

History from Below in Obama's *Dreams from My Father*

This research paper explores the autobiographical memoir of Barack Obama from theoretical perspective of 'new historicism'. The paper begins with short introduction of the book Dreams from My Father connecting it with the research topic 'History from Below' and digs out the context in which the book was written. Then the study attempts to analyse how Obama has finely experienced the same level of prejudice as his father and forefathers and it also attempts how his experiences of racial prejudice can also be counted under collective experience of people from margin. The paper explains how Obama's autobiography gets meaning as part of the larger black community's story in white dominated society that dominates black people's history and its racial past. The writer's motive behind recollecting his racial past in the memoir is actually an attempt to investigate his inheritance and the history of deeply grounded racial prejudice in America.

Key words: History from below, racial identity, the blacks; inheritance, prejudice

The present research paper analyses an autobiographical memoir of Obama titled *Dreams from My Father* (1995). It is a story of race and inheritance. Obama celebrates his autobiography through narratives. The novel highlights and excavates ordinary African ordinary people's history which has been elided. It tends to realize historians "history without people". History from Below questions why the so-called civilized, socialized and most educated people of America prove as care-taker of human right as secured in constitution whereas practical eyes lack to address the real issues of racism. The issue raised in this research is, why does it unable to address the proper history which is history from below itself? Obama reports the realities of his past struggles, turmoil, experiences of oppression, exclusion, lack of origin to his present position including his father's similar experiences of racism in order to dig out

the actual history of black oppression which is a history from below and his continual resistance against racism. The collection of his narrative form successfully manages to represent the socio-cultural environment of that time when racial discrimination was rampant in America. Through the life story of narrator we can see the way how his experience of exclusion in white ruled society even being half-white becomes confused for his own identity. From his presidential position everything seems normal like there is no racial discrimination because such discrimination happens among marginalized people. The writer's social position gives him no ground to see all the racial reality of society for advocating the racial discrimination. He takes help of memory and childhood experiences to explore the history from below from the perspective of common people because at the time of writing this memoir his position was also of the common man. As revealed in the autobiography he later accepts blackness as his identity and this acceptance by writing *Dreams from My Father* makes him even more authentic source to explore the history of common black people.

Barack Hussein Obama, a black writer born on 4th August 1961, Honolulu, Hawaii, is originally from Kenya. He was elected as the 44th president of the United States on 4 November 2008. His two books *Dreams From My Father* (1995), and another book entitled *The Audacity of Hope* (2006) is the second one. Both books deal with the hope which wants to break the boundary of identity crisis, racial discrimination as being African American. Barack Obama published *Dreams From My Father* which is so much influential memoir that became *New York Times* bestseller when it was republished in 2004.

Barack Obama was elected as the first African American president. *Dream from My Father* becomes popular after his speech at the Democratic National

Convention in Boston. Barack Obama's position as the president of America contributes greatly behind instant recognition of the book. Many scholars like Michael Gledhill discuss the memoir from perspective of Obama's successful life despite being a man from the black community. His story of long struggle from the suffocated atmosphere of racism to the height of being president attracts the attention of whole world. During the recent years of publication, people merely regard the book as story of personal success. However, little has been inquired behind Obama's gradual discovery of causes for existence of the pervasive racism through generations after generations. Furthermore, there are hardly any discussions on how Obama's backward narrative into the past of his father and grandfather intends to trace out the long-lost root of black history that can answer his quest for his own original identity. The whole memoir revolves around his adventure to reveal the mystery of his father about whom he has always been unaware. His return to Kenya from America, his land of origin to discover the realities of his father and his ancestors mark his conscious efforts symbolically to identify the entire myth of his black history.

In the same context of identifying black history, my study attempts to analyze this book from theoretical notion of history from below from new historicism which tries to see the historical incidents from people's point of view. As the part of new historicism, the history from below helps to study the use of common people's perspective reflected in any literary work. New Historicism as a theory looks literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times. In the same context my paper attempts to study on the base that Obama's narration in *Dream from My Father* represents marginal voice because its written with Obama's pre-presidential

perspective, when he was also a common citizen suffering from racial prejudice in America argue

In the book *Practicing New Historicism* Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt:

The notion of culture as text has a further major attraction: it vastly expands the range of objects available to be read and interpreted. Major works of art remain centrally important, but they are jostled now by an array of other texts and images. Some of these alternative objects of attention are literary works regarded as too minor to deserve sustained interest and hence marginalized or excluded entirely from the canon. (9)

While talking about Obama's autobiography, it tries to capture and explore the cultural context of slavery and black identity in the racial and reveal the racial suffering of marginal people. In this regard, Obama's narrative itself is a written form of abstract racial culture of that time. Though it was not so popular at the initial phase of publication but when its writer became president of America, the book itself made big space in mainstream literary canon.

History from below is a core subject matter of this autobiographical text *Dreams From My Father* because the writer projects time frame and experiences when he is common man and most of his narratives deal with suffering and plight of being common man. It stands with new historicism and examines with all kinds of people and subjects without having partiality. It especially "includes the voice of ordinary, voiceless, marginalized, oppressed, subaltern and common man, local history, forgotten people history," (2) of any society, literature, nation. It attacks the traditional stereotype of "racializing other" (*Representation* 239). Writer, Sabyasachi Bhattachary in his journal gets the reference of Rodolfo Stavenhage's history form

below as “de-elitization” of social science as the part of the process of intellectual decolonization”(2). *Dreams from My Father* also favours the concept of de-elitization because it advocates African American people who are from below, common and marginalised. Likewise James Barrett forwards the term “slavery from the slave’s point of view” (8) for the history of common man. As this memoir is written by African American writer with his own lived experiences. As Obama being common man before to be president this memoir plays imperative role to show the struggling history of African American. Instead of using his perspective after change in his social status, the writer makes use of same old perspective when he was among the grassroots black population. Every personal incidents of racial suffering described in the book shares similar vibes with black people who have suffered same kind of racial experiences.

According to Michel Foucault “Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized” (Caldwell 5). In case of this book, the racial discourse forwarded by Obama became popular only after he climbs to the position of US president. As soon as he became powerful, his discourse generates great value among people. The title of Obama’s book, *Dreams from My Father* finely expresses the historical perspective as the narrative involves both passing on dream from black father to a son and later the son’s quest of his father’s inheritance and his own racial identity throughout the novel. The multi-perspectives embedded in the memoir gets highlighted further by the subtitles. It depicts Obama’s racial history of his Kenyan father who abandons the family and children. Obama through the text the quests for his past life, family heritage and history of father itself is the history of black people because his father is one of them, marginalized and

suppressed in white dominated society. Obama's act of finding his original identity and racial heritage gives him wide ground to excavate the history of common black people and throughout the book his narrative contributes to show the contemporary picture of black people's lifestyle and their struggle to survive in white dominated society.

There are three parts in the book. The first part is "Origins," in which he meaningfully describes his uncertain identity, life with a distant African father, white mother and maternal grandparents in a world where he is defined by his blackness and raised by the white side of his family. The second part of the book is "Chicago" which is a story of American society. He writes about humanity belongs to the single moral community and how life is a struggle for poor people. He also mentions nation of Islam and the importance of religion for black people. The last part is "Kenya" in which he describes how he finally understands his own racial identity by visiting his father's side of the family.

In Introduction of first edition book, Obama attempts to maintain the connection between his racial life story, his present status and past heritage of his family. In his own words he defines the narrative as autobiography, memoir and family history. He views that his book is not simply the retelling of family history, instead its something that goes deeper, and its like finding out the meaning of life as black American and illustration of struggle of his family in racial society. Obama continues:

And so what was a more interior, intimate effort on my part, to understand this struggle and to find my place in it, has converged with a broader public debate, a debate in which I am professionally engaged, one that will shape our lives and the lives of our children for many years to come. The policy

implications of all this are a topic for another book. Let me end instead on a more personal note. Most of the characters in this book remain a part of my life, albeit in varying degrees—a function of work, children, geography, and turns of fate. (prefacexi)

This extract from the preface of *Dreams from My Father* foregrounds the writer's awareness regarding the situation of country and his people. This line indicates that the historical experiences from his past life still vibrate in his mind and he has not yet forgotten the root of his origin. He remembers the destitute where his family grows. These lines in preface section establish Obama's credibility as racially experienced person who relates with the suffering of other racial minorities.

In *Dreams from my father*, the writer employs some narratives to depict the history of racial past and struggle through his own family history. He talks of his grandfather:

Actually, he was well respected because he was such a good farmer. His compound in Alego was one of the biggest in the area. He had such a green thumb, he could make anything grow. He had studied these techniques from the British, you see. When he worked for them as a cook. I didn't know he was a cook. He had his lands, but for a long time he was a cook for wazungu in Nairobi. He worked for some very important people. During the World War he served as captain in the British army. (370)

The above mentioned excerpt clearly expresses that, book is not just the history of one black boy who later becomes president, it's the story of a boy whose grandfather was cook and servant to British. Though his grandfather was never a slave to white but he relates his root with slavery history. It is also evidence that shows much inclination of

black people for their land. They devote it for the sake of nationalism which is hidden history of America that Obama wants to show through his memoir. Through his memoir Obama also seeks to institutionalize the neglected history of marginal black people, since their history were always represented from mainstream point of view. If the same history was told by any humble writer, it would not have gained much credibility but Obama as academic personal represents the history and when he reached the position of President, this book and content automatically got social acceptance and become authentic history of blacks. That's where Foucault idea of power and production of reality is applicable. He writes:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault, 194)

As said by Foucault the effect of power is not always used to suppress rather it can be exercised to excavate buried histories too. The earlier historiographer used their white power and dominance to bury the dark history of racism in America. And now with same power Obama attempts to explore the buried history from perspective of marginal people who have no access to power. His narration functions as powerful voice shouting the racial experience of marginal and powerless common people.

The birth of Obama itself is a reflection of two races because his parents different identities show his "miscegenation" (11) which itself is a hope and promise for the equal and bright future of African American, for that I claim that talks and emergence of history from below he also maintains indirectly by bringing the matter of "Origin" (10). Obama's return to Kenya for the identification of father's ancestor

symbolically represents his intention to dig out the mystery of black people, black history and common people's history. The history from below means Africans are equal to white American in the nation making process. His advocacy for mutual habitation between the two races regardless of conflicting history reflects his humanistic position for the reconciliation to progress America.

Apart from these social initiations and liberal humanistic position of Obama, the theoretical perspectives of study focuses on perspectives of author instead of his identity because his pre-presidential perspective and early year's memoir can be studied under frame of "peoples history"(Forni 3).

People's history is considered as the fundamental departure from traditional historiography. It blames the mainstream canons which presents the account of high-level politics and warfare, the lives of great statesmen and elite affairs. But French Annales School follows approach to open up new perspective and views on behalf of common people's history which says the system "slowly shifts from major events and powerful peoples to underlying forces, masses and people in margin who indirectly sustain the social structure"(Forni7). Similar issues and approaches motivate the group of Marxist historians in the United Kingdom after World War II, as well as many other historians working later in the United States, shifting their area of study to the lives and struggles of ordinary people, they investigate on social relations at the grass roots and daily activities such as work and leisure, as well as attitudes, beliefs, practices and behaviours. Such study approach becomes known in the 1960s as history from below.

History from below includes ordinary people as its subjects of study and concentrates on their experiences and perspectives in vivid way. Apart from the stereotype of traditional political history and its focus on the actions of 'great men', the

history from below is all about the history of common man. Lucien Febvre first used the phrase "histoire vue d'en bas et non d'en haut" (history seen from below and not from above) in 1932 when praising Albert Mathiez for seeking to tell the "histoire des masses et non de vedettes" (history of the masses and not of starlets). It was also used in the title of A. L. Morton's 1938 book, *A People's History of England*. Yet it was E. P. Thompson's essay *History from Below* in *The Times Literary Supplement* (1966) which brought the phrase to the forefront of historiography from the 1970s (Koditschek and Theodore). It was popularized among non-historians by Howard Zinn's 1980 book, *A People's History of the United States*. Scholars like Theodore view the existing history can be altered by revisiting from lower class people's perspective and establish a new knowledge of history for future generation.

People's history views historical incidents as the story of mass movements and of the outsiders who are usually not counted under mainstream. According to the concept of history from below theory "individuals whose story is not mentioned in the past in other type of historical writing as considered important" (Bhattacharya). The primary focus would be given to minorities, the oppressed, the poor, the radicals, the subaltern and the otherwise forgotten or whose history is deliberately ignored. It mainly emphasizes on the struggle of ordinary people, everyday practices, beliefs, values and mentalities. Influenced by the Annales School and cultural anthropology, but reacting against traditional social history's emphasis "on social structures and serial trends, its practitioners emphasize the importance of individual agency while trying to demonstrate the complexity of lived experience, the fluidity of identity, and the subjective nature of meaning" (Port, 2015).

In case of this book, people generally assume that the autobiography of great personality always focuses on the discourse of upper level social force, however this

autobiography *Dreams from My Father* tries to reveal the history of common black people through his childhood memory and experience as black born. In response to this problem my study tries to find out the ways through which Obama successfully incorporates the historical account of common black people and their experiences in his biography. Obama successfully represents the history from below or the history of common people instead of looking the history from his presidential status, he excavates his childhood experiences and racial past. This approach in turn gives him full access to the ground reality of black history.

As one analysis of the text will be clearly visible that history from below is the primary matter that guides the narration of this autobiographical novel. The way Obama portrays his family inheritance and himself in the book obviously attempts to dig out the shadowed part of his fathers and grandfathers racial history, that history which was buried under him, under his fame and popularity. The racial past buried under his presidential status. But the racial history of his grandfather still lies big in his memory relating social scenario of that time and how his grandfather used to perceive the society and their blackness, Obama successfully portrays his grandfather's perception in following words:

The condition of the black race, their pain, their wounds, would in his mind become merged with his own: the absent father and the hint of scandal, a mother who had gone away, the cruelty of other children, the realization that he was no fair-haired boy-that he looked like a "wop." Racism was part of that past, his instincts told him, part of convention and respectability and status, the smirks and whispers and gossip that had kept him on the outside looking in.

(21)

Even though Obama personally feels racial prejudice less than his grandfather and father, he is well aware about the experience, how it feels because he as a black clearly gets that experience. Obama often expresses his father and forefathers feelings about racialism. So, he takes his grandfather perspective to analyse the context of racial discrimination at that time. He does not feel necessary to impose his judgement, whether it is right or wrong to think that way he just puts the perspective of grandfather as it is. Obama's act of emphasizing his grandfather perspective also makes it clear that he tries to give the subjective history from the eyes of a person who has lived and seen the consequences of discrimination in life of black people. As his grandfather feels racism as an inseparable part of life during that time because blacks were trying to fight against racism like now, the difference is, degree of racism was more at that time. As the above extract mentions, in past also racism is a part of social issue and mostly the blacks feel the heat of racism. The concept of history from below is embedded in the text, as even being an individual autobiographical novel. By presenting important event which reflects racial prejudice the writer tries to show the collective suffering of all black people.

During the progress of narrative the writer very detailly presents an event when his white mother is playing with black girl and how other children tease her as nigger lover. And when his grandfather tries to complain school authority, they just accuse him for being too liberal and accepting black as humanly unit of society. As Obama writes:

The children were chanting, in a high-pitched, alternating rhythm: "Nigger lover!" "Dirty Yankee!" "Nigger lover!". . . He personally called the parents of some of the offending children to give them a piece of his mind. And from every adult that he spoke to, he received the same response: "You best talk to

your daughter, Mr. Dunham. White girls don't play with coloreds in this town.

(19)

Here my concern is to show the projection of this event as advocacy of racial harmony which is done by Obama's grandfather by complaining against the discriminatory behaviour of other children. Through this incident Obama digs out the history of his mother's racial experience as well as collective history of other black people who feel similar prejudice. In this incident, the small black girl who is friend to writer's mother is a representation of black community and his mother fulfils the role of white community. And his grandfather advocacy can be regarded as the voice of common people against school authority who was not ready to accept his liberal perspective towards racism. It shows that even at that time there were people advocating against racism and this incident further shows how the feeling of racism is prevalent among small children. With this, the writer implicitly shows that when children are raised in such discriminatory society that automatically will grow young with biased mentality. Obama's motive behind presenting this incident shows his liberal viewpoint as he presents the balanced context where white children show racial prejudice and another white old man advocates for justice.

This shows Obama's different stand in term of racial discrimination. In *National Review*, Michael Gledhill notes the difference between Obama of dreams and of the presidential race. He makes a number of easy conclusions. He writes:

Obama is touted as a post-racial states man who sees beyond the narrow issue of white versus black, contrary, obsessed with race: almost all of dreams is about race and race conflict Obama's dreams focus on race conflict, but this fact should not lead us to repudiate him as a racially obsessed man who

regards most whites as oppressors, and who sees U.S. history as a narrow, bitter tale of race and class victimization” (Who Is Barack Obama).

The way Obama presents liberal perspective of his grandfather shows his generous attitude towards some open minded white people.

While Obama captures and explains social reality differently. His narrative is influenced from similar positions of the subaltern or radicalised common black people whose history and culture has been ignored by those who observe the world in binary terms as being set up of two halves; white and black. Obama’s life narrative thus shares a common motive of revisiting the racial images of his respective subjects’ history. Musabu Muteshi in his *New York Times* review writes that “it was deeply insightful look at the lives of others; be they Kenyan relatives, village lives or his then neighbours: financially poor Americans mostly from minority groups” (*Review The New Times*). He further adds that Obama successfully manages to clear the essence of the people he meets and the places he visits with humanity, curiosity and intelligence. This also shows writer’s intense desire to assimilate with black peoples and accept own blackness.

The expression of Obama’s desire to accept his blackness is the concern behaviour of author which is explicitly visible in his narration where he frequently talks about his desire to mingle with black community. In same regard Stephen Greenblatt writes:

Self-fashioning is in effect the Renaissance version of these control mechanisms, the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment. Literature functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as

itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes. (Albert 31-33)

Here the narrative of book functions within racial consciousness of Obama who attempts to self-fashion himself as belonging to black community and redefines his own racial identity. In course of self-fashioning, Obama is constantly guided by certain racial values and social acceptance of his identity. Literature's relationship to self-fashioning has three layers. First, any literary work reflects the behavior and values of its author. Secondly a work of literature also reflects those "control mechanisms" and the codes that shape behavior, and third, a work of literature comments on those control mechanisms and codes. We can find this element in Obama's work as his liberal view towards race fulfils first claim, his attempt to get social acceptance of identity fulfils second claim and finally his comment on racial difference and identity shift contextualizes the third claim.

Obama frequently faces confusion regarding his identity because of his multiracial heritage background. As the narration reveals, Obama meets other confused multiracial students while at Occidental College in Los Angeles. Their confusion only increases his own dilemma and he begins to search the way out to integrate his racial consciousness. During that phase of identity confusion, he stops introducing himself as Barry, the nickname given by his grandfather to adjust him in Western society or the white culture. From that point some kind of racial awareness encourages him to use his original Barack instead of that nickname. This change of name indicates Obama's initial step to racial realization and also the move of his identity from white to black community. This change temporarily minimises his restlessness, and although he adopts the appearance and behavioural pattern of blackness. It was difficult for him to feel same as the blackness from inside.

Obama takes up basketball as his ticket into black culture but quickly acknowledges that, in doing so, he is living out a caricature of black male adolescent himself a caricature of boastful American manhood. And yet it is in the basketball court, partly through his friendship with a young black man named Ray, begins meditating on the annoying racial falsifications shifting through in the process of becoming an adult. Obama observes, almost bitterly, that black selfhood seems produced by a racist and racially obsessed. Here Obama is between two identities. Sometimes to be in Africa and America can be very difficult expressing own identities because, he is from biracial experiences though he is fair enough to go beyond the racism, as even being black man. Likewise *Los Angeles Times*, Gregory Rodriguez also talks about. Dreams "lyrical yet interminable," (03) and, indeed, at times it feels as if Obama has more hope. However the racism is not going to end any more. It is never ending but hope is always there with Obama. The reason behind his success is his patience of hope to get together with all races especially black and white.

Giddens corroborates Obama's view by noting that identities in the modern era are increasingly becoming a personal project. "I will therefore argue that Obama is shaped by his respective sociocultural contexts: he nonetheless actively participates in determining who they come to be recognised". The activities and incidents in this memoir is the reflection of history from below where there is collective suffering of all black people. As racism is never the suffering of the single person. It always covers the story of mass and target the socio-culture tendency of people that contribute to the increase of racial discrimination in specific community. Mainly through his childhood experiences Obama's narratives address all the common people living in the racial society at that time. The essence of history from below is to

bring marginal history in mainstream front, which is done by Obama in this book. Through various moments of personal experiences like his childhood life, activities, experiences in college, incidents in Kenya and via other social occurrence the writer relates his life with marginal people and their racial past. Later many years after the publication of this book when Obama relates same context of this book during his speech and again the history of common black peoples suffering grabs the attention of international society.

Likewise Dwight W. Hoover also hints, “There is no universal meaning or truth in the history and that meaning imputed to history reflect power relation” (22). It means history is in the hand of winner. Who can exercise power have history to write as the meaning of the black has been given by itself white, And the Foucault’s idea of “*discursive formation*” (44), it more importantly discusses the matter of power, that every text has its ideology to deliver something between and among people. While talking about the ideology of Obama, it seems that he has more desire to bring the history of black in mainstream account and attempts to know the world hidden reality. With very detail narrative and keen eye to the racial history the writer offers clear view of racial past to people who read the book in today’s time.

The small incidents and occurrences in Obama’s life are also counted under the representation of people’s history because such social behaviour of people is the invisible force that makes great changes. In same regard Andrew Port writes:

The sudden popularity of history from below in the 1960s – especially the interest in ordinary people, social protest, and the behavior of crowds – clearly reflected the political turmoil, social upheaval, and critical atmosphere of that decade. Changing political sensibilities and disappointments have since then marked a

dramatic shift away from an interest in the plight of the working classes to that of other groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and colonial subjects. (5)

People are always the agents for change and they remain at the center of history. When Obama wrote about the racial experiences of people he encountered in life, it automatically incorporates the history of black because experience of discrimination is abstract and the people who experience it are concrete evidence of discrimination. By identifying himself with black population he adopts their blackness, their history and their suffering, as a result his story also functions as an imitation of their story.

Obama in *Dreams from My Father*, talks about Joseph Conrad's book *Heart of Darkness* that presents black always as barbaric, uncivilized, wild. But Obama's *Dreams from My Father* presents very casual life of black population; family life, school, college, the context of marketplace and other normal social dimension of black civilization. This representation acts as his narrative resistance to the idea of Conrad, and other whites who feel same way. Black as uncivilized is purely a white concept where they measure black's lifestyle from their perspective of civilization and tries to find American outlook in their social engagement. However this book views black from below, from the perspective of common black individuals.

The writer further explores how discrimination is institutionalized within the American system. The white dominated institutions will teach black people to think and behave like them in order to make them civilized. When black people reach the level of white measured civilization after imitating their lifestyle and income level, the whites will again point their origin. When Obama and his friend Frank talk with each other, Frank says:

You are not going to college to get educated .They'll train you to forget what it is that you already know. They'll train you so good, you'll start believing s shit. They'll give you a corner office and invite you to fancy dinners, and tell you you're a credit to your race... you know you may be a well-trained, well-paid nigger, but you're a nigger just same.(97)

It shows university level curriculum has the tendency of hegemony in the name of education. The reason Frank tells not to go for educating to Obama is that he has fearlessness; in the name of education they dominate blacks using every medium.He is afraid that someday they change him and internally force him to accept their dominance.Through the fear of his friend, Obama represent the fear of common black people in America.

Obama describes in the book that he was raised mainly on a multicultural background; by white mother side and later left to mingle with the blacks. His childhood passed among his white mother and maternal grandfather where he gets habituated with white's lifestyle. Atten years old he realized the racial differences between his father and mother.Only after growing up, he knew that his father belongs to black and mother from white inheritance, which makes fluid identity of Obama. The difference resembling in his face and outlook confuses his identity till he become mature. Hewrites: "That my father looked nothing like the people around me-that he was black as pitch, my mother white as milk-barely registered in my mind" (13). In Obama's account he has constantly faced the situation when people barely searched the tragedy of being black in his eyes but in early age he is not enough racial to understand the difference. During his childhood it seems that being black or blackness is equal to invisibility. Nobody notices the black person.

While going through the book *Dreams from My Father* the researcher notices that whatever situation has been brought by racial discrimination in America, Obama subtly experiences the same level of prejudice as others people. His self-experience of racial prejudice can be counted under collective experience of people from margin. As a part of childhood experience of racial fear, Obama shares:

They know too much, we have all seen too much, to take my parents' brief union—a black man and white woman, an African and an American—at face value. As a result, some people have a hard time taking me at face value. When people who don't know me well, black or white, discover my background and it is usually a discovery, for I ceased to advertise my mother's race at the age of twelve or thirteen, when I began to suspect that by doing so I was ingratiating myself to whites. (Introduction xv)

As the statement explains, Obama as ten years child always feels that, relating himself to the racial root of his mother would uplift his position in society or at least makes other people happy who give suspicious look at him. With this confession from the writer's side we are pretty clear that racial experience and plight has grown in Obama's mind since young hood. During that time being black is like suffering and brain of Obama is well aware of this fact. Even in his childhood the feeling of racial discrimination is hunting Obama which later leads him to think like liberal individual.

His father's legacy and his black consciousness that changes his life forever and makes him a new person. The desire to understand those entities encourages Obama to visit Kenya and also inspire him work as community organizer at Chicago. While working with black community the life story of Obama automatically gets advocacy with their racial stories and his life also becomes part of their racial struggle. If we analyze with critical eyes, Obama's book is not policy oriented but a

pure personal story in which he revisits his experiences of confused identity and later finds his path to racial awareness. While going through the novel we can find implicit indication about liberal racial values of Obama and he has white race for practicing discrimination on colour base. This liberal perception has influenced by his childhood upbringing in Hawaii. America is growing with hate-culture towards opposite race, he grows up in very ideal social scenario than other. Because of such context, his autobiography also evokes very liberal historical account of black's life and he has not emphasized much in hard-core racial discrimination or the very dark side of race of that time. Looking Obama's book from perspective of people's history, it of course is great piece of literature that represents life of black people but his representation is more tilted towards liberal history.

The researcher's analytical eye to read the epilogue of the book notices that the writer shares some elements of hope to minimize the feelings of prejudice. He writes that his father's attitude toward the people is gentle and forgiving and his father is in search of some solutions to end all these discriminations. Following his father's dream Obama is always thinking to make a kind of community to advocate for black people. He is in search of a place where he can express his blackness. He writes:

I saw the African-American community becoming more than just the place where you'd been born or the house where you'd been raised. Through organizing, through shared sacrifice, membership had been earned. And because membership was earned-because this community I imagined was still in the making, built on the promise that the larger American community, black, white, and brown, could somehow redefine itself-I believed that it might, over time, admit the uniqueness of my own life. That was my idea of organizing. It was a promise of redemption. (135)

From his past experiences and visions a researcher assumes that Obama's thinking is beyond racial dimension, above the narrow distinction of black and white, in his autobiography he talks about organizing a liberal community that accepts each other's uniqueness. His biography views the history of America as ruined by racial and class discrimination and needs of an immediate social reformation. When Obama grows mature experiencing racial prejudice. He always looks for some ways to raise voice against discrimination. He does it by organizing black community. Similarly through this book also, he brings the voice of marginal black people to mainstream social ground. The book written from perspective of below has been highlighted by the person who remains at the top-most status any people dream to be.

Most autobiographical writingstry to explore the viewpoint of author's part, episodes of writer's life, but very few of them relatively explain the collective experience of people. While creating the masterpiece *Dreams from My Father*, from the early side of mid-life, Obama shows more interest discovering his root, how he comes to be who and where his origin belongs and how his identity as African American can be related to all those racial minorities. Obama crafts this book from very wide perspective, the reason isto search his African ancestry vividly explains course of uprooting his origin and he relates the personal aspects of his past life with collective experience of other millions of black minorities in America.

The writer grows up as mixed heritage- a man fathered by a Kenyan African he hardly knows, and brought by a white American mother, her parents and later by Indonesian stepfather. Similarly a person, who is half white, such as Obama, accepts America's designation of black as his identity. While Obama offers thoughtful views to analyse the several aspects of his situation, he may well have decided that fully answering such questions would disturb the pace of his narrative. With an engaging

authorial voice and a keen eye for telling details, Obama takes readers from his boyhood memories of Hawaii to his grassroots efforts to help African Americans in Chicago to his search in Kenya for a solid connection with the father he hardly could relate himself.

In many parts of the text, it seems to be a story of race and inheritance of below people, so the text incidents portray very dark part of racial discrimination that Obama himself feels. As he writes “It seemed like a natural issue for us. Segregation wasn’t much of an issue anymore; whites had all but abandoned the system. Neither was overcrowding, at least in black neighbourhood high schools; only half the incoming students bothered to stick around for graduation”(140). Despite being one of the half-blood members of black community Obama may not fully realize the plight of blackness as other blacks have. For those racial population being black is itself a doomed fate and on top of that being born in poor family make double marginalized, at one level for being black in white dominated society and other for being poor economy. As an educated individual from quite privileged family, he may have experienced the drawbacks of being black in white dominated society but throughout the autobiography he seems to realize the gap between him and other black people who are not as privileged as him. The history can never be understood from distant view; it needs closer eyes to interpret history. The position of Obama doesn’t allow him full opportunity to see the deep and real history of black in radicalized society. His perspective from below collects some surface level experience and explore it in term of black history. Black history is more than what it’s represented in the book. But we can never ignore the fact that Obama’s narrative also captures the broad view of people’s history from below.

Though Obama tries his best to portray the history from below, his narratives never fully succeed to get the serious picture of racial segregation as there remains a huge gap between his black self and other black population in destitute. Though his mother tries a lot to make him realize his black self and constantly encourages him to know his roots and history of race. Obama recalls the context when his mother talks with him about his father and how his father shares some personalities, traits and characters with him as his appearance and mind finds to be same. His relation with mother and her attempts to make him aware about the history of father and black history also plays a great role in life of the writer. It is also the part of his mother that never let him forget the real history of black, which later grows as his tendency to self-actualize himself as someone from black race. His mother encourages him to identify himself as someone from black origin so it becomes very easy for him to get motivation to embrace with black society. As Obama remembers his mother saying:

You have me to thank for your eyebrows...your father has these little wispy eyebrows that don't amount to much. But your brains, your character, you got from him." Her message came to embrace black people generally. She would come home with books on the civil rights movement and the recordings of Mahalia Jackson, the speeches of Dr. King. (50)

Unlike other white people, Obama's mother gets married to a black man and never regrets doing so on racial ground and she never tries to manipulate her son even after the death of his father. Her constant effort is to make her son realize his origin and keep him informed of the black history. Such encouragement of her mother later motivates him to visit Kenya to discover the real history of his African heritage.

When his mother provides him to read the books that discuss about black history, he becomes more focused to racial dimension of society. The personal

experience of racism has only motivated him to see the injustice in society but his desire to explore the history of black people aroused by reading such book in early age.

Scholars like James, Sabyasachi and Ivo claim, history from below somehow stands with new historicism and delves with all kinds of people and subjects without having partiality. It especially “includes ordinary, voiceless, marginalized, oppressed, subaltern, common man, local history, forgotten people,” (2), society, literature, and nation and so on. Obama’s constant effort is to let the history of African American reveal through writing as well.

In same context we can find some narrative incidents in Obama’s experience during the time he visits Kenya with his sister. They go to a restaurant and place the order, the waiter is black, but he does not pay attention to their order and begins to serve other non-black tourists. The waiter’s manner towards him seems to be annoyed; he keeps on serving order of others and pays no attention to Obama’s table. Then Obama’s sister Auma react in anger: “I don’t care how many mouths you have to feed, you cannot treat your own people like dogs” (169). Then she throws money on table and gets out from the place. Later when Obama tries to pacify her in this situation she utters the most pathetic experience of being black:

That was stupid, throwing away money like that. She set down her purse beside her and we watched the traffic pass. You know, I can’t go to a club in any of these hotels if I’m with another African woman, the askaris will turn us away, thinking we are prostitutes. In office if you don’t work there, and you are African, they will stop you until you tell them your business. But if you’re with a German friend, then they’re all smiles. Good evening, miss, they’ll say. How are you tonight?” Auma shook her head. That’s why Kenya, no matter

what its GNP, no matter how many things you can buy here, the rest of Africa laughs. It's the whore of Africa, Barack. It opens its legs to anyone who can pay.(313-14)

In this context we can see Obama more liberal towards racial discrimination than his sister because she reacts so quickly and he tries to console her. From many such narrative incidents, it makes clear that Obama has no problem with racist people rather he thinks that the social force which encourage racism should be discouraged from society. From Obama's point of view, the waiter who shows racist behaviour in restaurant is victim of social force that inserts the racist perception inside him. Like the waiter there exist many other people who are victim of same phenomena and who unknowingly impose racism on their own people.

Obama's success to be president of America includes the story of his African American community and his book is more effectively able to uncover history of African American people and their society, thought pattern and suffering and provides a new spring in the lens of African American community, society through this memoir. As mentioned earlier this book become popular because of the two forces one is Obama's presidential status and another is his presentation of racial history through the perspective of common man. If writes this book from the perspective of president then the story cannot be related with common black and marginal. Obama's narration as common man makes the story relevant to millions of black people who have directly or indirectly feel the plight of racism in white dominated society.

This memoir has given many incidents and evidences when the narrator directly feels racial discrimination and how his experiences can be related with other common black peoples. Depending on the evidences which are available in text, it can be assumed that the concept of history from below is the best approach to

analyze *Dreams from My Father* as the experiences of one person can gradually be related with many other people going through same phase. Through this autobiographical work a president and writer Obama voices to African community and assists to show bare reality of it and in the very moment it leads African to new horizon. His narration acts as action to represent the racial history of all black people that is buried under passing time. The story of Obama alone stands for all those oppressed black people who are merely able to voice their suffering. This narration from very reliable course shows American the real face of its racial past.

As the progress of narrative we can find that the writer uses various measures to represent the real history. The racial realities are exposed in vivid ways, diverse perspectives; through the lens of the writer's grandfather, his sister, insights of his white mother is presented in precise context and sometime the autobiography also tries to recollect the experiences of other people. Then none of these people are privileged as today, so their account of Afro-American experience can be counted under history from below. These characters voice are assumed as voice of common people are in top social position today, but the time frame and setting of Obama's narration is earlier when these peoples are also common people. So their experiences and histories share many similarities with average black individuals who live under the dominance of whites.

The writer does not try to establish his knowledge in the book rather plays with perspective of various people and even while presenting own perspective he does a level of confession by stating his childhood establishes his identity as white. Being like white is among the greatest tendency of that time. Blackness is often overlooked, so people seek new ways to imitate white, their whiteness, to live prestigious life in discriminating society. As a child Obama is not in position to make any judgement in

the narration but till the end of book when he gradually grows matured he never tries to justify his raciest ideologies of childhood rather he accepts them as part of his social self. It's because as the small child rising in racial society where his grandfather giveshim different nickname to make him fit for white community. And since childhood he is under the influence of social force that sees blackness as abnormal and white as normal people.

However as he grows up, he becomes more conscious about his ancestors and origin which makes him curious toknow about his inheritance.Obama's individual quest to track down the history of his father's racial marginalization as his symbolic journey to discover the history of black civilization which is characterized by the continued presence of racism.As Obama narrates in his autobiography, in course of his struggle to raise himself as black man in America: "Away from my mother, away from my grandparents, I was engaged in a fitful interior struggle. I was trying to raise myself to be a black man in America, and beyond the given of my appearance, no one around me seemed to know exactly what that meant" (75-76). He then starts listening black music, watch black movies, slowly and gradually he also begins to read the history of black people and try to adjust himself accordingly with black culture. He also visits the ancestral land of his father and tries to self-actualize himself as black person.

Likewise, Obama's ultimate victory as the first black president of America portrays him as a man of peace who, instead of the unbearable history of conflict between black and white, advocates for the reconciliation and negotiation between the two races for the progressive future of the United States. The research inquires the motives behind Obama's retrospective recollection of his past the advocacy of history from below as back as his grandfather along with his present position as president.

So history from below goes back to know origin and keeps balance, intimacy, harmony relation between two countries via father and mother as they both are different from each other. Hope for uniting two souls together as mother and father, is symbolically a faith in two countries relationship to be strong. Though even he does not reason behind not coming his father to America, as he gets a book “*Origins*” (10) by his mother, where the sense of belongingness can be found, even he has no interest in that book to a small child, as small child loves to watch cartoon.

Obama constantly thinks about his future and after completing graduation he is in dilemma regarding how to move ahead with life. It is the time when he has self-actualized himself as black person, when he has already accepted his black origin and he is in stage where people search for their own community. In one conversation Obama says:

I knew it was too late to ever claim Africa as my home, and if I had come to understand myself as a black American, and was understood as such, that understanding remained unanchored to place. What I needed was a community, I realized, a community that cut deeper than the common despair that black friends and I shared when reading the latest crime statistics, or the high fives I might exchange on a basketball court. A place where I could put down stakes and test my commitments. (115)

Here, more value is with community than human beings, especially humans of two countries, Africa and America, where he becomes confuse between two identities and he advocates more about community. He has desire to belong to Africa or the black community but in reality he is living around white people and enrolls in their educational institution. From one way he accepts his original identity as black but in another way his involvement with white society is compulsion because of the

environment he grows. But soon the feelings of alienation leads the young Obama to his land of origin and for him the books become the source of personal enlightenment and intellectual growth that ultimately leads him to be racially conscious with liberal perspective. One of the invisible forces that encourage him to find the history of black people is his desire embraces with black community and African heritage. When he feels that it's late to claim Africa as home, it indicates the conflict between presence of whiteness rooted within Obama and his constant effort to overcome white influence by accepting his black heritage. Here Obama's need of community also reflects his inner feeling to organize black people and revisits the social perception that white society have made for them. The researcher analyses the history of racial society, black people are always considered as violent, uncivilized and barbaric, which makes them anti-social unit in white society. By presenting the historical account of his father and minor details of his parent's life, Obama tries to erase such biased social judgement and establish black people as normal human being. In the whole book he celebrates the narrative people and views the racial society from perspective of common man.

This study is limited to the analysis of Obama's *Dreams from My Father*. Within its narrow scope, the study focuses on the way Obama represents the history of average black people in society. And under the framework of history from below, the autobiography of Obama has been examined. People of mixed heritage become always haunted by some existential questions regarding their identities. Obama in his book analyses many such contexts of identity dilemma, leading readers to wonder the way he explores. A man fathered by an African man and later rose by white American woman, her parents, and an Indonesian stepfather, is the causes so far to dig out his African half identity. While Obama offers thoughtful considerations on several

aspects of his identity problem and give readers a choice to realize their own interpretations. Obama may think that fully answering such questions will make narrative more liberal. With an engaging narrative construction and precise detailing of events, Barack Obama takes readers from his racial boyhood recollections of Hawaii to his liberal efforts to help African Americans in Chicago also find space to portray his search of fatherly inheritance in Kenya.

In conclusion, this research attempts to represent the socio-cultural view and personal identity which shapes historical account of racial society in realm of cultural and personal, private and public contexts. In short, it shows the history of race, history of below, marginalized, and common people. It does not come out of vacuum rather it is the outcome of Obama's childhood experience and its insightful recollection in manhood. Obama's autobiography acquires meaning as part of the larger black community's story in white dominated society and can be conceived as people's history of its racial past. My study further finds that narrative and identity are mutually constitutive in the book as the narrator relatively describes the discrimination context along with his personal details. With his narrative, Obama confirms his black identity, announces his political aspirations and defines himself as the man raised from ground to the status of President. Additionally he explains his origins, justifies the various stances he talks in response to the ever-changing circumstances of his life, and upholds his reputation.

As discussed earlier people's history can be considered as the departure from traditional mainstream historiography which always emphasizes on high level account of elite people and major incidents. However in this text, despite being active member in mainstream politics Barack Obama writes about the history of common people by giving detail of his own experiences when he was among them. The shift of historical

representation, from highlighting the history of great personalities focusing on people history began after the world war. The quest of many scholars to find out the social dynamics and the way society functions enables them to research on common people history. Same approach has been used by Obama when he emphasizes on the experience of his grandfather and mother who are primary witness of racial discrimination and through their experiences Obama relates the suffering of common people. The underlying social force and consciousness of mass can only be explored by investigation on the history of people and the autobiography of Obama has done that by giving some real incidents that happens in the life of people featured in the book. This book also teaches us the way how individual agency contributes to represent collective historical account of entire group. In context of this research researcher critiques on how Barack Obama as a member of black community represents the racial history and grass-root experience of all black people of that time.

Obama writes his autobiography that neither discusses the big event nor gives account of any great personalities rather it focuses more on personal journey that leads Obama to look deep into history of common black people. His desire to find meaning of life takes him back to his racial past. As with many other African-American writers their past experience always makes great impact in writing when they represent their racial experience in literary work. In the case of Obama also he talks about himself in the book but his life story incorporates the history of entire black people and he functions as agency of representation. He establishes the connection between the life story of his grandfather and slavery. Such connection keeps him in credible position to write about the history of common black people by linking with his family history. Unlike other slave narratives this book is not much into the

suffering of slave but it has made much effort to give detail picture of racial suffering faced by black people at different moments of life.

Obama's retrospective memory of his father and grandfather's racial life along with his personal experiences of oppression, exclusion and displaced feeling without any idea of his race seems to suggest his motive relating the history of black's troubled civilization as well as their constant resistance to get rid of racism. His parents, including his childhood, young hood and adulthood is not only the history of survive but history of thrive for blacks at the very moment. He has much hope that there will be a day all man are equal in their respective communities especially in America from every aspect. The investigation of Obama's past life also shows an alternative reality that the disintegration and ignorance among the blacks itself was equally responsible for the long-held practice of racism. Unlike mainstream reading of the book as Obama's personal success, the research finally reconnects an alternative accounts on how his past and present simultaneously draws the real picture of the black as the race in the history of America. The theoretical approach used in my study is history from below which evokes to record the history of common people and marginal groups. However this book *Dreams from My Father* is not only limited to historical analysis, but has further scope for doing research.

My research mainly focused on the historical account of common black people that gets represented through perspective of Obama. Towards the end, this research finds that Obama makes minimum of use his own experience and borrow the experience of his father, grandfather and mother to depict the racial past of African people. It's because the history from below is always explored from the perspective of margin and then Obama himself was not in that magnitude to marginality to share the experience. The narrative of Obama successfully depicts marginal perspective and

uses their viewpoints to explore the racial prejudice experienced by common black people. So this autobiography can be explained as exploration of marginal issues from marginal point of view. As the book is all about remembrance and recollection of past experience as well as it talks about the identity crises faced by Obama during his childhood which is history from below itself. So his narrative act as agency to represent the history of all black people in white dominated America. Obama's personal desire to dig out his family inheritance indirectly makes him discover the racial history of common black people.

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