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**From Marginalisation to Emancipation: Education, Ambedkarite Consciousness, and
Rationalism in Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri***

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Abstract: *Dalit autobiography occupies a significant position in modern Indian literature because it transforms individual memory into a collective testimony of caste oppression, social exclusion, poverty, resistance, and self-assertion. Siddalingaiah's Ooru Keri is an important contribution to Kannada Dalit literature, documenting the lived realities of marginalised communities while articulating a vision of social transformation. The autobiography traces Siddalingaiah's journey from a childhood marked by poverty, hunger, caste-based segregation, and superstition to the development of an educated, rational, progressive, and politically conscious Dalit identity. This paper critically examines the interconnected themes of caste oppression, education, Ambedkarite consciousness, rationalism, atheism, identity formation, and social resistance in Ooru Keri. Particular attention is given to the symbolic distinction between the "Ooru," or dominant-caste village, and the "Keri," or Dalit settlement, as a spatial representation of caste*

hierarchy and social exclusion. The study argues that education functions in the autobiography as an instrument of both individual empowerment and collective liberation. It further analyses the influence of Dr B. R. Ambedkar on Siddalingaiah's intellectual development and his gradual movement from inherited religious beliefs and superstition toward rationalism and atheism. The paper also examines Siddalingaiah's use of humour, irony, realism, and collective memory as distinctive features of Dalit autobiographical aesthetics. Ultimately, Ooru Keri transcends conventional autobiography and emerges as an alternative social history of Dalit life in Karnataka. It demonstrates how literature, education, rational inquiry, and political consciousness can collectively challenge structures of caste domination and contribute to the assertion of human dignity.

Keywords: *Siddalingaiah, Ooru Keri, Dalit Autobiography, Ambedkar, Education, Caste, Rationalism, Atheism, Kannada Dalit Literature*

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