

---

## Dalit Childhood as a Cultural Testimony: Trauma and Resistance in Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh (Against the Night)*

<sup>1</sup>Santosh Kumar Sonker, <sup>2</sup>B. Krishnaiah

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak – 484887, Madhya Pradesh, India.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English, School of Humanities, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad – 500046, Telangana, India

### Abstract

Dalit autobiography in India has emerged as one of the most radical literary forms, raising its voice against the historical suppression of marginalised groups. Balbir Madhopuri's *"Changiya Rukh" (Against the Night)* is a significant Punjabi Dalit autobiography that explores childhood trauma, social conditioning, and political awakening. The present paper is to analyse the portrayal of Dalit childhood in *Changiya Rukh* as a cultural testimonial, converting individual anguish into shared historical documentation. Utilising trauma theory and Ambedkarite political philosophy, the paper contends that Madhopuri's narrative reconceptualises trauma not alone as a psychological disruption but as a structural phenomenon engendered by the caste system. The research further examines the influences of labour, schooling, gendered pain, memory, silence, and ideological reform on the subjectivity of the Dalit child. The paper contends that Madhopuri's story transmutes Dalit infancy into a formidable repository of social injustice and a cornerstone for emancipatory consciousness.

**Keywords:** Dalit autobiography, Ambedkar, Madhopuri, upbringing, trauma, caste, cultural witness, resistance.

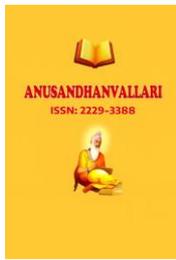
---

### Introduction

Dalit autobiographical literature in India constitutes a significant literary challenge against caste-based oppression and historical erasure. Explaining Dalit literature's impact, Alok Mukherjee affirms:

Indian literary history and theory, as well as the teaching of Indian literatures, are spectacularly silent about Dalit literature. However, Dalit cultural and critical productions make a significant critical intervention in the thinking and writing about Indian society, history, culture and literature. (1)

*Changiya Rukh* which means a chopped tree, is a metaphor of mutilation and a symbolic image of enforced stunting of something made small and inferior so that the others appear larger and superior, an excellent parallel to the position of the Dalits in this deeply divided society. (Ravi Bhushan) Unlike mainstream autobiographies, which frequently focus on personal growth and self-expression, Dalit life stories are more akin to public testimonies. They talk about more than just themselves. They discuss a shared history forged through hunger, shame, hard work, and exclusion. "In Rene Jara's phrase it is a 'narration de urgencia' – a story that needs to be told – involving a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, exploitation, or simply struggle for survival, which is implicated in the act of narration itself (Vidal and Jara 1986:3)." Bill Ashcroft, et. al. (231) Dalit autobiographies do not aim for emotional closure but rather for political acknowledgment. Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh* holds significant importance in the tradition of Dalit life writing, especially within Punjabi Dalit literature, which has traditionally been marginalised in mainstream Dalit literary discourse, predominantly influenced by Marathi, Hindi, and Tamil texts. Madhopuri's autobiography portrays childhood not as a protected period of innocence but as the initial space for caste warfare. The Dalit child in *Changiya Rukh* experiences social hierarchy not through theoretical education but through physical control, spatial division, labour exploitation, and public humiliation.



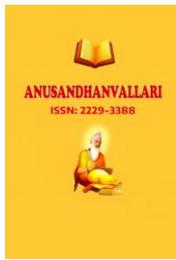
Dalit childhood in *Changiya Rukh* serves as cultural testimony. Childhood serves as the initial locus for the inscription of caste structures onto the body and mind, while resistance gradually emerges through education and the development of political consciousness. Trauma, in the text, is systemic, repetitive, and deep-rooted in everyday social existence. Simultaneously, the narrative presents the transformation of sorrow into critique through intellectual consciousness, influenced by Ambedkarite theory. This work integrates trauma theory and Dalit political philosophy, positioning *Changiya Rukh* as a text that reconceptualises autobiography as an ethical act of witnessing rather than merely a personal narrative of self-discovery. It works as a catalyst for social change. In the words of Balbir Madhopuri, “This (Dalit) literature is not just a means of entertainment or killing time. It prioritises as ideological and a socio-economic revolution and cultural change.” (Rajkumar Hans 8)

### Trauma, Testimony, and Dalit Political Thought

The present study utilises two principal conceptual frameworks, i.e., trauma theory and Ambedkarite political philosophy. Collectively, these frameworks facilitate an interpretation of *Changiya Rukh* that transcends individual psychology, aiming for a comprehension of trauma as a social and political phenomenon. Cathy Caruth’s definition of trauma stresses that traumatic experiences are not always easy to remember right away. Trauma manifests subsequently, via repetition, fragmentation, and unresolved memory. Trauma defies linear storytelling and traditional depiction. In this context, trauma transcends individual injury, constituting a rupture of meaning itself. Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart explain that “when people are exposed to trauma, that is, a frightening event, outside of ordinary human experience, they experience “speechless terror” (172) Trauma theory, when applied to Dalit life narratives, assists in seeing caste violence not as discrete acts of cruelty but as an ongoing framework of destruction. Trauma theory alone does not adequately explain the political particularity of caste. This is where Ambedkarite political philosophy becomes very important. B. R. Ambedkar theorised that caste functions as a system perpetuated by economic exploitation, religious ideology, ritual hierarchy, and social discipline. Ambedkar contends that caste is not merely a cultural distinction but a hierarchical system of inequality that undermines social mobility and moral community. In his seminal essay, *Annihilation of Caste*, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar underlines as follows:

It is a pity that caste, even today, has its defenders. The defences are many. It is defended on the ground that the Caste System is but another name for division of labour; and if division of labour is a necessary feature of every civilised society, then it is argued that there is nothing wrong in the Caste System. Now, the first thing that is to be urged against this view is that the Caste System is not merely a division of labour. *It is also a division of labourers*. Civilized society undoubtedly needs a division of labor. Nevertheless, in no civilised society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural, undoubtedly, needs division of labour. However, in no civilized society is the division of labor accompanied by this unnatural division of laborers into watertight compartments. The Caste System is not merely a division of labourers, which is quite different from the division of labour—it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers. (14)

Trauma theory and Ambedkarite philosophy, when considered collectively, facilitate an understanding of Dalit trauma as structural rather than incidental. Trauma is not initiated by an acute jolt but rather by continual exposure to institutionalised violence. In this context, testimony is not merely therapeutic storytelling; it is a powerful form of communication. Rather, a political act that unravels the mechanisms of production of suffering and its perpetuation. This theoretical paradigm facilitates the study of Dalit childhood in *Changiya Rukh* as a nexus of trauma, memory, ideology, and resistance. Arjun Dangle says that “Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism, since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group of people who, as



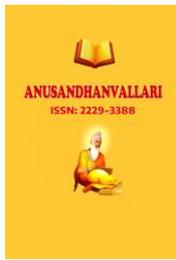
untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality.” Dangle traces the origin of Dalit literature to Ambedkar. “His revolutionary ideas stirred into action all the Dalits of Maharashtra and gave them a new self-respect. Dalit literature is nothing but the literary expression of this awareness.” (Alok Mukherjee, 1)

Dalit autobiography fundamentally changes the established conventions of life writing. Dalit autobiographies emphasise community suffering, in contrast to mainstream elite autobiographies that exalt individual achievement. The “I” that tells the story is not separate from the community. It talks from inside of it. Humiliation, work, poverty, and resistance all shape the self. In *Changiya Rukh*, Madhopuri’s early recollections are not kept to himself. They become public testimony. Every instance of exclusion, deprivation, and segregation serves as a historical record of caste society in rural Punjab. The story illustrates how untouchability operates in real life, not just in theory. Madhopuri’s telling of what has been kept quiet for a long time goes against the cultural silence that surrounds caste violence. The autobiography serves as a counter-archive to nationalist narratives that frequently extol unity while concealing social discord. The Dalit body, obscured in official narratives, emerges as the focal point of historical truth in the autobiographical writing.

The controlled tone of Madhopuri’s narration enhances this testimonial role. The story doesn’t become too emotional. It does not seek sympathy by being overly emotional. It, on the other hand, demands factual precision. This ethical economy of language prevents the reader from viewing Dalit pain as mere entertainment and instead calls for political recognition. Dalit autobiography arises not only as a literary genre but also as a counter-historical method of knowledge creation. It intervenes in a historiographical tradition that has either ignored the Dalit presence altogether or represented it solely through the eyes of the dominant castes. Dalit life writing emphasises humiliation, hunger, labour, and exclusion as collective social realities, in contrast to traditional autobiographies that focus on the development of the individual self through education, introspection, and personal success. The villagers are afraid of the village officials, such as *zaildar*, *jagirdar*, *safedposh*, and *nambardar*. A *zaildar* is supreme for many villages and enjoys unlimited powers. Madhopuri writes:

Zaildar enjoys judicial powers”... It was said that a *zaildar* was forgiven five to seven murders by the government, and people did not have the courage to look him in the eye. The treatment meted out to the lower castes, especially untouchables, was oppressive and terrifying. The *zaildar* compelled them to *begaar* in his field and on his construction sites. If there was no such work available, then he got them to dig up the fields and throw the mud excavated in this way outside the village. This meant that he did not know the days fixed for forced labour. (4-5)

The Dalit “I” is hence not an exclusively private entity; it represents a collective voice forged by communal hardship and political strife. This collaborative aspect is quite clear in *Changiya Rukh*. Madhopuri’s own recollections perpetually intertwine with the experiences of his family and community. The narrative voice does not focus solely on internal psychological turmoil; it contextualises the self within a framework of caste dynamics, labour hierarchies, and systemic poverty. The autobiography serves as a form of witness in the strictest sense; it documents experienced violence not for individual catharsis but for public recognition and historical rectification. Testimony, in the context of trauma studies, transcends mere recollection. It is an ethical intrusion into silence. Madhopuri’s story reveals to the reader the sights of ritualized humiliation that would normally be accepted and not questioned in a caste society. Witnessing the government’s support for social and economic inequalities in the village, Madhopuri pondered many painful questions in his heart. He writes that the “untouchables – encompassed only the right to provide free labour. In turn for the *begaar* given by them, these downtrodden people, deprived of all human rights, were conferred the right to remove carcasses of animals, and that also as a gesture of kindness on the part of the master who owned them.” (6-7) The text prevents people from easily feeling sorry for Dalits by telling these stories without being overly sentimental. Instead, it needs constant moral attention. This is why *Changiya Rukh* does not want to close. The story does not end with forgiveness or reconciliation. Its goal is not therapeutic recovery but political exposure. In this case, Dalit



autobiography is a sort of cultural witness that records what official histories leave out: the everyday violence that keeps caste as a social order and directs towards “the transformational agenda of today’s Dalit literature, reflects that assertion.” (Alok Mukherjee, 16)

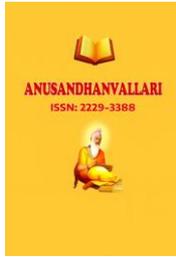
The early internalisation of caste hierarchy is a big part of childhood in *Changiya Rukh*. Youngsters from the dominant Caste gain power slowly, but Dalit youngsters learn about power via humiliation. Life’s initial lessons are not about fun or freedom; they are about limits, rules, and terror. Segregation happens in the most common places in life. The Dalit youngster learns where to sit, who to touch, and where to sip water. Every day actions become dangerous. Madhopuri witnesses it in the religious celebrations of *Gurupurab*, the first day of the Indian solar month or the birthdays of the Gurus. Jat Bhai of Gurudwara would say, “Give these Chamar brats a shout and drive them off.” (11) The body is always being watched. Caste is not imparted through ideological discourse but by physical discipline. School occupies a unique position in this process. Education is later demonstrated to be the foundation of resistance, but throughout childhood, it serves as an additional mechanism of caste restriction. Dalit kids are often made to sit on the edges of the classroom, away from the rest of the kids. They are not allowed to participate equally. Teachers can sometimes reinforce caste bias. The school becomes a place where humiliation is accepted by the system, rather than a place of freedom. This early social training results in what trauma theory refers to as normalised harm. Violent people do not see it as a break from everyday life; they see it as life itself. The Dalit child grows up thinking that being left out is a normal part of life. During his school days, the school teacher, Master Sodhi, ill-treated and exploited untouchable students for sweeping the school floor, and they were sent to tend his animals:

Gudd, you and Roshi (Roshan Lal) go home and cut some fodder and chop it up! Ordered Master Sodhi... ‘Go quickly! The buffaloes must be hungry and bellowing away. Wash them also... ‘He sends us every third day, but he never tells the Jat boys that they should fetch and chop the fodder for his animals! Abruptly, and for the first time, I showed my resentment.’ (69)

### Trauma as a Structural Condition

The narrator’s trauma in *Changiya Rukh* does not stem from a singular horrific event. It builds up over time. Every day, hunger comes back. Humiliation occurs repeatedly in the traditions of social settings. Labour takes energy from the body before it has fully grown. The mind is not shaped by shock, but by constant decay. Being poor makes this trauma worse. Material destitution intersects with social shame. Hunger is more than just being uncomfortable. It is a symbolic fall. Not being able to eat enough makes people feel ashamed. The child learns that being hungry has a social meaning. It makes him seem bad. Another important aspect of the story’s pain is how it is passed down through generations. The pain that parents go through becomes part of the child’s emotional legacy. The father’s sorrow and the mother’s endurance shape the child’s moral universe. Trauma operates as a historical current that traverses generations, rather than being limited to a personal psychological occurrence. Trauma is conveyed through description rather than lamentation. This refusal to make misery beautiful gives the story moral authority. The passage does not ask for pity. It reveals a societal offence.

Madhopuri’s story shows how caste creates hurt subjectivity over generations with shocking accuracy. One of the most disturbing things about being a Dalit child in *Changiya Rukh* is that the body starts working at a young age. Childhood transitions into adulthood due to economic imperatives. The Dalit child works before becoming a citizen. Manual labour is depicted not as a dignified option but as an inherited obligation. The caste system keeps Dalit bodies chained to hard and demeaning work. Schooling does not replace work; it lives alongside it. The child only studies at night after the body has been emptied during the day. This leads to two kinds of exploitation: physical weariness and a lack of education. The child is expected to excel academically, even when they lack the necessary resources for studying. Every attempt to better oneself comes with hunger,



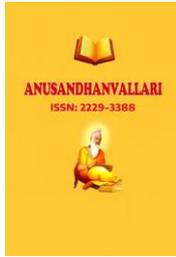
tiredness, and shame. Symbolically, the Dalit body is where economic and ritual power meet. The body is necessary for work, but it is often viewed as dirty. It is both necessary and hated. This inconsistency causes significant mental strain. The self is constructed in an environment where utility coexists with social ostracism. Madhopuri would like to bring to the notice of both Bhaia and Taya that Master Sodhi should teach them instead of using them for manual labour at Sodhi's house. He explains how he struggled to continue his studies: "My brother and I studied in the light of a diya placed in an alcove in the wall between the small room at the back and the hall, and slept on a single cot." (87) In an interview to Sivasankari, Balbir Madhopuri explained about his family and his labour work until he finished his graduation:

My father carried on the family's hereditary profession of shoemaking while he lived in Lahore for six months. After shifting from there, he became an agricultural labourer again. The circumstances were challenging. We were seven children in all. We lived in a small, makeshift shed, where we coexisted along with the cattle. During monsoon, the house would be in floods. The kerosene lamp would be lit up only on occasions, and as such, we would be surrounded by darkness. I have worked as an agricultural labourer right up to my graduation (<https://balbirmadhopuri.in/Interviews.html>)

*Changiya Rukh* is told from a man's point of view, although Dalit women play an important emotional and moral role in the story. The mother's labour, hunger, and emotional fortitude influence the child's perception of unfairness. Dalit women face many problems at once, including caste, poverty, and being subordinate to men. Their work is mostly hidden. They work both inside and outside of the house. They eat last and sleep least. But they do not often find words to describe their pain. The mother's wordless fortitude serves as an emotional anchor and a political lesson for the child. The child learns that unfairness is not simply a one-time occurrence, but a pattern that happens repeatedly. Madhopuri's story foregrounds how difficult it is for Dalit women to fight back in spaces that are controlled by caste. They must endure, rather than openly defying. This hidden pain makes any simple story of resistance more complicated. Dalit children is closely associated with the hard work, hunger, and emotional strength of Dalit mothers. The mother is not just a background character; she is a real example of the institutional oppression that exists across caste, class, and gender. For instance, at the *sawan*-eating contest at the two-wheeled well, Madhopuri clearly explains the discrimination meted out to the Dalit women:

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

In *Changiya Rukh*, memory does not serve as a nostalgic recreation of the past but rather as an active political force. Madhopuri's memories of childhood are a deliberate choice to break the silence that has historically surrounded the existence of Dalits. In a society where caste violence is common and not often recorded in official history, remembering becomes a way to fight back. The traumatic recollection in the narrative does not progress linearly. It manifests through recurrent depictions of starvation, physical abuse, educational isolation, and public shaming. These repeats mirror the pattern of trauma, in which distressing experiences defy linear narrative arrangement. However, Madhopuri's act of writing turns these broken memories into political evidence. Silence serves a dual function in the story. On one hand, silence shows how humiliating some things are that cannot be said, especially when they have to do with the body and societal shame.



On the other hand, forced silence is a sign of how Dalits have suffered in the past without being able to speak up against it. Madhopuri transforms memories into testimony by breaking this silence through autobiography. Political testimony is not the same as confession. It does not want private emotional support. It calls for moral responsibility and recognition from everyone. The reader is not only invited into an intimate emotional connection but also positioned as a witness to institutional injustice.

The memories of Madhopuri become a tool for social truth, ensuring that what caste tried to erase remains in the cultural consciousness forever. The meeting with B. R. Ambedkar's ideology signifies the most crucial ideological shift in Madhopuri's life narrative. Before Ambedkar, people believed that pain was something that would inevitably happen to everyone. The misery of Ambedkar offers not spiritual solace but political elucidation. His analysis of caste reveals the violence concealed inside ritual, religion, and tradition. Ambedkarite thought transforms Dalit identity from an enforced stigma into a platform for political assertion. The Dalit self is no longer required to internalise shame. It picks up the rhetoric of rights, dignity, and justice instead. Reading Ambedkar transforms personal pain into collective history and criticism. Trauma persists, although it is reinterpreted as a manifestation of institutional injustice rather than individual deficiency. This intellectual awakening also alters how people interact with one another and the community. Madhopuri's awakening does not result in disengagement from the Dalit collective. It instead makes him feel more responsible for it. The person transforms into a political entity, with its existence gaining significance solely via solidarity. The Ambedkarite turn serves as both a psychological emancipation and a moral realignment of the Dalit identity. During the discussion of caste discrimination:

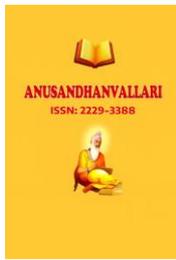
As if the Jats let us near them. They make us sit on the ground in their courtyards. We are treated worse than their dogs!' Bhai retorted.

The Jats are men of substance and landowners. Just look at these Ramdasias! They are our people, and merely because they have accepted Sikhism, they are our people, and merely because they have accepted Sikhism, they act superior to us!" (61)

Bhaiya's critique of the religion makes others think about their pathetic conditions of life. He states that "We are not going to get rid of this! All these problems have been created by the Brahmins! It is they who have divided us so that they may dominate us and make us slaves of them." (61) He continues that "What sort of life do we lead? We neither belong to this side nor do we fit in with the others! They call us Hindus. Tell me where do we stand in the scheme of Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishyas, and Shudras? We have neither a religion nor a caste! If only anyone were to ask them how are we Hindus?" (61-62) Balbir's mother is quite clear and she does not "see difference in Sikhs and Hindus... we all believe in the same God." (62) Bhaiya adds that "The Sikhs suffer from the same disease of caste as the Hindus... Become a Sikh or whatever you want to be, but don't remain a Hindu! One must get out of this hell!" (62) They refer to Lahori Ram Bali who mentioned Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his advice to "the poor and the low castes to become Buddhists, because the Buddhists don't believe in varna or caste and are treated equal." (62) Balbir Madhopuri portrays a rebellious Phumman who confronts a Jat landlord instead of bowing to him:

Threaten someone else; those days are gone when all of them scraped and bowed before you... Now you lose your temper when you hear a few home truths! You are here every day, to threaten and frighten us... Think before you speak or else I'll pluck your beard" (31)

*Changiya Rukh* is based on the unique realities of Punjabi Dalit existence; yet, its portrayal of childhood is very similar to that of other Dalit autobiographies from throughout India. In stories from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh, Dalit childhood seems to be characterised by comparable patterns of segregation, hunger, coerced labour, and public humiliation. The early political exposure of the Dalit child is a constant across locations. In contrast to dominant-caste children whose childhoods are



shielded by social privilege, Dalit children encounter power at the most personal level from a young age. They learn about hierarchy through their bodies long before they hear about it in abstract conversation. However, *Changiya Rukh* does highlight some crucial geographical differences. The agrarian economy of Punjab, the predominance of landowning classes, and the cultural hegemony of Sikh institutions engender unique forms of exclusion and control. Labour relations, land dependence, and religious nationalism interface with caste dominance in particular ways. This comparative framework illustrates that whereas Dalit childhood adheres to a common political lexicon of victimisation, it simultaneously integrates regional social dynamics. Madhopuri's story thereby broadens the national repository of Dalit memory beyond more thoroughly examined Marathi and Tamil frameworks. It strengthens the notion that caste is not merely a regional anomaly but a pervasive pattern of social violence across India.

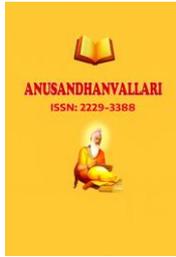
The language of *Changiya Rukh* is intentionally simple, direct, and controlled. This stylistic simplicity is not a sign of a lack of literary skill. It is a political choice based on the ethics of testimony. Madhopuri rejects decorative aestheticism because it could turn real pain into art. Dalit autobiography functions inside a representational quandary. Using too much flowery language can make pain feel less tangible. Madhopuri's minimalism stops this from happening. His phrases are still grounded in real-life experiences, such as hunger, heat, fatigue, and shame. The simplicity of form guarantees adherence to lived reality. This stylistic economy also serves a democratic purpose. In the words of Alok Mukherjee, Dalit "narratives seek to capture the authentic Dalit experience through a minute chronicling of the smallest detail of daily life in a language that, as Limbale terms it, is crude, impure and uncivil. It is as if, by capturing each detail and reproducing it deliberately in a language that is the opposite of the language of upper caste literature, the Dalit writer will convey the essence of Dalitness." (12) The story becomes more available to people who do not read a lot of highbrow literature. This simplicity also fights against Brahmanical control over what people choose to read. It contradicts the notion that only elegant language possesses artistic value. In *Changiya Rukh*, moral urgency supplants stylistic ornamentation as the principal structuring force of storytelling. The politics of simplicity thus transforms into a resistance strategy inherent in literary form.

Balbir Madhopuri's reluctance to portray the Dalit subject as a lifelong victim is a significant step forward. Even while the story talks a lot about pain, it does not let trauma be the only thing that defines Dalit identity. Trauma inflicts pain; however, it also refines political awareness. Madhopuri's evolution from a wounded youngster to a politically aware individual challenges humanitarian interpretations that depict Dalits solely as passive victims. Such interpretations, albeit empathetic, frequently perpetuate paternalistic power dynamics. *Changiya Rukh* challenges this framework by demanding epistemic authority based on lived oppression. The text transforms trauma into an interpretive framework rather than a definitive diagnosis. It allows for criticism. It makes people ask questions. It undermines the legitimacy of the caste hierarchy. Instead of stopping the subject in their tracks, misery becomes the basis for intellectual clarity. Balbir Madhopuri was not able to decipher the caste discrimination in haircut practices and their hierarchies when his brother explained them:

Once I had asked Bhaia, 'Taaya comes from a distance of four kilometres to cut our hair. Taaya Gyanu and his father, Baba Natha Singh, are in our village and they also cut hair.'

'They are Hindu barbers, and they don't cut our hair,' Bhaia had told me and then got busy. At that time, I did not fully understand the implications of this statement. But I had seen Taaya Gyanu many times, cutting the tails of the animals that belonged to the Jats. (140)

This reframing holds special importance in trauma studies, which frequently focus on psychological rupture and fragmentation. Madhopuri's story shows that trauma may also be used as a way to teach people about politics in situations of systemic violence. The injured individual not only seeks recovery but also



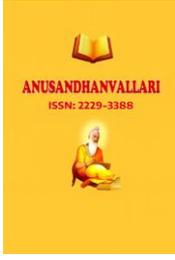
demands a restructuring of the societal structure that caused the injury. Madhopuri gets hurt when Inder Singh threatened his Bhaia to advise his brother-in-law “not to drink straight from the pipe carrying water from the Persian wheel.” (62) He understands that “we were considered worse than animals! Even stones and dumb animals are accepted and considered better than us.” (62) Therefore, he “wished that I didn’t have to labour like this – somehow get some education and move to Delhi, like my aunt’s son who was working in Delhi, and live there, wear new trousers and shirts, where no one would scold me, and there would be no one to fear.” (34) After understanding the Indian social, cultural, economic and political dimensions and transforming himself into a conscious man, he moved to Delhi. He occupied prestigious positions such as Deputy Director (News), All India Radio, in charge of Punjabi Publications (Ministry of Information & Broadcasting), and Editor, Yojana, published by the same Department. He emerged as one of the prominent Dalit writers from India. Madhopuri transforms autobiography from a personal literary form into a public moral record by framing infancy as a cultural witness. The story resonates with more than just readers; it speaks to society as a whole. Dalit childhood here becomes a living indictment. It records the daily operation of caste more effectively than abstract sociological data. The child’s viewpoint reveals the unvarnished cruelty of social rules that adult ideology frequently camouflages as tradition.

### Conclusion

*Changiya Rukh* is one of the most honest depictions of Dalit childhood in Indian literature. Madhopuri reimagines childhood not as a safeguarded realm of innocence but as a preliminary exposure to caste-based violence. Hunger, labour, humiliation, mother sacrifice, and institutional exclusion provide the emotional and political framework of the Dalit child’s existence. However, the story does not stay stuck on the injury. Education and Ambedkarite awareness turn trauma into criticism and quiet into testimony. Resistance develops gradually, inconsistently, and at significant personal expense. The Dalit infant becomes a political subject not by heroic rupture but through prolonged ethical effort. *Changiya Rukh* redefines autobiography by defining childhood as a cultural witness. It transforms from a chronicle of personal development into a manifestation of historical justice. Memory serves as evidence. Writing turns into a way to see politics. By telling the story of Dalit childhood, Madhopuri does more than tell a story. He reveals a culture structured by hierarchical inequality. His autobiography serves as a moral text that compels readers to view caste not as a relic of history, but as a current and functioning system.

### Works Cited

- [1] Ambedkar, B. R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Critical Quest, 2007.
- [2] Bhushan, Ravi. “Balbir Madhopuri’s *Changiya Rukh*: A Critique of Dalit Identity and Politics.” *Language In India* (Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow). Volume 11: 3 March, 2011. (<https://www.languageinindia.com/march2011/ravishankarmadhopurifinal.html>)
- [3] Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- [4] Dangle, Arjun was mentioned in Alok Mukherjee’s “Reading Sharankumar Limbale’s *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*.” *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. Sharankumar Limbale. Orient BlackSwan, 2004.
- [5] Hans, Rajkumar. Balbir Madhopuri was mentioned in “Introduction” to *My Caste – My Shadow: Selected Poems* by Balbir Madhopuri. Trans. From Punjabi by T.C. Ghai. LG Publishers, 2020.
- [6] Jara, Rene is mentioned in Bill Ashcroft, et. al. *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*. Routledge, 2004. P. 231.
- [7] Kolk, Bessel A. Van Der and Onno Van Der Hart. “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma.” *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.



- 
- [8] Madhopuri, Balbir. *Changiya Rukh (Against the Night): An Autobiography*. Tripti Jain (translated). Oxford University Press, 2010.
- [9] Mukherjee, Alok. "Reading Sharankumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*." *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. Sharankumar Limbale. Orient BlackSwan, 2004.
- [10] Sivasankari. "Interview of Balbir Madhopuri." (<https://balbirmadhopuri.in/Interviews.html>)