



LITERARY ANALYSIS OF DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR'S BUDDHA AND HIS DHAMMA

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ABSTRACT

The Buddha and His Dhamma is the last creation of Dr. Ambedkar and it is the culmination of his writing. The book reveals his literary genius and presents a very different Ambedkar. The book shows the difference between Dr. Ambedkar and Babasaheb Ambedkar. The scholars who study Ambedkarite literature will find abundance of literary devices employed by Dr. Ambedkar in this work. The language of a trained barrister here becomes juicy and lucid. Dr. Ambedkar never appears so romantic as in The Buddha and His Dhamma. The brief discussion makes it clear that the writer has the capacity to produce world class literary work. The greatness of the book can be understood from the fact that it is read as the Bible by millions of Buddhists and Dr. Ambedkar's followers across the world. It is not merely a book it has been the way of living for millions of Dalits in India.

Key words : *Buddha and His Dhamma , magnum opus , literary devices , euphemism*

Preface :

The intellectual dominance of Dr. Ambedkar as father of Indian constitution, law maker, educationist, social reformer and political thinker and activist has curtailed his contribution to English literature. Prejudiced Indian intelligentsia remained passive and took no labours to establish his contribution to English literature. The ignorance of research scholars of English literature kept Dr. Ambedkar's world class writing and literature in the darkness. The paper focuses on literary analysis of Dr. Ambedkar's magnum opus work *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. The intention is to make scholars of English literature aware of his literary genius. The following discussion will illustrate the class and quality of literary writing of Dr. Ambedkar.

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Buddha and His Dhamma is the culmination of Dr. Ambedkar's writing . The Buddha And His Dhamma is an objective and scientific historical text on Buddhism. While speaking about the books, Dr. Ambedkar himself pointed, "books to be examined and tested by the accepted rules of evidence without recognizing any distinction between the sacred and the profane and with sole object of finding the truth"¹ Unfortunately and hastily the book fell into the category of religion and literary beauty of the work remained hidden.

About the work :

The work which has been described as Ambedkar's magnum opus was written during the years 1951 – 1956 and published by the People's Education Society in November 1957, almost a year after the great leader's death. In the preface he wrote for it in March 1956, but which did not appear in print until September 1980, Ambedkar traced the origin of the work to his article on 'The Buddha and the Future of His Religion'. In that article, he recalls, he had argued that the Buddha's religion was the only religion which a society awakened by science could accept and without which it would perish. He had also pointed out that in the modern world Buddhism was the only religion which it must have, if it was to save itself. But Buddhism made only a slow advance, and this was 'due to the fact that its literature is so vast that no one can read it [all] and it has no such thing as a Bible as the Christians have. On the publication of ['The Buddha and the Future of His Religion'] I received so many calls, written and oral, to write such a book. It is in response to these calls, that I have undertaken the task.' The writing of The Buddha and His Dhamma was thus an attempt on Ambedkar's part to produce the Buddhist Bible which he had, in his 1951 article, pronounced 'quite necessary' if the ideal of spreading Buddhism was to be realized. Despite his use of the inappropriate term 'Bible', however, Ambedkar was far from regarding The Buddha and His Dhamma as possessing any special authority. As he wrote of the work in the (recently published) preface, 'How good it is I must leave it to readers to judge. As for myself, I claim no originality. I am only a compiler. All I hope is that the reader will like the presentation. I have made it simple and clear.'²

Buddha and His Dhamma as Literature :

The important question is: How should we read Buddha and His Dhamma as Literature? The answer is that we should apply exactly the same method of literary analysis to Buddha

¹ Last aim Of History Writing is Finding Truth from Past Which will be useful to future generation

² Sangharakshita –Ambedkar and Buddhism ,Windhorse Publication -1986 Bhagwan Das (ed.), *Rare Prefaces Written by Dr Ambedkar* (Jullundur 1980)p.28-9



and His Dhamma that we use for other literature. It will not be any exaggeration to say that the book in every way is exactly as the other literary books. It is rather to say that literary aspects of Buddha and His Dhamma do not require anything different from ordinary tools of analysis. The book is not less than any in Indian or English literature. A story consists of settings, characters and action. The prose of Buddha and His Dhamma is made up of images and figures of speeches. The close study of the books projects a different Ambedkar. Here Babasaheb's highest intellects, profound knowledge, superb command on English, undefeatable arguments of trained Barrister, lucidity of language, poetry in the form of prose reflect in Buddha and His Dhamma. Most of the time it feels that Dr. Ambedkar speaks through Buddha's mouth. Some people also say that it is not Buddha and His Dhamma, it Ambedkar and His Dhamma. It was never in the nature of Dr. Ambedkar to accept anything blindly. So using his genius he also tried to filter adulterated concepts of Buddhism. So, for reading Buddha and His Dhamma is a different experience for the readers.

Dr. Ambedkar has not contributed in the form of poetry or drama. But it does not mean that he is not aware of various literary devices. He has employed number of various literary devices in *Buddha and His Dhamma*. The book is full of various literary devices, spread everywhere in the book. Literary devices like allegory, alliteration, antithetic Parralism, apostrophe, heroic narrative, gospel style, epic style, literature of praise, tragic elements, autobiographical elements, climax, euphemism, hyperbole, imagery, figure of speech, interrogation, rhetorical questions, irony, use of legal perspective, litotes, metaphor, metonymy, mythological references, onomatopoeia, parables, paradox, pathos, personification, repetition, riddles, supernatural elements, riddles, transfer epithet, synecdoche and many other literary devices are amply employed by Dr. Ambedkar in the book.

Literary Devices :

It is not possible here to discuss all literary devices employed by Dr. Ambedkar in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. The restrictions of length has compelled to be very brief. So very literary devices are illustrated here.

Poetic Language:

The simple but a language full of various literary devices leads to a poetic language. Dr. Ambedkar never wrote poetry but he has lived an epic life. There are many sentences and paragraphs in *The Buddha And His Dhamma* which are not less than a poetry. There is a rhythm in his logic. He himself is a man of adjectives. He is the source of inspiration for



millions .Entire Dalit literature in India stands firm on the foundation provided by him. Following evidences are sufficient to prove whatever is claimed.

1] "Ordinary women captivate simple men; but they are truly women, who subdue the nature of high and hard."³

2] The king may say, ' He is gone at a wrong time.' But there is no wrong time for duty.⁴

Use of Similes :

Dr. Ambedkar has used similes the most . Comparison with the help of similes is his favorite style. Number of superb similes are used by him in the novel.

1] Bearing the Bodhisatta in her womb like oil in a vessel for ten lunar months, Mahamaya, as her time of delivery was coming nearer, desired to go to her parents' home for delivery.⁵

2] " See this lake surrounded by the *Sinduvara* shrubs growing on its banks, like a fair woman reclining, clad in fine white cloth.⁶

Metaphoric language in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*:

A metaphor involves a direct or implied comparison of two unlike things. Followings are some metaphorical impression in *Buddha And His Dhamma*:

1] " This city bereft of him is a forest,⁷

2] " O, ye, Parivrajakas, you must realise that the world is a dungeon and man is a prisoner in the dungeon.⁸

Alliteration:

³ The Buddha and His Dhamma p.16

⁴ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches Vol.11 p.36

⁵ Ibid p.4

⁶ Ibid p.18

⁷ Ibid p.40

⁸ Ibid p.123



It is a figure of speech in which consonants, especially at the beginning of words stressed syllables, are repeated. It is a very old device indeed in English verse and is common in verse generally. It is used occasionally in prose.

Followings exemplify the use of alliteration in *Buddha And His Dhamma*.

1] Another, with beautiful, full bosoms, and having her earrings waving in the wind, laughed loudly at him, as if saying, "Catch me, sir, if you can!"⁹

2] "Indeed, Ananda, beings liable to decay, liable to death, liable to grief, woe, lamentation and despair, are liberated there from because of their friendship with what is lovely."¹⁰

Apostrophe :

Apostrophe is a figure of speech in which an exclamation is addressed to an object as if it were a person.

There are many examples of Apostrophe in *Buddha And His Dhamma*.

1] "Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, 'O altar, altar!'

2] Then the door-keeper approached Suddhodana and with clasped hands said, "Know, O Raja that an aged sage, old and advanced in years, stands at the door, and says that he desires to see you."¹¹

Climax :

This figure of speech lists a series of actions or qualities and repeats each one.

Some fine examples of climax appear in *Buddha And His Dhamma* :

On one occasion Mahamaya decided to observe the festival with gaiety, with splendour, with flowers, with perfume, but without drinking intoxicants.¹²

⁹ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches Vol.11 p.17

¹⁰ ibid p.591

¹¹ Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches Vol.11 p.6
Buddha and His Dhamma p.6

¹² ibid p.3



5. On the seventh day she rose early, bathed in scented water, bestowed a gift of 4,00,000 pieces of money as alms, adorned herself with all precious ornaments, ate choicest food, took upon herself the fast-day vows, and entered the splendidly adorned royal bedchamber to sleep.¹³

Euphemism :

A euphemistic figure substitutes an inoffensive or agreeable expression for one that may offend or suggest something distasteful.

1] God's call has come and His messengers are waiting to take me¹⁴

2] Mahamaya breathed her last.¹⁵

Hyperbole :

In hyperbole, the writer or speaker exaggerates to create a strong effect. Hyperbolic impressions in the novel shows Dr.Ambedkar's ways of dealing with the book with different perspective .This confirms the literary value of the work.

1] Then they stood surrounding him, their minds overpowered by passion, as if they were drinking him in with their eyes motionless and blossoming wide with love.¹⁶

2] They wept and wept, held him fast and bathed him with their tears.¹⁷

3] It seemed all bathed in gloom.¹⁸

Figure of Speech Interrogation: Rhetorical Questions:

1] How can we stay here in peace? I say you should take us along with you."¹⁹

¹³ Ibid p.3

¹⁴ Dr.BabasahebAmbedkar : Writings and Speeches Vol.11 p.8

¹⁵ Ibid p.8

¹⁶ Ibid p.33

¹⁷ Ibid p.33

¹⁸ Ibid p.39

¹⁹ Ibid p.31



2] "It is true that I may have to live alone in the jungle. But which is better? To live in the jungle or to be a party to the killing of the Koliyas!"²⁰

3] " How has he abandoned me his lawful wife?"²¹

Conclusion :

The above discussion is sufficient to pave a way for readers to read the work with a literary angle. This discussion provides an opportunity to correct oneself and read literary work as a work of literature. It also makes it crystal clear that Dr.Ambedkar's contribution to English literature is at par excellence. The discussion not only establishes neglected part of the book by canonical literature but it also opens doors for research scholars explore Dr.Ambedkar's great literary work.

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²⁰ ibid p.31

²¹ ibid p.41