoṃ? kaī mitr merī racˈnāoṃ meṃ mere lāuḍˈnais, airogaiṃṭ ho jāne kī or iśārā karˈte haiṃ. unˈkā iśārā hotā hai ki maiṃ saṃkīrṇ dāyˈre meṃ kaid hū̃. sāhityik abhivyakti ko vyāpak arthoṃ meṃ grahaṇ karˈnā cāhie. saṃkīrṇatā se bāhar ānā cāhie. yānī merā dalit honā aur kisī viṣay par apˈne pariveś, apˈnī sāmājik-ārthik sthiti ke anusār dr̥ṣṭikoṇ banānā airogaiṃṭ ho jānā hai, kyoṃki maiṃ unˈkī najar meṃ sirf es. sī. hū̃, darˈvāje ke bāhar khaṛā rahˈnevālā*.

[324] See chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?".

[325] See also the description of the "barrier" – i.e. the pond Dabbowali – between the village Barla, and the *bastī* in which Omprakash Valmiki grew up and the corresponding close reading section in the introduction to this dissertation.

kā dām, one can say that Valmiki accuses casteist society of trying to force him into the part played by Mangal in Premchand's story.

Valmiki's autobiography is not the only one of his works in which he refers to Premchand and his writings. Valmiki's poem *Thākur kā kuāṃ* (The Thakur's well) is a direct response to Premchand's short story of the same name.[326, 327] In this short story, Premchand depicts the "lower caste" woman Gangi (Gaṃgī), who, in a way similar to Mangal, stands hidden in the darkness not daring to draw water from the Thakur's well for her sick husband (Premchand 2004: 109). Challenging even the notion of a well that belongs to the Thakur, in his poem, Valmiki poignantly asks, if the well belongs to the Thakur, what belongs to oneself: "the village? the city? the country?" (*gā̃v? śahar? deś?*; Bharti 2006: 56).

In this context, the nickname Munshi Ji (*muṃśī jī*),[328] with which Valmiki's father often addresses his son in the book, appears in a new light. As mentioned above, Premchand's full pen name is Munshi Premchand (although he is generally known as Premchand today). The word *muṃśī* is a very common title for anyone who has to do with writing and generally "a title of respect to an educated man" (McGregor 2004b: 816). Since young Omprakash was one of very few educated people in his community at the time, it would be quite plausible for his father to affectionately call him Munshi Ji. Nonetheless, Valmiki's extremely conscious and careful use of language and choice of phrasing has been sufficiently demonstrated by this point to allow one to argue that his decision to use this nickname in his autobiography can hardly be incidental. On the contrary, it con-

[326] Premchand's short story *Thākur kā kuāṃ* was first published in 1932.

[327] The word *ṭhākur* can have various meanings, but means, both, in the case of Premchand's story as well as Valmiki's poem "a title of respect, used in the names of people who own large areas of land or people of high social rank" as defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/thakur, accessed on 15.09.22.).

[328] For instance, on pages 16 and 31, see chapter 4 "Forms of Hindi as a Rhetorical Strategy: *Dalit Cet'nā* in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*".

stitutes another link between Valmiki and his autobiography and Premchand and his writings. Using several elements of Premchand's story, Valmiki constructs his own narrative through which he challenges both Premchand and casteist society. In this manner, in *Jūṭhan*, Valmiki's protagonist undergoes a transformation from Premchand's Mangal – a young uneducated boy who is waiting outside the door hoping to receive some *jūṭhan* – to Omprakash Valmiki, a writer (Munshi Ji) who refuses to be a passive spectator and instead, plays an active part in his own live and fortune. The very fact of the existence of his autobiography is a case in point.

1.2 Premchand and the Babu Maheshnath Utterance

In the beginning of *Dūdh kā dām*, in the middle of a discussion with Bhungi, the character Babu Maheshnath[329] utters the following phrase:

> Whatever else might happen in the world, Bhangi will remain Bhangi. It is hard to make people out of them[330, 331] (Premchand 1996: 284).

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[329] An utterance very similar in essence also appears in Premchand's novel *Gaban* (1931), see Gajarawala 2013: 37 for details. Premchand was an extremely prolific writer and might have used a similar phrase in other works as well. However, since this is not the only connection between *Jūṭhan* and *Dūdh kā dām*, I maintain that it is this short story that Valmiki references in his autobiography. I therefore refer to the utterance as the "Maheshnath utterance" henceforth.

[330] Hindi original: *duṇiyā mẽ aur cāhe jo kuch ho jāe, bhaṃgī bhaṃgī hī raheṃge. inheṃ ādˈmī banānā kaṭhin hai*.

[331] "*ādˈmī banānā*" is an idiomatic phrase that is translated in the *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* as "to educate, to civilise" (McGregor 2004b: 85), however, I chose to translate it literally to better convey the underlying meaning.

Bhungi, whose *jāti* is Bhangi, responds by saying that Bhangis "make people" out of "big people" (*bhaṃgī to baṛoṃ-baṛoṃ ko ādˈmī banāte haiṃ*; ibid.), alluding to the traditional occupation of Bhangi women as wet nurses in "high caste" households. "Why would anyone need to make people out of them?" (*unheṃ koī kyā ādˈmī banāye*; ibid.) Bhangi's retort is seen as a great impertinence, but since her services are still urgently needed in the big house, it is laughed off and forgotten. The incident has a much longer life in the Dalit literary world. In Dalit writer Ajay Navaria's well-known short story *Uttarˈkathā*,[332] first published in 2012, Maheshnath's utterance is explicitly mentioned as a pretext for an unnamed gentleman, who looks suspiciously like Premchand, to write this "answer story":

> He started taking something out of his bag: "Have a look at this sentence: 'Whatever else might happen in the world, Bhangi will remain Bhangi. It is hard to make people out of them.' How is it?"
>
> "Did you say this?" there was something like irritation in my voice, or ridicule or it might have been just dissatisfaction.
>
> "A character belonging to the Thakur [(*ṭhākur*)] *jāti* from the Premchand story '*Dūdh kā dām*' said this". He gazed at me in silence, then, standing awkwardly, started cracking his knuckles. There was despair [written] on his forehead that seemed to have been born out of a mental struggle of some days. He put his hands into the pockets of his kurta and when he took them out again, the empty pockets of the kurta [came out and] dangled like the squeezed out teats of a goat. "Why was this said? This is my concern"[333] (Navariya 2012: 88).

[332] Literally "the answer story"; "Hello Premchand!" in Laura Brueck's translation.

[333] Hindi original: *vah thaile meṃ se kuch nikālˈne lage – 'dekhiye jarā yah vākya – 'duniyā meṃ aur cāhe jo kuch ho jāe, bhaṃgī bhaṃgī hī raheṃge. inheṃ ādˈmī banānā kaṭhin hai.' kaisā hai?' unhoṃne pūchā.*

'yah āpˈne kahā hai kyā?' mere svar meṃ kuch khīj jaisī thī, yā upahās yā phir śāyad vah asaṃtoṣ hī ho.

yah premchaṃd kī kahānī 'dūdh kā dām' ke ek ṭhākur jāti ke pātr ne kahā hai.' vah mujhe cupˈcāp tākˈne lage, phir khaṛe-khaṛe apˈnī uṃgliyāṃ caṭˈkāne lage. unˈke māthe par hatāśā thī, jo kāfī dinoṃ kī kaśˈ-

This short passage from the beginning of Navaria's short story, challenges not only Babu Maheshnath's utterance, but also Premchand himself. The unnamed gentleman obviously represents Premchand at least in part, and his awkwardness, the cracking of his knuckles, the struggling that has been with him for several days, as well as the empty teat-like pockets suggest that there is no reasonable explanation for this utterance, no substance to it. At the same time, the image of the empty teats hints at the "lack of milk" in Maheshnath's house – the reason, for which Bhungi, in the original Premchand story, has to become the wet nurse to Maheshnath's young son. This image effectively contests the notion that people from "upper castes" are to be regarded as the Haves while people from "lower castes" as the Have-Nots, since in *Dūdh kā dām* it is Babu Maheshnath's unnamed wife who does not have milk to feed her son and the woman from the Bhangi *jāti* who does. Navaria's unnamed character proceeds to hand the first-person narrator some papers, which he calls *uttar* ("response"), and which contain the embedded narrative that follows. This embedded story is the *Uttarˈkathā* itself, which re-tells the story of Mangal and provides "responses" to several short stories written by Premchand, which feature characters from "lower castes".

Navaria's short story is certainly worthy of a deeper analysis, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.[334] However, it should be noted that his narrative illustrates how deeply the Dalit literary consciousness is affected by Premchand's legacy and the story *Dūdh kā dām* in particular. Dalit writers like Omprakash Valmiki and Ajay Navaria reject the patronizing empathy of non-Dalit writers such as Premchand and respond by bestowing agency upon their characters. Or, as Brueck aptly puts it,

> Therein lies the difference in most Dalit writing. Charging that non-Dalit writers, however sympathetic, use the Dalit character as an object of em-

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makaś se paidā huī lagˈtī thī. unhoṃne apˈne donoṃ hāth, apˈne kurˈte kī jeboṃ meṃ ḍāle aur phir jab bāhar nikāle to kurˈte kī khālī jebeṃ bāhar aise laṭak gaīṃ, jaise bakˈrī ke nicuṛe hue than hoṃ. 'kyoṃ kahā gayā aisā, merī ciṃtā yah hai?'

[334] See Brueck 2014: 12–15 for a further discussion of Navaria's short story.

> pathic connection and subsequently locate the impetus for social change *outside* of that Dalit object, Dalit writers instead seek to invest their characters with subjectivity and the power to resist, rebel, and change. *This* is Dalit consciousness[335] (Brueck 2014: 14f.).

The change that Brueck is talking about is what Babu Maheshnath's utterance denies Bhangis and by extension all Dalits. This same change is what Navaria grants Mangal through his narrative and what Valmiki turns into a major motif of his autobiography. While the connection between Navaria's *Uttarkathā* and *Dūdh kā dām* is explicit and straightforward, Valmiki's approach is much more subtle. Instead of introducing and discussing the subject directly, he lets three different characters, on three different occasions in his autobiography utter a slightly paraphrased variant of what I call the "Maheshnath utterance". These three characters either address the main protagonist directly or – as in the last instance – merely utter the phrase in his vicinity, thus giving the narrator an opportunity to respond to it in the main text.

All three instances contain direct speech and feature an interplay between standard and non-standard Hindi and with it the tension between formally educated and/or competent speakers versus incompetent ones.[336] On the following pages I close read and discuss these three instances and show how Valmiki uses the Maheshnath utterance to didactically promote one of the main messages of his autobiography. Namely that what is needed for members of castes formerly labeled as "untouchable" in order to improve their life circumstances and advance socially or, to change and not to "remain a Bhangi", is education.

[335] See chapter 4 "Forms of Hindi as a Rhetorical Strategy: *Dalit Cetꞌnā* in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*" for a discussion of *dalit cetꞌnā* or Dalit consciousness.

[336] See chapter 4 "Forms of Hindi as a Rhetorical Strategy: *Dalit Cetꞌnā* in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*".

2 First Appearance of the Maheshnath Utterance: Fears and Doubts

The first instance occurs on page 40. The main characters of the episode are the young Omprakash, on his way to school, and an older boy called Br̥jeś Tagā, a boy from the Taga (*tagā*) or Tyagi (*tyagī*) *jāti*, which is the dominant *jāti* in the village. The scene is set with the following description.

> Sūrajbhān Tagā's son Br̥jeś was coming right behind me. He was quite a few years older than me. He had a rather long stick on his shoulder. He might have been going to the field. The moment he saw me, he started muttering something. I pretended not to hear and went on. Just when we came to the *kothī* (a building belonging to the irrigation company), he spoke. The school was a little further away, "*Abe*, Chuhre *ke*, stop"[337, 338] (Valmiki 1999: 40).

The scene abounds with an atmosphere of danger, even though nothing as yet has happened. The young protagonist finds himself far away from any shelter or people he could ask for help, one on one with an older boy who has a "long stick" (*ek laṃbī-sī lāṭhī*) on his shoulder and is obviously aggressively disposed. He addresses Omprakash with the derogatory form of address (*abe, cūhˈṛe ke*) introduced by Valmiki earlier in the book.

[337] "*Abe*, Chuhre *ke*" roughly means "hey, Chuhra's offspring", see chapter 4 "Forms of Hindi as a Rhetorical Strategy: *Dalit Cetˈnā* in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*".

[338] Hindi original: *mere pīche-pīche sūrajˈbhān tagā kā beṭā br̥jeś ā rahā thā. mujhˈse umr meṃ kāfī baṛā thā. usˈke kāṃdhe par ek laṃbī-sī lāṭhī thī. śāyad khet par jā rahā thā. mujhe dekhˈte hī usˈne kuch baṛˈbaṛānā śurū kiyā. maiṃ anˈsunā karˈke calˈtā rahā. koṭhī (nahar vibhāg kā nirīkṣaṇ kā bhavan) ke pās pahũcˈte hī, usˈne āvāz dī. skūl thoṛī-sī dūr rah gayā thā, "abe, cūhˈṛe ke, ruk jā".*

I turned around and looked at him, mischief was gleaming on his face. He came close to me and said, "Chuhre *ke*, you have grown horns indeed. You are quite arrogant. Even the way you walk has changed"[339] (ibid.).

Bṛjeś's speech is unmarked on this occasion.

When I started to walk away without replying, he moved forward and blocked my way. He said threateningly, "I've heard you're clever in your studies"[340] (ibid.).

Here, however, the boy's aggressive behavior is accompanied by the usage of a retroflex *ṇa*: ***suṇā** hai, tū paṛhˈne meṃ hośiyār hai* (*suṇā* instead of *sunā*). This usage has been shown in chapter 4 to be one of the most prominent features of the non-standard form of Hindi used by Valmiki to mark speakers as not formally educated or to let characters sound uninformed or incompetent in the context of caste oppression.

He drove one end of the stick into my stomach, "Come on, show me, too, how clever you are". He was bent on fighting. I wanted to avoid fighting. Seeing me quiet he growled again, "However much you study, you'll remain a Chuhra…"[341] (ibid.).

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[339] Hindi original: *maiṃne muṛˈkar usˈkī or dekhā, usˈke cehˈre par śaitānī jhalak rahī thī. mere karīb ākar vah bolā, "cūhˈṛe ke, tere to sacˈmuc sīṃg nikal āe haiṃ. tū to baṛī śekhī meṃ rahˈtā hai. terī to chāl hī badal gaī hai".*

[340] Hindi original: *binā uttar die maiṃ jāne lagā to usˈne āge baṛhˈkar merā rāstā rok liyā. ḍā̃ṭˈte hue bolā, "suṇā hai, tū paṛhˈne meṃ hośiyār hai".*

[341] Hindi original: *usˈne lāṭhī kā ek sirā mere peṭ meṃ gāṛ diyā thā, "karˈke hameṃ bhī to dikhā tū kitˈnā hośiyār hai". vah jhagˈṛe par utārū thā. maiṃ jhagˈṛe se bacˈnā cāhˈtā thā. mujhe cup dekhˈkar vah phir gurrāyā, "kitˈnā bhī paṛh **liyo**, rahegā to cūhˈṛā hī…"*

The atmosphere of danger nears escalation when the boy voices the first Maheshnath utterance of *Jūṭhan*: “However much you study, you’ll remain a Chuhra…” (*kitˈnā bhī paṛh* ***liyo****, rahegā to cūhˈṛā hī…*). The boy’s usage of a non-standard verb form *liyo* instead of the subjunctive/imperative form *lo* of the verb *lenā* (“to take”), once again marks him as an uninformed speaker. Furthermore, what distinguishes this utterance from the original Maheshnath utterance is not only the fact the “Bhangi” has been replaced with Valmiki’s own *jāti*, Chuhra, but the more important fact that this new utterance already contains a solution. Instead of the uncertain “whatever else may happen in the world”, Valmiki introduces a clear proposition, i.e., education as the way to improve and socially advance one’s life circumstances. The escalation of the situation as well as the young protagonist’s reaction to it are not less remarkable.

> He shoved me with the stick. I just escaped falling, but my bag fell on the ground. He caught the bag with the stick, picked it up and started to whirl it in a circle. I was entreating him, “My books will fall out… give me my bag… my notebooks will get torn…” He didn’t give in, whirled the bag forcefully and threw it far away. When I ran to pick it up, he started roaring with laughter. My bag had fallen into a ditch at the side of the road, where it had filled up with water and mud. While fishing out the bag, my clothes had gotten wet. My feet were smeared with mud, the books and notebooks in the bag had become wet, when I saw them, I started crying.
>
> At school I had washed my hands and feet at the tap. I dried my books and notebooks in the sun. My mind became very sad on that day. It seemed as if studying would not fall to my share. But I kept seeing my father’s face and remembering his words, “You have to improve *jāti* by studying”[342] (ibid.).

[342] Hindi original: *usˈne mujhe lāṭhī se dhakiyāyā. maiṃ girˈte-girˈte bacā, lekin merā jholā zamīn par gir paṛā thā. usˈne us jhole ko lāṭhī meṃ phāsākar ūpar uṭhā liyā aur gol-gol ghumāne lagā. maiṃ usˈke āge giṛˈgiṛā rahā thā, “merī kitābeṃ bikhar jāẽgī… merā jholā de do… kāpiyā̃ phaṭ jāẽgī…” vah nahīṃ mānā aur zor se ghumākar usˈne jholā dūr pheṃk diyā. maiṃ uṭhāne ke lie dauṛā to vah kahˈkahe lagākar hāsˈne lagā. merā jholā saṛak ke kināre khāī meṃ gir gayā thā, jahā̃ pānī aur kīcaṛ bharā huā thā. jholā*

The “upper caste” boy physically attacks Omprakash, but is satisfied when not the boy himself, but his book bag falls to the ground. He then proceeds to try to destroy the book bag, this symbol of education. The whole episode can be read as an allegory of the casteist “upper caste” society trying to prevent members of the “lower castes” from studying. The older “upper caste” boy attacks the younger and physically weaker “lower caste” boy, because he has already “changed” as a result of studying: he speaks Modern Standard Hindi, “the way he walks has changed” (*cāl hī badal gaī hai*), he even seems to have become “arrogant” (*baṛī śekhī meṃ rahˈtā hai*). In other words, the text implies that education makes people not only speak correctly, but changes them in other ways, too. For instance, it can make them more sure of themselves, which might be perceived as “arrogance”.

The fact that the attacker is satisfied when not the young protagonist himself, but rather his book bag becomes the object of the attack, as well as the fact that what the young protagonist tries to save are his books, and not his person, leaves no doubt about the metaphorical significance of this altercation. The young Omprakash implores the older boy not to destroy his books. He runs to get his book bag out of the ditch whilst his own clothes get wet and dirty. The casteist society, represented here by the “upper caste” boy, emits an evil laugh, when it sees the “lower caste” boy crawling in the ditch and getting dirty. Again, a metaphor – this time, the casteist society is pleased seeing a “lower caste” boy being dirty on his hands and knees, whence it has pushed him. As a result of the attack, the “lower caste” boy is nearing despair, but thanks to his father’s wise advice, which stands in direct contradiction with the Maheshnath utterance, he decides not to give up his studies.

Just like the paraphrased Maheshnath utterance, the father’s words “You have to improve *jāti* by studying” (*paṛh-likhˈkar jāti sudhārˈnī hai*) suggest that a change and an im-

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nikālˈne meṃ mere kapˈṛe bhīg gae the. pā̃v kīcaṛ meṃ san gae the, jhole meṃ kitābeṃ aur kā̆piyā̃ bhīg gaī thī̃, jinheṃ dekhˈkar mujhe ronā ā gayā thā.

skūl ke nal par maiṃne hāth-pā̃v dhoe the. kitābeṃ, kā̆piyā̃ dhūp meṃ sukhāī thīṃ. merā man bahut duḥkhī ho gayā thā us roz. lag rahā thā jaise paṛhˈnā-likhˈnā apˈne hisse meṃ nahīṃ hai. lekin pitājī kā cehˈrā sāmˈne āte hī unˈkī bāteṃ yād āne lagī thī, ‘paṛh-likhˈkar jāti sudhārˈnī hai.’

provement is possible through education. Thus, in the first instance, the Maheshnath utterance is not yet contradicted, it is paraphrased to contain a possible solution and a change brought about in the main protagonist as a result of education is hinted at.

3 The Maheshnath Utterance Refuted

The second instance occurs after only two pages in the book, but almost two years later according to the chronology of the narrative. The main protagonist is a member of his friend's *bārāt* party[343] and as such is required to join in the *salām*[344] procession despite his unwillingness to do so. During this procession, the party stops at the house of an "upper caste" woman, who expresses interest in the groom.

> Translation: One woman said while placing a one-rupee note on Hiram Sing's hand, "Oh, your son-in-law is quite handsome. What work does he do?"
>
> Hiram Sing's mother-in-law said enthusiastically, "He is studying… he has passed the 8th grade exam". The woman who was asking looked at Hiram in astonishment. I was standing right next [to him]. Looking at me from top to bottom, she asked in the same tone: "You… study too?"

[343] In this case, a marriage procession of the bridegroom's party to the bride's parental house.

[344] According to *Jūṭhan*, it was common among the Chuhras that during a *salām* procession, the groom went around in the bride's village with his party and the bride visited the groom's village with her party – both in order to receive gifts from "upper caste" village residents.

Hindi original: [345] *ek aurat ne hiram siṃh ke hāth par ek rupae kā noṭ rakhˡte hue kahā, "**arī**, terā jamāī hai to **sohˡṇā** (**suṃdar**) kām kyā **kare** haiṃ?"*

*hiram kī sās ne utsāhit hokar kahā, "**paṛhe** haiṃ… āṭhvīṃ kā imtahān diyā hai". pūchˡnevālī mahilā ne āścarya se hiram ko dekhā. maiṃ pās hī khaṛā thā. mujhe ūpar se nice dekhˡte hue usī sur meṃ bolī, "tū… bhī **paṛhe** hai?"* (Valmiki 1999: 43).

Standard: *ek aurat ne hiram siṃh ke hāth par ek rupae kā noṭ rakhˡte hue kahā, "**are**, terā jamāī hai to **suṃdar** kām kyā **kar rahe** haiṃ?"*

*hiram kī sās ne utsāhit hokar kahā, "**paṛh rahe** haiṃ… āṭhvīṃ kā imtahān diyā hai". pūchˡnevālī mahilā ne āścarya se hiram ko dekhā. maiṃ pās hī khaṛā thā. mujhe ūpar se nice dekhˡte hue usī sur meṃ bolī, "tū… bhī **paṛh rahe** hai?"*

The "upper caste" woman is very clearly marked as a not formally educated person. She uses *arī* instead of *are*, shortens the continuous verb forms *kar rahe* and *paṛh rahe* to *kare* and *paṛhe*, and uses the non-standard word *sohˡṇā* which is explained in a parenthetical gloss as *suṃdar* (good looking) by the author. By this point in the book Valmiki's usage of non-standard words and word forms has been made very clear. The speech form used by the woman thus from the very beginning signals her incompetence to the reader. Her superficial interest in the young and handsome bridegroom and her astonishment at the reply lead to the following conversation with the young Omprakash.

Translation:

I nodded.

[Woman] "You… in which class?"

[345] Since the woman's speech is heavily marked with non-standard words and word forms, and the grammar of the dialogue between her and Omprakash is crucial for my argument, I return in this example to the practice of quoting the Hindi original and its standard version in the main text.

[Omprakash] “I’ve passed the 9th grade exam”.

Her eyes filled with astonishment, “You look younger than him?”

[Omprakash] “*Jī,*[346] I am younger than him”.

She paused for a while, then said, “But Barla is a Taga village?”

[Omprakash] “Yes, *jī*”. I said.

[Woman] “Chuhra’s kids go to school too”. She was wondering.

[Woman] “However much you study… you will remain a Chuhra”. saying this she vented her anger and went back inside.

Hindi original:

maiṁne ‘hā̃’ meṃ gardan hilāī.

[Woman] *“tū… **koṇˈsī kilās** meṃ hai?”*

[Omprakash] *“nauṃvī kī parīkṣā dī hai”.*

*usˈkī āṁkheṃ tājjub se bhar gaī, “tū **dikkhe** to isˈse choṭā?”*

[Omprakash] *“jī, maiṃ inˈse choṭā hūṃ”.*

vah thoṛā rukˈkar bolī, “barˈlā to tagāoṃ kā hai?”

[Omprakash] *“jī hāṃ”, maiṃne kahā.*

[Woman] *“cūhˈṛoṃ ke **jākat** (bacce) bhī paṛhˈne **jāveṁ** hai madˈrase meṃ”. use āścarya ho rahā thā.*

[Woman] *“kitˈnā **bī** paṛh lo… rahoge to cūhˈṛe hī”, kahˈkar usˈne apˈne bhītar kī bhaṛās nikālī aur aṃdar calī gaī* (Valmiki 1999: 43).

Standard:

maiṁne ‘hā̃’ meṃ gardan hilāī.

[346] *jī* is a word with several meanings: when used with a name or a title it is a formal appellation similar to “sir” or “madam”; used on its own as a response, it can be understood as both a polite form of address as well as an extremely polite form of agreement. The word is left untranslated because no English translation can reflect the level of extreme politeness associated with it.

[Woman] *“tū… **kaunˡsī klās** meṃ hai?”*

[Omprakash] *“nauṃvī kī parīkṣā dī hai”.*

*usˡkī āṁkheṃ tājjub se bhar gaī, “tū **dikhne meṃ** to isˡse choṭā?”*

[Omprakash] *“jī, maiṃ inˡse choṭā hū̃”.*

vah thoṛā rukˡkar bolī, “barˡlā to tagāoṃ kā hai?”

[Omprakash] *“jī hā̃”, maiṃne kahā.*

[Woman] *“cūhˡṛoṃ ke **bacce** bhī paṛhˡne **jāte** hai madˡrase meṃ”. use āś-carya ho rahā thā.*

[Woman] *“kitˡnā **bhī** paṛh lo… rahoge to cūhˡṛe hī”, kahˡkar usˡne apˡne bhītar kī bhaṛās nikālī aur aṃdar calī gaī.*

In this exchange, too, the woman continues to use non-standard words and word forms. In the interrogative pronoun *kauṇˡsī,* retroflex *ṇa* replaces the dental *na* and the diphthong *au* shortens to *o*. The vowel *i* is added to the word *klas*, aspiration is dropped in the word *bhī*, two non-standard verbs forms are used: *jāveṁ* instead of *jāte* and *dikkhe*, which might stand for *dikhˡne meṃ* or *dikhˡkar*. Additionally, the non-standard word *jākat* is used and explained as *bacce* in a parenthetical gloss. In contrast, Omprakash’s own speech is emphatically standard, correct and polite.

It is interesting to note that while in the first instance above Br̥jeś Tagā uses the non-standard verb form *liyo* in the Maheshnath utterance (*kitˡnā bhī paṛh liyo*), the woman in the second instance uses the standard subjunctive/imperative verb form *lo*. However, in this case, the Maheshnath utterance contains an unaspirated *bī* instead of *bhī* (*kitˡnā **bī** paṛh lo*), while just a few lines before the same character used the standard form *bhī* in her speech (*tū… bhī **paṛhe** hai*?). This interchangeability of the non-standard word forms serves to emphasize the lack of importance of the particular speech form, tongue or dialect used as opposed to the fact that the speech is marked as non-standard. The different speech forms, which imply the protagonist’s superiority over the uneducated

"high caste" woman, once again demonstrate the author's attempt to contradict the Maheshnath utterance, which is repeated here with barely a change in the wording: *kitˡnā* ***bī*** *paṛh lo… rahoge to cūhˡṛe hī* ("However much you study… you will remain a Chuhra").

The protagonist's reaction after this second occurrence of the Maheshnath utterance is quite different. While the first instance is followed by frustration, feelings of insecurity and a somewhat reluctant determination to go on studying to pursue an uncertain "improvement of *jāti*" (*jāti sudhārˡnī hai*), the second is succeeded by a self-confident narration, in which Valmiki proceeds to challenge the Maheshnath utterance in a number of ways.

> The procession had moved on to the next door. My throat was drying out from thirst. I was also tired from standing around. I said to the drummer, "*bhaiyā*,[347] get [me/us] some water to drink".
>
> He looked at me in surprise, "We will only get water when we get home"[348] (Valmiki 1999: 43f.).

In this episode, the main protagonist is portrayed as a self-confident young man, who is exhausted and wants nothing more than to quench his thirst. It appears as if he has forgotten that due to his *jāti* affiliation, he cannot get drinking water in a "high caste" neighborhood. The drummer's surprise shows that this is a well-known fact.

[347] "Brother", a friendly form of address.

[348] Hindi original: *julūs agˡle darˡvāje kī or cal diyā. pyās ke māre merā gala sūkh rahā thā. khaṛe-khaṛe thak bhī gae the. maiṃne ḍhol bajānevāle se kahā, "bhaiyā, kahīṃ pānī pilˡvā do".*

usˡne hairānī se merī or dekhā, "pāṇī to ghar jāke hī milegā".

> The whole joy of taking part in the *bārāt* was spoiled. When we came back soaked in sweat, I drank a lot of water. When he saw [me] drinking water like this, the man who had given me the water said, "is there a drought in Barla?"
>
> "No! The *salām* has dried out my juices". Whether that poor uneducated one understood the essence of my words or not, I do not know. I silently sat down on one side to ease my exhaustion. The pain of wandering from door to door for '*salām*' had exhausted me beyond measure. [I felt] as if something was boiling in my mind[349] (Valmiki 1999: 44).

The change that had started to happen to the young Omprakash as a result of his studies in the first instance, has led him in the second instance to contrasting himself with a "poor uneducated one" (*vah becārā anᶦpaṛh*), who might not be able to understand the protagonist's metaphor. It also appears as though the main protagonist is the only member of the party who endures suffering as a consequence of the *salām.* His anguish appears to be more mental than physical: he is exhausted by the "pain of wandering from door to door for '*salām*'" (*'salām' ke lie dar-dar bhaṭakᶦne kī pīṛā*). A context of *dalit cetᶦnā*[350] emerges in the narrative as the young protagonist struggles with his feelings:

> Pork meat and *roti*s were made for lunch. Having drunk alcohol some people were creating a hubbub. People were dozing on the cots at the bottom of the neem tree. In the commotion of the food being served and the de-

[349] Hindi original: *bārāt meṃ āne kā sārā ānaṃd kirᶦkirā ho gayā thā. pasīne se lathᶦpath jab ham vāpas lauṭe to maiṃne jī bharᶦkar pānī piyā. pānī is tarah pīte hue dekhᶦkar pānī pilānevālā bolā, "barᶦle meṃ sūkhā paṛ gayā hai kyā?" "nahīṃ! salām ne merā pānī sokh liyā hai". merī bāt ke maram ko vah becārā anᶦpaṛh samᶦjhā yā nahīṃ, maiṃ nahīṃ jānᶦtā. maiṃ cupᶦcāp ek kinare baiṭh gayā thā, apᶦnī thakān miṭāne ke lie. 'salām' ke lie dar-dar bhaṭakᶦne kī pīṛā ne mujhe behad thakā diyā thā. mere man meṃ jaise kuch ubal rahā thā.*

[350] See chapter 4 "Forms of Hindi as a Rhetorical Strategy: *Dalit Cetᶦnā* in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*" for a discussion of *dalit cetᶦnā* or Dalit consciousness.

> parture of the bridegroom’s party I was sitting quietly aside[351] (Valmiki 1999: 44).

The by now educated main protagonist, who speaks emphatically correct standard Hindi, is portrayed on this occasion as a young man who is estranged from a community that used to be his own. While other members of the *bārāt* party continue to celebrate, he is sitting apart and brooding over something that “was boiling in his mind” (*mere man meṃ jaise kuch ubal rahā thā*). The appearance of the protagonist’s father offers an opportunity to elaborate:

> Seeing me sitting like this, Father asked, “Why are you sitting like this, Munshi ji?”
>
> Instead of answering father’s question, I shot a question [at him]: “Is this going for *salām* [a] good [thing]?”
>
> Father stared at me as if he was seeing me for the first time. Seeing him quiet, my mind’s confusion started to come out, “That the groom should tour from house to house at his own wedding… it’s a bad thing… bridegrooms from high castes never go around like this… this bride will go to Barla and walk around from house to house for *salām* in the same manner…”[352] (ibid.).

[351] Hindi original: *dopahar ke khāne meṃ sūar kā mīṭ aur roṭī banī thī. śarāb pīkar kaī log ho-hallā kar rahe the. nīm ke peṛ tale cārˡpāiyoṃ par log ũ̃gh rahe the. khānā khilāne aur bārāt ke vidā karˡne kī gahˡmā-gahˡmī meṃ, maiṃ ek kināre cupˡcāp baiṭhā thā.*

[352] Hindi original: *mujhe is tarah baiṭhā dekhˡkar pitājī ne pūchā, “aise kyūṃ baiṭhe ho muṃśī jī?”*

maiṃne pitājī ke savāl ka uttar dene ke bajāy, ek savāl tejī se dāgā, “ye salām ke lie jānā kyā ṭhīk hai?”

pitājī ne merī or aisā ghūrā jaise pahˡlī bār dekh rahe hoṃ. unheṃ cupˡcāp dekhˡkar mere man kī uthal-puthal bāhar āne lagī, “apˡnī hī śādī meṃ dulhā ghar-ghar ghūme… burī bāt hai… baṛī jātˡvāloṃ ke dulhe to aise kahīṃ nahīṃ jāte… ye dulhan barˡlā jākar aise hī ghar-ghar jāegī salām karˡne…”

One might say that Valmiki depicts in this episode the emergence of *dalit cetˡnā*: first, the main protagonist is haunted by feelings of anguish and exhaustion after participation in an event that is part of the Chuhra tradition, then he proceeds to brood over his feelings and finally expresses his frustration with a custom that he regards as demeaning and compares the celebratory customs of the Chuhras with those of "high caste" people. The protagonist's efforts are not in vain: his father, whose speech is once again emphatically non-standard at this point, realizes the truth of the son's words.

> Translation: Father was listening to my words in silence, "Munshi ji, that's it, sending you to school has been a success… I understood it, too… now we will break this tradition".
>
> Hindi original: *pitājī khāmośī se merī bāt sun rahe the, "muṃśījī, bas, tujhe skūl bhejˡnā saphal ho* ***giyā*** *hai…* ***mhārī*** *samajh meṃ* ***bī*** *ā* ***giyā*** *hai…* ***īb*** *is rīt* ***kū*** *toṛeṃge"* (ibid.).
>
> Standard: *pitājī khāmośī se merī bāt sun rahe the, "muṃśījī, bas, tujhe skūl bhejˡnā saphal ho* ***gayā*** *hai…* ***merī*** *samajh meṃ* ***bhī*** *ā* ***gayā*** *hai…* ***ab*** *is rīt* ***ko*** *toṛeṃge".*

The father's non-standard speech serves here to emphasize the contrast between the son's standard speech and progressive thought and the traditional casteist worldview his father comes from. The father's words "sending you to school has been a success" illustrate once again the contradiction of the Maheshnath utterance: studying has made the protagonist different, it has made him see the demeaning nature of this tradition, it has also helped him explain this to his uneducated father, who realizes the truth of his son's words and who, along with the whole family, also changes and improves his situation as a result of his son's studies:

> Father indeed did break this tradition in his own house. My brother Janesar's *bārāt* party went to Rajopur near Laksar. Father had flatly refused, "My son will not go for *salām*".
>
> At my sister's wedding, too, we didn't allow our brother-in-law to go for '*salām*'. We clearly said that if someone wanted to give something, they should come and give it here[353] (Valmiki 1999: 44).

The second Maheshnath utterance serves as an opportunity to introduce the subject of a practice that helps to plant an inferiority complex inside young people from the Chuhra *jāti*. In the narrative following the utterance, Valmiki addresses a conflict between tradition and *dalit cetˈnā*, which is resolved when the protagonist succeeds in convincing his father of the custom's bad impact on the young couple. The two short examples of occasions on which the family has refused to go for *salām* are full of a sense of pride and self-respect, not inferiority.

> It might seem like an ordinary matter, but whether it is a groom or a bride, a sense of inferiority is planted inside them from the first day of marriage. A short story of mine about '*salām*' with the same title has been published in *Hans* magazine (August 1993) and Rajendra Yadav had called it a forceful story of protest against Brahminism[354] (Valmiki 1999: 45).

[353] Hindi original: *pitājī ne sacˈmuc is rīt ko apˈne hī ghar se toṛā thā. mere bhāī janesar kī bārāt laksar ke pās rajopur gāī thī. pitājī ne sāph manā kar diyā thā, "merā beṭā salām karˈne nahīṃ jāegā".*

bahan kī śādī meṃ bhī hamˈne apˈne bahanoī ko 'salām' par nahīṃ jāne diyā thā. sāph-sāph kah diyā thā, jise jo bhī denā hai yahāṃ dekar jāe.

[354] Hindi original: *dekhˈne-sunˈne meṃ bahut sādhāraṇ-sī bāt lag sakˈtī hai lekin dūlhā ho yā dulhan, śādī ke pahˈle hī din unˈmeṃ hīnˈtā-bodh bhar diyā jātā hai. 'salām' par isī śīrṣak se merī ek kahānī haṃs (agast, 1993) meṃ chapī thī jise rājeṃdr yādav ne brāhmaṇˈvād-virodh kī saśakt kahānī kahā thā.*

As a crowning achievement the author announces that his short story with the same title has been published in the renowned magazine *Hans* and received highly positive feedback from its famous editor, Rajendra Yadav (Rājeṃdra Yādav).[355] Thus, in the narrative that follows the second paraphrased Maheshnath utterance, Valmiki presents several arguments which help to demonstrate that education is able to improve one's life circumstances and social status. Through his narrative, Valmiki suggests that education is able to transform a person into a reflecting, intelligent and self-respecting human being, who is capable of rebellion against centuries-long oppression and able to achieve as much as a publication in an esteemed magazine and receive high praise from a famous person – all of which not merely challenges, but contradicts the Maheshnath utterance so vigorously as not to leave any doubt in the mind of the reader.

4 The Didactic Moment

The third instance of the Maheshnath utterance, which is meant to seal the argument, is located on the last pages of *Jūṭhan*. The main protagonist is now nearly equivalent with the author of the book at the time of writing. He walks along a street with a friend whose aim it is to convince Valmiki to change his surname to a caste-neutral one.[356] This appears to be a sour subject with Valmiki, who on several pages argues that one of the most important means towards an improvement of reputation and social status of Dalits is to openly admit to being one. At this moment, the companions happen to overhear a conversation between some bus drivers.

> Translation: Most of the drivers were Sikhs. Finishing his argument one driver [said], "Say what you will… however big an officer he might be-

[355] See the introduction to this dissertation.

[356] His chosen surname "Valmiki" is a caste marker, since it is the name by which members of the Chuhra *jāti* are known in many parts of northern India. See also chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?".

come, his caste cannot be changed… if he is a Chuhra, he will remain a Chuhra…"

Hindi (and Punjabi) original: *jyādātar ḍrāivar sikkh the. ek ḍrāivar ne bahas kā samāpan karˈte hue, "kuch bhī kaho… chāhe* ***jinnā baḍḍā*** *afˈsar* ***vaṇ jāve****, us* ***dī*** *jāt* ***nī*** *badal* ***sakˈdī****… cūhˈṛā hai to rahegā cūhˈṛā hī…"* (Valmiki 1999: 157).

The words marked **bold** in the above example are partly standard and partly non-standard Punjabi words, that is, non-standard and marked with regard to Hindi – the main language of the text. The Sikh bus driver speaks a mixture of Hindi and Punjabi, which, according to Anne Murphy[357] can be heard quite often particularly in eastern Punjab, the Puadh region, and in Delhi. In *Jūṭhan*, Valmiki mentions numerous friends and colleagues from different parts of India and yet, this is only one of two instances in the whole book where another language is used in direct speech. [358] If Valmiki's friends and colleagues who appear as characters in his autobiography use direct speech in the book at all, it is invariably Modern Standard Hindi. As has been shown above, a speech form other than standard Hindi – whether it is (partly) a different language or not – only appears in the text on strategically placed occasions. I thus regard the above example as another instance of marked speech, which is meant to make the speaker stand out and look less of an authority. Not only is the fact that Punjabi has been chosen on this occasion over Hindi a marker in itself, but even more so is the fact that some of the Punjabi words are written in non-standard forms. The Punjabi verb for "to become" is *baṇˈnā*, not *vaṇˈnā*, so the compound verb form *vaṇ jāve* should read *baṇ jāve* in standard Punjabi. In a similar manner, the consonant *va* has been replaced by *ba* in *baḍḍā*

[357] The following explanations regarding the Punjabi language were obligingly supplied by Dr. Anne Murphy, Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia, via email communication.

[358] The only other instance of a different language in *Jūṭhan* is the direct speech used by an unnamed village boy met by Valmiki on his way to his native village. The boy initially speaks standard Hindi and switches to Marathi when faced with violence. On that occasion Valmiki does not only explicitly give a reason for the change of language, but also translates the complete sentence into Hindi in a parenthetical gloss.

instead of *vaḍḍā*. Further, the negation *nahīṃ* has been shortened to *nī*, which is unusual for written Punjabi.

In this third and last instance, the paraphrased Maheshnath utterance has changed: the bus driver doesn't speak about education anymore, he speaks about "becoming a big officer". It appears that the fact that a person from a "lower caste" can study and become a "big officer" (***baḍḍā*** *af'sar*), or, as in Valmiki's case, a well-known and successful writer, is considered as already established. What remains is to challenge the phrase "if he is a Chuhra he will remain a Chuhra". This is where Valmiki turns the tables on Babu Maheshnath and his utterance and argues that "staying a Chuhra", that is to say, to admit one's one's *jāti* affiliation instead of hiding it as soon as one has become "a big officer" is precisely what should be done in order to improve the Dalits' reputation.

> Having heard this conversation, Iṃdujī looked at me. There was a question in her eyes, "Say now, mister writer, is there still a sustainable argument for your surname after this?"
>
> After some silence Iṃdujī said, "One day this surname of yours will tremendously damage your position". At the same moment her daughter Soniyā, who was standing beside us, announced, "Uncle, I will write Valmiki with my name"[359] (ibid.).

While the narrative following the first two instances strives to corroborate the notion that education is the right approach for "a Chuhra" to improve their situation, in the last instance the author doesn't even need to respond to the Maheshnath utterance – neither to the driver's argument, nor to the silent question that is being asked by his friend – the

[359] Hindi original: *is vārtālāp ko sun'kar iṃdujī ne merī or dekhā. un'kī āṃkhoṃ meṃ jaise praśn thā, 'ab kaho lekhak jī, is'ke bād bhī āp'ke sar'nem kā koī aucityapūrṇ tark hai?*

kuch der kī khāmośī ke bād iṃdu jī ne kahā thā, "āp'kā yah sar'nem kisī din āp'kī pratiṣṭhā ko zabar'dast dhakkā pahuṃcāegā". usī kṣaṇ pās khaṛī un'kī beṭī soniyā bol paṛī, "aṃkal jī, maiṃ ap'ne nām ke sāth vālmīki likhū̃gī".

statement has already been contradicted: not only through the narrative following the second incident, but by the whole book, by the mere existence of it, as well as by Iṃdujī herself, when she silently addresses Valmiki as “mister writer” (*lekhak jī*). When Soniyā – a representative of the new educated generation of Dalits – agrees with the main protagonist’s and the author’s opinion without further argument, the text implies that she realizes that the driver’s utterance lacks substance. There are no arguments to support it. It’s empty, just like the empty teat-like pockets belonging to the Premchand lookalike from Navaria’s *Uttarᵎkathā*. On the other hand, in Valmiki’s case, his whole life is an argument that proves his point. By making the young woman agree with the protagonist’s view and declare her intention to make her own Dalit identity public, Valmiki metaphorically paves the way for the new generation. The Maheshnath utterance helps Valmiki to make his point: not only is education the way to improvement, but being a Dalit, especially a distinguished member of the Dalit community, one should not strive to cease to be one, i.e. to resort to “passing” as someone else, but to endeavor to make one’s achievements known in order to improve the position of the whole Dalit community.

5 Conclusion

In his autobiography, Omprakash Valmiki refers to the well-known short story *Dūdh kā dām* written by the renowned Hindi writer Munshi Premchand not only through its title – *Jūṭhan* – but also through the image of “standing outside the door” as well as the utilization of an infamous phrase uttered by one of its characters, Babu Maheshnath. Evoking the image of standing outside the door on three separate occasions, all of which accuse casteist society of reducing Dalits or people formerly labeled as “untouchable” to passive spectators, Valmiki implicitly draws a comparison between the fate of Mangal, the protagonist of *Dūdh kā dām* and his own life story. While Mangal’s character remains content with his passive position in life, Valmiki’s protagonist rebels against the place “outside the door” that is forced on him by society.

A more central part in Valmiki's autobiography takes the phrase uttered by Premchand's character Babu Maheshnath. It is addressed to a woman from the Bhangi *jāti* and reads, "Whatever else might happen in the world, Bhangi will remain Bhangi. It is hard to make people out of them"[360] (Premchand 1996: 284). This phrase, which is referred to as the "Maheshnath utterance" throughout this chapter, is repeated in a slightly altered form by three different characters on three different occasions in *Jūṭhan* and challenged by the narrative that frames it. The altered utterance contains the means proposed by Valmiki to achieve improvement, which is education. At the same time, every character to pronounce this paraphrased utterance is marked as an incompetent speaker through the usage of non-standard speech.

In the first instance, Valmiki introduces the subject and his protagonist's doubts about whether or not he will be able to continue his studies despite the hostility he meets with from members of the "upper caste" society. The second instance demonstrates that Valmiki's assertion is accurate, that education indeed does help to improve one's situation in life and social position. Finally, the third instance serves as a didactic moment to seal the argument. Valmiki proceeds to suggest that a "Bhangi" – to use Premchand's original wording – should not endeavor to cease to be a "Bhangi", but should let the world know of their achievements in order to improve the position and social standing for all Dalits. Valmiki's autobiography *Jūṭhan* is the best example for such a course of action.

Thus, the central character of Valmiki's autobiography in the course of the narrative undergoes a transformation from a young illiterate boy akin to Premchand's Mangal to Omprakash Valmiki, an established writer – Munshi Ji, as his father used to call him, or "mister writer", as his friend Iṃdujī calls him on one of the last pages of the book. Valmiki uses his life narrative to challenge the object status to which, as Dalit writers claim, Premchand and other non-Dalit writers have subjected Dalit characters in their

[360] Hindi original: *duṇiyā mẽ aur cāhe jo kuch ho jāe, bhaṃgī bhaṃgī hī raheṃge. inheṃ ād'mī banānā kaṭhin hai*.

writings. Instead, Valmiki fills his text with his own agency and *dalit cet'nā* to promote the same strategy among his potential Dalit readers.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have shown that Hindi Dalit authors use a wide variety of narrative techniques in their autobiographies to perform their Dalit identity. Chapter 1 "Who is a Dalit?*"* discusses relevant caste-related terminology and proceeds to present the wide range of definitions for the term *dalit*, which can be found in various scholarly works, pieces of Dalit literature and criticism. As the next step, the chapter demonstrates how each of the three authors uses caste-related terminology and the term *dalit* in their respective autobiographies. The ambiguity of the term *dalit* presented in the first part, is emphasized by the different meanings implicitly given to it by Omprakash Valmiki, Kausalya Baisantri and Tulsiram. The chapter demonstrates that caste-related terminology and especially the usage of the term *dalit* is still far from unified and extremely ambiguous. In Hindi Dalit autobiographies as well, its usage is diverse and indefinite. Even though in his autobiography *Jūṭhan* Omprakash Valmiki mentions his own definition of the term *dalit* – namely that a Dalit is a member of the group formerly labeled as "untouchable", who has become aware of the oppression his community has been facing for centuries and stands up against it – a closer look at the usage of the term *dalit* in *Jūṭhan* reveals that Valmiki barely uses the term as a designation for particular individuals, while rather preferring to employ it as a collective term used in formal and abstract contexts as well as phrases such as "Dalit literature", "Dalit movement", "Dalit consciousness", etc. In the case of particular individuals, however, in *Jūṭhan*, either other caste-related terms such as names of *jāti*s are used or the characters' *jāti* affiliation is not revealed at all. Since in his autobiography, Valmiki performs the changes in his protagonist's consciousness through his writing, the term *dalit* only appears in the narrative after the main protagonist gets acquainted with it. But even after this, there are only two occasions in the whole book, on which Valmiki comes close to calling himself "Dalit" rather than using the two names of his *jāti* "Chuhra" or "Bhangi". In Kausalya Baisantri's autobiography *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp*, categories such as names of *jāti*s, occupational terms and religious affiliations initially seem to be used without differentiation, which suggests an unimportance of categories for Baisantri. In the greater part of her autobiography for herself and her family members Baisantri uses the terms Mahar as well as "untouch-

able" (*aspṛśya* or *achūt*). Once her family advances socially as well as financially, however, the Hindi words meaning "untouchable" and names of *jāti*s are practically replaced by the word *dalit*. The term *dalit* appears to have a very specific meaning in Baisantri's vocabulary as a designation for people, who have become aware of the importance of education, have educated themselves and/or members of their families and have achieved a better social status. In his two volume autobiography, Tulsiram uses the term *dalit* in quite a different manner as an umbrella term that includes every person or group of people belonging to any community or *jāti* formerly labeled as "untouchable", regardless even of whether the said person or group has lived in the historic time period, in which the term was in use. Both, present day members of Scheduled Castes such as Chamar or Pasi *jāti*s as well as characters from Buddhist texts, who are termed as Chandala in those texts, are called Dalit in Tulsiram's autobiography. Tulsiram uses names of *jāti*s for both Savarnas as well as Dalits, as occupational terms or as subcategories, and does not appear to attach any negative undertone to *jāti*s.

Chapter 2 explores the construction of a Buddhist identity for Dalits in the two volumes of Tulsiram's autobiography. It shows that since the early 20th century quite a few notable Dalit leaders and activists have endeavored to construct a new shared and respectable identity for Dalits by claiming that in the past, Dalits became labeled as "untouchable" as a consequence of their Buddhist identity and a refusal to submit to the Hindu religion. One of the most well-known of these activists was Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, who studied the history of caste oppression for many years and published the book entitled *The Untouchables Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?*, in which he argues at length that people known as "untouchable" at the time of his writing the book, had been Buddhists in the past and became ostracized and labeled as "untouchable" because they refused to change their eating practices and give up consuming beef. For Ambedkar the root of untouchability lay in the Hindu religion and he promoted the idea that in order to be free and live in an egalitarian society, Dalits needed to renounce Hinduism and convert to an egalitarian religion. After many years of deliberations and an in-depth study of many religions of the world, Ambedkar chose Buddhism as such a religion and proceeded to convert to Buddhism in 1956 together with his wife

as well as several hundred thousands of Dalits. Hindi Dalit writer Tulsiram follows Ambedkar in his two-part autobiography when he claims that present day Dalits must have been Buddhists before being labeled as "untouchable". Attempting to deconstruct the centuries old identity of the powerless and deprived "untouchables", in the two volumes of his autobiography, he utilizes several Buddhist stories as parables to create a virtual link between present day Dalits and Buddhists of ancient times. He also provides his own piece of evidence for his claim, and implicitly promotes conversion of Dalits to Buddhism as a means to be accepted into a bigger community and thus to escape suffering.

Chapter 3 "Tropes of Agency in Kausalya Baisantri's *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp*" looks into the specific case of Kausalya Baisantri, who as a woman Dalit writer performs her intersectional identity as a Dalit and a woman and creates new literary tropes in the context of male-female relations and the discourse of empowerment in her narrative. The chapter demonstrates in its initial stage how male authors of Hindi Dalit autobiographies tend to disregard female characters and often either do not mention them at all or mention them to a much lesser degree than male characters. In the first volume of Tulsiram's two-part autobiography *Murdahiyā*, for instance, individual women characters – as opposed to groups of women – are hardly mentioned in the narrative. Barely any women characters appear in the main part of *Maṇikarṇikā*, the second volume of his autobiography. Instead, they are assembled in a separate chapter at the end of the volume, which, being cut out of the chronological order of the autobiography, looks like an afterthought. In Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography *Jūṭhan*, women characters often remain behind the scenes as well. This is illustrated based on two additional examples. As the next stage, the chapter demonstrates how Kausalya Baisantri actively responds to female erasure in male written Dalit autobiographies as well as to the absence of narrative agency for women characters which she challenges in her autobiography. By experimenting with the genre of autobiography and adding her maternal grandmother and mother as main protagonists of her work, Baisantri fills her narrative with female characters and with female agency. Numerous further female characters of *Dohˡrā Abhiśāp* help in the creation of the woman role model trope, which I identify in this chapter and exemplify by

means of various close reading examples from the text. Baisantri also creates the man role model trope. She does so by indirectly suggesting to the readers that specific characters are to be regarded as insignificant and irrelevant, while others should be seen as role models. The woman and the man role model tropes share the following characteristics: they are hard-working and honest people, who understand the importance of education for both girls and boys and run schools or help in other ways to advance education for underprivileged persons. In addition, the male role model is respectful towards women, and the woman role model is independent and clever and plays an active part in her own fortune and the narrative. With these tropes, Baisantri's autobiography *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* challenges male-written Dalit literary texts as well as traditional views on gender roles and distribution of agency. In the introduction to her autobiography, Baisantri declares that she "needs independence" to share her story with the world and that her male relatives, i.e. her husband, her brother and her son, might be displeased with her choice to publish her frank and openly written work. I argue that the many examples of female agency in *Dohˈrā Abhiśāp* are performed through Baisantri's own agency of writing her autobiography.

Chapter 4 "Forms of Hindi as a Rhetorical Strategy: *Dalit Cetˈnā* in Omprakash Valmiki's *Jūṭhan*" analyzes the language and usage of non-standard versus standard forms of Hindi in Valmiki's autobiography. Using examples of direct speech from *Jūṭhan*, I show that Omprakash Valmiki uses in his autobiography different forms of Hindi in direct speech to indicate to the reader certain dissimilarities between speakers. In the village setting of the book, a non-standard form of Hindi is used in order to mark speakers as not formally educated. This form of speech is juxtaposed to the speech used by school teachers, whose direct speech uses standard Hindi, and is thus implicitly marked as the speech of educated persons. This difference between educated and not educated characters serves the purpose of marking school teachers as less knowledgeable or competent in the context of caste oppression through the usage of some non-standard forms in direct speech used by them. In contrast, characters who have been marked as not formally educated in other instances appear more authoritative or informed in the context of *dalit cetˈnā* or Dalit consciousness by the usage of more standard forms in their

speech. Valmiki's usage of standard and non-standard forms of Hindi changes in the city setting of *Jūṭhan*. Here, the difference between people from the village and people from the city is highlighted by the same means, that is, through the usage of standard and non-standard forms of Hindi in direct speech.

At last, chapter 5 "Challenging Premchand: Creating a Narrative of Empowerment" examines the narrative techniques employed by Omprakash Valmiki to express Dalit consciousness by means of rhetoric and linguistic methods. In *Jūṭhan*, Valmiki refers to the short story *Dūdh kā dām* written by the celebrated and prolific Hindi author Munshi Premchand not only through its title – which means "leftovers" and is a direct reference to Premchand's story – but also through the notion of "standing outside the door" as well as the usage of an infamous phrase uttered by one of its characters, Babu Maheshnath. In his autobiography, Valmiki evokes the image of standing outside the door on three separate occasions, all of which serve to accuse supporters of caste hierarchy of reducing Dalits or people formerly labeled as "untouchable" to passive spectators instead of active agents. By doing this, Valmiki draws a subtle comparison between the destiny of Mangal, the main protagonist of *Dūdh kā dām* and the story of his own life. While Mangal's character remains content with his passive position, Valmiki's protagonist rebels against the place "outside the door" which casteist society tries to force on him. A more crucial role plays the phrase uttered by Babu Maheshnath, another character from Premchand's *Dūdh kā dām*. It is addressed to a woman from the Bhangi *jāti* and reads, "Whatever else might happen in the world, Bhangi will remain Bhangi. It is hard to make people out of them"[361] (Premchand 1996: 284). This phrase, or the "Maheshnath utterance" as I refer to it, is uttered in a somewhat changed wording by three different characters on three different occasions in *Jūṭhan* and challenged by the narrative that frames it. This altered utterance contains the method suggested by Valmiki to achieve improvement, namely education. In addition, through the usage of non-standard speech, each character to utter this paraphrased statement is marked as an uninformed speaker. In the first instance, the main protagonist's doubts about the continuation of his

[361] Hindi original: *duṇiyā mẽ aur cāhe jo kuch ho jāe, bhaṃgī bhaṃgī hī raheṃge. inheṃ ād'mī banānā kaṭhin hai*.

education regardless of the antagonism of the casteist society he meets with is introduced. The second instance proves that Valmiki's assertion is accurate, and that education indeed helps one to advance socially. Finally, the third instance serves as a didactic moment to seal the argument. Valmiki suggests and is supported by a character who represents the new generation that as a "Bhangi" – to use Premchand's original wording – who has advanced socially, one should not hide one's caste affiliation. Rather, one should make it known publicly in order to improve the reputation and position for all Dalits. Valmiki's autobiography *Jūṭhan* is the best example for such a course of action.

In this way, the central character of Valmiki's autobiography in the course of the narrative undergoes a transformation from a young illiterate boy akin to Premchand's Mangal to Omprakash Valmiki, an established writer – Munshi Ji, as his father used to call him, or "Mister Writer", as his friend Iṃdujī calls him on one of the last pages of the book. One can, arguably, see this same transformation in the other two autobiographies, which are in the focus of this dissertation, as well. While Valmiki purposefully uses his life narrative to challenge the object status to which, as Dalit writers claim, Premchand and other non-Dalit writers have subjected Dalit characters in their writings, Kausalya Baisantri and Tulsiram do so indirectly through the very fact of writing and publishing their autobiographies. All three authors reject the passive position of "Mangal" and instead, write their texts through their own agency and consciousness in order to promote the same strategy among their potential Dalit readers. Tulsiram argues for taking the initiative and getting educated despite any obstacles, including one's family that might not realize its importance. His promotion of Buddhism as the historical religion of Dalits deconstructs the identity of the helpless and destitute "untouchables", while his implicit campaign in favor of a conversion to Buddhism encourages the idea of being an active agent in one's own story. Kausalya Baisantri achieves the same objective in *Dohꞌrā Abhiśāp* by the means of writing about three generations of women in her family and effectively showing how a change of situation or, in this case, social position happens in a gradual progression. As the first step, her grandmother revolts against an abusive husband and decides to lead an independent life. She works hard regardless of deprivation and loss, and arranges the marriage of her daughter to a suitable young man, who was

raised by a good woman. As the next step, this daughter (i.e. Kausalya's mother) works hard together with her husband and decides to educate all her children. The more positive change enters the lives of the family members, the simpler it seems to get: while the eldest daughter had to stop studying because her in-laws opposed the idea of her education, the second eldest daughter (Kausalya Baisantri herself) struggled through high school and college regardless of caste oppression she had to face. Regretting her eldest daughter's fate as an uneducated woman, the mother decided not to let her other children marry young and give an education to all of them. The younger children of the family also studied at universities and got academic degrees. At the end of her autobiography, Kausalya Baisantri states that her mother became extremely active in helping other Dalits to get educated too. At last, Baisantri lists her own children and nieces and nephews and states that all of them are educated and married to suitable partners (some of whom belong to "high castes") (Baisantri 1999: 116). In this way, all three authors of Hindi Dalit autobiographies in focus of this dissertation not only challenge, but also contradict the Maheshnath utterance, and advocate for education and active participation in their own destinies for all Dalits.

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