



IMPACT OF THE LITERATURE STIMULATED BY LIFE AND MISSION OF DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR ON THE CASTE SYSTEM IN HINDU SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

In the present paper I tried to look at the current significance of the writings stirred by life and mission of Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar on caste system in Hindu society. These writings could be reviewed as representation of Ambedkarite discourse in black and white and also could be viewed as modernity is reconfigured in new modes of writings in modern Indian literature. Ambedkar and his followers were essence of the social revolution. The seeds of revolution especially in cultural domain were sown in the writings stimulated by thoughts and ideology of Ambedkar. A reading of that sort of writings illustrates, perpetuates and strengthens the above said views towards these writings. My endeavor is to appreciate the current significance of this literature, through general idea of some determining approaches to the study of ambedkarite literature and to explore how the notions of human dignity, equality are central to the narratives of this literature. This paper is a step taken to the direction of studies and understanding of Ambedkarite discourse in present perspectives.

Key words: ambedkarite literature, Ambedkarite discourse, current perspectives, human dignity, equality, caste system, present perspectives etc.

INTRODUCTION

Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar is a discourse, a philosophy in himself. Many studies have been done; many researches have been conducted that are helpful in understanding the philosophy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. More work is still to be done that we may understand the Ambedkarite discourse in modern perspectives. When we take a dive into the sea of literature on Ambedkar we will come to know the significance of Ambedkarite

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discourse and philosophy in construction of new India, in construction of India of 21st century. Now I move towards my topic *The Impact of the Literature Stimulated by Life and Mission of Dr. Ambedkar on Caste system in Hindu society*. We know the various aspects of the life and mission of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. We know Ambedkar as a jurist, economist, first cabinet minister of law and justice, social reformer and head of the drafting committee for the constitution of India. We know his life is marked by the sociopolitical activities especially as a dalit leader. One more aspect of his life that I explore here is his life and mission as an eventual foundation of stimulation for a new stream of literature in India. His appeal for social reformation became stronger through the medium of literature. The sea of his writings and speeches also played an instrumental part in giving rise to a stream of new literature as he produced bulk of writings. I explored the literature on his books in an article *Dr. BR Ambedkar's Bith Anniversary: List of Books Written by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar* created on internet by Shikha Goyal on February 20, 2018 22:28 IST on Jagran Josh website. According to the creator of this article Shikha Goyal Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar is popularly known as 'Baba Saheb' by his clique all over the world. Dr. Baba Saheb was born on April 14, 1891 in Madhya Pradesh and his birth anniversary is celebrated as Ambedkar Jayanti. Bharat Ratna Bhimrao Ambedkar had been a lawyer of higher degree, struggled as socio-political leader and was one of the chief architects of Indian constitution. Out of his knowledge and experience and struggles he wrote down a number of books. Some remarkable of them are *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and development; The Problem of Rupee: Its Origin and its Solution; The Annihilation of Caste; Who were Shudras; The Untouchables; Riddles in Hinduism; and Manu and Shudras* etc. the education department of Maharashtra Government brought out the writings and speeches of Ambedkar. Other than this the ministry of social justice also brought out the collection of Ambedkar's productions. *The Annihilation of the Caste* and the book *Problem of Rupee* are included in the bestselling books.

Annihilation of the caste is an undelivered speech written in 1936. This book primarily was written as a script of the speech for the meeting of Jat-Pat Todak Mandal that was not delivered. The reason behind not delivering of this speech was cleared by Dr. Ambedkar in the Prologue (How this speech came to be composed_ and not delivered) to the book of the same title. Dr Ambedkar presents the copies of the letters corresponded between the secretary of the the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal and Dr Ambedkar. In response to the copy of Ambedkar's speech to the secretary of the Mandal , secretary writes to Dr. Ambedkar:

"Many thanks for your kind letter of the 5th December. I have released it for press without your permission for which I beg your pardon, as I saw no harm in giving it publicity. You are a great thinker, and it is my well-considered opinion that none else has studied the problem of caste as deeply as you have. I have always benefitted myself and our Mandal from your ideas. I have

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explained and preached it in the kranti many times and even I have lectured on it in many conferences. I am now very anxious to read explosion of your new formula. It is not possible to break caste system without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the caste system, is founded.” (Annihilation1)

“Our executive committee persists in having you as our president for our annual conference. We can change our dates to accommodate your convenience. Independent harijans of Punjab are very much desirous to meet you and discuss with you their plans. So if you kindly accept our request and come to Lahore to preside over the conference it will serve double purpose.” (Annihilation1)

Dr. Ambedkar states:

“The Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal I was given to understand to be an organization of Caste Hindu Social Reformers, with the one and only aim, namely, to eradicate the Caste System from amongst the Hindus. As a rule, I do not like to take any part in a movement which is carried on by the Caste Hindus. Their attitude towards social reform is so different from mine that I have found it difficult to pull on with them. Indeed, I find their company quite uncongenial to me on account of our differences of opinion. Therefore when the Mandal first approached me, I declined their invitation to preside. The Mandal, however, would not take a refusal from me, and sent down one of its members to Bombay to press me to accept the invitation. In the end I agreed to preside. The Annual Conference was to be held at Lahore, the headquarters of the Mandal. The Conference was to meet at Easter, but was subsequently postponed to the middle of May 1936.” (Annihilation1)

The writings and speech of Dr. Ambedkar stimulated some people from lower classes (as they were raked according to caste system in Hindu Society) to reveal their plight through the narratives of literature. Some people started to write in their regional languages and expressed their outcry through the medium of literature. That leaves a remarkable influence on the coming generations of those communities and has become a major source of revolution in their lives. In the present century we may see, though still it needs a reformation to some extent, crystal clear transformation in the caste system in Hindu society.

In 1958, in a conference in Mumbai held by Maharashtra Dalit Literary Association, this new form of literature was termed as dalit literature. This Marathi word Dalit was first used by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule in 1880s for outcasts and untouchables for their oppressed and broken condition in Hindu society. Gandhiji used the word Harijan for this class of people but later it was defied by Dr. Ambedkar. In his early writings in English Ambedkar

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used the term ‘depressed classes’ and ‘broken men.’ The terms used by Ambedkar could be translated as dalit. In this way this new stream of literature was given the term Dalit literature. Commencement of this literature took place in Marathi language then it came in Bangla, Hindi, Punjabi, Kannad, and Tamil languages. Later on dalit literature had turned into the synonym of the dalit perception for human dignity in the course of the narratives of poems, novels, short stories and autobiographies. Eventually prominent writers from this stream of literature revised and expanded the range of this form of literature in order to include schedule tribes, poor peasants, woman who are being exploited by others in this or that way especially in the terms of politics, economics and religion. This has turned as the emblem of remonstrance and upheaval. These writers were able to gain the distinctive place in the mainstream of Indian English literature. Honest endeavors of dalit writers created a new mould for this literature. “the central idea of mainstream literature is the Hindu trinity of ‘Satyam Shivam Sundram’, for dalit it is the Western trinity ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’. This central idea makes both the literatures mutually exclusive and parallel” (Kumar 3)

In the continuation of efforts of Mahatma Phule and Bhimrao Ambedkar, this literature arose in Maharashtra. Dalit youths provoked to produce short stories, poems, novels and autobiographies. They provided the constructive vision for dalit identity and the subaltern communities started to collect the courage to change their status in the social order. Some notable writers in this field are: Mahashweta Devi, Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, Daya Pawar and Bama. The longstanding pain of the soul is the main concern of these writers. They looked for an alternate for their existence in society. These writers tried to make a call to their fellow men to bring a drastic change in the society. Dalit literature emerged as an independent form of literature in India from the sea of speech and writings of Ambedkar. This literature ignited the sense of human dignity. Many dalit critics and writers present their own story in different works and many quote the influence of Baba saheb on their lives and their works. A notable dalit critic and writer Nimbalkar presents his outlook saying:

“The immense potential of Bhimrao Ambedkar and his life was not restricted to himself or anyone particular individual. He handed over to them the flares of his philosophy for development. His thoughts contained a graph of the progress of the people at the grass root of the society. For this Doctor Ambedkar’s life itself has become the revolution. This revolution had changed the consciousness of dalits. That is why Ambedkar and his philosophy is the source of dalit literature.” (6)

Om Prakash Valmiki also cites the influence of Dr. Ambedkar on him saying that: Dr. Ambedkar’s life-long straddle had shaken me up. I spent many days and nights in great turmoil. The restlessness inside me had increased. My stone-like silence had suddenly begun to melt. I proceeded to read all of Ambedkar’s books that I found in library. (Joothan 72)

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Being inspired by Ambedkar's Philosophy an influential Dalit woman writer writes: Being a dalit creates a problem! On top of that, being a Dalit woman makes difficult. Ambedkar's call for equal rights for woman on par with man has given a new dimension to feminism and the rights for Dalit-woman. Treating boys and girls equally and educating both and providing girl child enough freedom may eradicate the evil of social injustice, violence and inequalities. (123) some of the dalit writers presents him as a liberator for their lives as Anna Bahu Sathe, a Marathi dalit writer sees him as a liberator in his poem "Take a Hammer to change the world". In this title hammer is Dr. Ambedkar. Sathe depicts him like this:

*Take a hammer to change the world
So saying went Bhimrao
Why the elephant is stuck sitting
In the mud of slavery?
Shake your body and come out
Take a leap to the forefront!*

Humanist ideology is central to his all concerns. Principles of equality and human dignity are the basis of his writings and speeches. In this sequence the literature stirred by his philosophy and his life revolves around these principles of human dignity and equality. Dr. Ambedkar said I like the religion that inculcates greatness of human beings and discards the notion of race, religion and caste. And his principles invoked many writers to write the literature that contains the humanity as religion. Ambedkar is an adorable figure and icon of pride, prestige and inspiration for his clique. Sometimes a number of the writers represent him as a living character in their stories. Narendra Jadhav represented Dr Ambedkar as a stimulant to world-shattering writings and pioneering life and throughout the work he enumerated his influences in upliftment of dalits. Damu is the central character in the novel. Damu remembers the words of Dr. Ambedkar through which he came to know the struggle of Ambedkar to eliminate the caste system and he was also inspired for the ending of humiliating duties that were imposed on them by caste system of the villages. The other characters like him were also inspired to abolish the traditions of so called caste system; they began to realize that they are human beings and started to understand their human rights through the literature. In the novel Jadhav cited Baba Saheb frequently in order to make his call for change stronger:

"It is utterly disgraceful to sell your human rights for a few crumbs of bread. We will attain self education, only if we learn self-help regain our self-respect and gain self-knowledge. There will be no difference between animals and parents I they do not try to put their children in better position than their own" (outcaste 6)



Jugal kishor Mishra, in his paper entitled ‘A Critical Study of Dalit literature in India’, writes that :

“Dalit (oppressed or broken) is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi Translation of ‘depressed classes’, a term the British used for What are now called the Scheduled Castes. In 1970s the ‘Dalit panthers’ revived the term and expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. So dalit is not a caste. It is a symbol of change and revolution.” (1)

We can analyze contribution of Dalit literature in the reformation of society that it strongly challenged the upper caste hegemony from literature. It invoked masses of this category to bring about the change in attitude of upper classes. They are also invoked to utilize their intellectual powers and thus they created their own thoughts, their own ideas and became the decision- makers of their own lives. At the same time these literatures also played an important role in spread of literacy among dalits and make them aware of their rights. There is no doubt that significance of this literature in the development of the society is increasing at present. But still we need to look at theoretical issues concerning the status of these people in the society. We need to explore that: (i) to which extent these writing have reframed the structure of the society or discrimination on the basis of caste system. (ii) Have these writings expressed the cruelties and humiliation done by upper class to downtrodden completely? (iii) Is there any difference in dalit literature in various languages of India? Answering these questions we can come to know the significance of this literature in contemporary perspectives.

In one of his poems entitled ‘Mother’ Nimbalker depicts the pangs of sufferings and caste discrimination. Waman Nimbalker is a remarkable dalit author who produced his works in Marathi language. The poems composed by him were anthologized in *Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. The poem ‘Mother’ is very appealing to the heart of the reader and was written in simple language. The poem was originally written in Marathi and later translated into English by Priya Adarkar. In particular this poem reveals the hardships a dalit woman confronts in her life. Motherhood is a divine thing on this earth. Nothing could be balance its value in exchange. This is the godly possession for a woman. But her adorable position is not given due worth. Even on sacrificing her life she is not given due importance. The point to be noted here is that a mother’s experiences turn more painful and hard when she is a dalit woman. The amount of hard realities for her gets doubled. Let’s see how Nimbalker portrays the figure of this mother in his poem:

Daylight would die, Darkness would reign.

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*We at our hut's door. No single light inside.
Lights burning in houses around. Kitchen-fires too
Kitchen-fires too. Bhakris Beaten out.
Vegetables, gruels cooked.
In our nostrils, the smells of food. In our stomachs, darkness.
From our eye, welling up, streams of tears.
Slicing darkness, a shadow heavily draws near.
On her head, a burden...my mother.
All day she combs the forest for firewood.
We wait her return. When she brings no firewood to sell we go to bed hungry.
One day something happens. How we don't know.
Mother comes home leg bandaged, bleeding.
A large black snake bit her, say two women.
He raised her hood. He struck her. He slithered away.
Mother fell to the ground.
We try charms. We try spells. the medicine man comes.
The day ends. So does her life.
We burst into grief. Our grief melts into air.
Mother is gone. We, her brood, throen to the winds.
Even my eyes search for omther. My sadness grows.
When I see a thin woman with firewood on her head,
I go and buy all her firewood.*

-Waman Nimbalker (Translated from Marathi into English by Priya Adarkar)

In the way of many dalit authors Nimbalker reveals the sadistic condition of dalit community in this poem. This poem also clearly shows the part of woman in the family and society. In particular this poem presents the agony of a family and in general of a community. Portraying the hardships of a mother and children of a family the poet successfully brings out the deprivation that dalit community confronts.

Some dimensions of dalit literature may be explored by analyzing Arjun Dangle's anthology *The Poisoned Bread*. This collection consists of four portions: poetry, autobiographical extracts, short stories, essays and speeches. We may look at themes explored in poems and fiction and autobiographical chunks. Autobiographical pieces in the anthology may be looked at as realities of lived experience. We may understand the essence and tone of the work as the voice of voiceless. We see that this vulnerable section of the society finds expression in black and white. As we know this literature got its arise in Maharashtra they were written in Marathi. The anthology *The Poisoned Bread* edited by Arjun Dangle contains piece of writings in Marathi from many Marathi dalit writers. Bulk of

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the writings in Marathi was translated into English by Priya Adarkar. *A Corpse in the Well* one of the autobiographical extracts in *The Poisoned Bread* was translated by Priya Adarkar. The present extract *A Corpse in the Well* taken from Taran-Antaral was written by Shankarrao Kharat. In this extract the author narrates the story of his father. He writes that his father had to keep the watch on a corpse in a deserted well of the village and for this he had to stand up over the night. His father Anna was bound to do this as a customary duty. In morning the writer would come to his father and ask him for taking food but his father would denied him saying that he may go only after the constable has come. His father's ignorance of his own hunger makes the child angry, child says, "Anna! The constable will come after his meal. The village chief has also filled his belly. Then why can't you oo eat your bread? Why must you remain hungry? The reply he receives to this speaks of the inequality that the Mahars suffered. Annareplies, "oh, they are officers! How can they work without food? That's what village duty is, my boy! Who cares if a Mahar lives or dies?" (Dangle 86)

There is another autobiographical extracts entitled *The Bastard*. This extract is from Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi*. Here hypocrisy in the name of Hindu religion is revealed. In his autobiography *Akkarmashi* wealthy Patils exploited Mahar women sexually. Along with this theme of hunger, poverty, attraction is also found in the autobiography. We see the extremities of hunger when a Mahar has less food then he has to remain on water. The author would help his grandmother in making liquor and many people from upper caste of the village would come to their home and take liquor. He depicts the hypocrisy of so-called religious and upper caste people saying they would drink the liquor made by the hands of a Mahar but would not touch the water offered by them. Other than this they could touch a Mahar woman but could not eat the food made by the hands of a Mahar woman. Extremity of the hypocrisy can be seen in the paragraphs:

"Those who have given the power by religion on account of their high caste and money inherited from ancestors have deemed it their birth right to abuse Dalit honour. Every village Patil and zamindar has slept with the wives of his land labourers. Used them like whores. As soon she came of his age, a girl from a poor family fell victim to their lust. You'll find the progeny of the patil's promiscuity in some houses of the village. These households live solely at the mercy of the patil. The whole village calls this the Patil's mistress's house and the children, the Patil's whore's brood. His benevolence, his visits, is all that matter for this household's happiness." (141)

All of these incidents made the author to look in to his identity as a Hindu. This is concluded in these lines as: "Am I a caste-Hindu? But my mother is an untouchable. Am I an untouchable? But my father is a caste-Hindu. I have been tossed apart like Jarasandha- half within society and half outside. Who am I? To whom does my umbilical cord join me?"

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(Dangle 142) The analysis of autobiography extracts from *The Poisoned Bread* reveals hardships and cruelties done to them by the caste system of the society. They suffered chill penury, scarcity of fundamental things for survival of the life; denial of right to use of resources; lack of opportunities for development; public mortification; cruelties got doubled when dalit is a woman; sexual exploitation and untouchability. “The dalit literature like black literature gives words to the old pains, agonies and sufferings of the dalits. In the field of literature, the form used first to reveal the inhuman conditions of the Dalit is poetry.” (Mahida 184)

“One can however feel optimistic about the kind of growth that dalit literature has shown from being nowhere to having substantially made a mark on the literary scene of India. It has traversed across languages building a rebellion throughout the country by way of its uninhibited expressions. And these expressions have not been submissive but remarkably rebellious. Dalits, the subalterns of India, have thus managed to shape a culture that can be the change they wish to see. Human creates culture and culture shapes the human. The same principle is applicable to Dalits also.” (Bhosale 49)

Baby Kamble is regarded as the representative of Dalit women and her work *The Prisons We Broke* is considered as the manifesto of Dalit women. She tried to highlight how the caste system and patriarchic system exploit a dalit woman doubly. Baby Kamble took it necessary to spread her experience as a dalit woman all over the world through her writing. She sees Dr. Ambedkar as a liberator of vulnerable sections. She asserts that she is educated because of Dr. Ambedkar and she writes that: “Today many of our daughters and daughters-in-law, are graduates. They are a hundred times more superior to ignorant woman like us. Even if their husbands forgot the father, in the glory of so-called greatness, it is their duty to reprimand what you are today is solely because of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar” (123)

CONCLUSION

Though India positions progressively in its social credentials in all circumstances, the utmost part of the south and north has not fetched greater welfare to most people. The ‘varna system’ outlined according to Hindu mythology has ranked the unfortunate people. According to Hindu scriptures, the Brahmins at the top, next to kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the last were the Sudras. It was this system that ranked people into different classes. The unfortunate people ranked by the Hindu varna system are dalits. They are ranked below in the Hindu caste system. These unfortunate people suffered badly in the hands of the upper caste right from the colonization period. Still, the suppressed were able to fight back and assert their rights by reuniting under the term ‘Dalit’ under the canopy. Sadly, the Indian constitution has failed to end the atrocities against the Dalits even in this 21st century. Dr. B



R. Ambedkar's dream of economic and social equality is still a question in India, particularly outside the cities, where the atrocities persist in various degree.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the dalits raised their voice through literature for the first time in the Marathi and other regional languages. These writers used poetry, drama, novel in a larger account to share their experience of caste discrimination they faced in society. They well used the genre autobiography to raise the issues to the limelight to reach a larger audience as it depicts the authentic representation of their life. The translators play a dynamic role in translating the text that is written in regional languages. It is indispensable to convert the text into English as it reaches a variety of audience, and also the other conquered class all over the parts of the world gets access to it. The translators stalwartly trust that translation acts as a bridge between the manifestations of confrontation. Dalit literature has its impact on the society to a greater degree. Dalit literature narrated the pain and sufferings of the slavery of Dalits through different genres of literature such as poems, novels, shot stories and autobiographies. And we have seen the journey and contribution of this literature through different phases in regeneration of depressed classes. Masses of the society got voice through literature. It ignited the dalit consciousness for their dignity in the society.

Dr Ambedkar dreamt India as a great nation without causing any bloodshed and literature is playing a great role in achieving this goal. He wanted revolution in every field of society through social, economical and political changes. When we are able to get equality in every sphere of life of every citizen, we may call India a real democrat and that would be a long-lasting gift for the people of India. All the movements of dalits and dalit writers place Baba sahib on an esteemed position of father of dalit-literature. The literature inspired by Dr. Ambedkar gave rise to awareness among the people for the happenings in their surroundings in Indian social context.

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