



IDEOLOGY OF Dr. AMBEDKAR IN FICTION: A STUDY OF SHORT STORIES OF OMPRAKASH VALMIKI

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ABSTRACT

Dalits are marginalised section of the society; they are socially, economically, politically and physically exploited in the society. Due to their lower rung in the society, they are forced to live on the margins of the society. OmprakashValmiki was very much influenced by the ideology of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar like eliminating untouchability from the society, and an importance of education in the upliftment of Dalits. Dr. BhimraoAmbedkar played an important role in Indian politics, exclusively for the upliftment of the oppressed. He devoted his whole life for the upliftment of marginalized section of the society. OmprakashValmiki shares his views and struggles in his writings like short stories, autobiography, and poetry. His story collection *Salaam*, translated by Naresh K. Jaintitle *Amma and Other Stories* is a sketch of struggling people for freedom and equality.

Keywords: Dalit, Downtrodden, Salaam, Untouchability, Upliftment.

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INTRODUCTION

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956) is a voice of voiceless people. He was appointed as the first Law Minister in the Cabinet of Independent India. He played a significant role in the architect of Indian Constitution. In 1990, he was awarded India's highest civilian honor Bharat Ratna. He was not only the Constitution maker but a prominent scholar and a great thinker on the various grounds like economics, history, politics, law, environment, and religion, etc. He devoted his whole life for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Trilok Sharma opines "he was the man behind the drafting and formation of the Indian constitution, was not only a learned scholar and an eminent jurist but also a revolutionary against social

evils like untouchability and caste system." (39) Mahatma Buddha, Saint Kabir, and JyotibaPhule were the idol images for Dr. Ambedkar. They raised their voice for social change, casteless and discrimination-free society. Dr. Ambedkar gave a new platform to this movement and made it as an important aim of his life. Herejected the divine notion of a caste system. He knew that caste system was the primary reason for inequality in the society "Dr. BabasahebAmbedkar, the father of Dalit Movement, rejected the notion that caste system is God made. He, along with Mahatma Phule, started a political movement for the freedom and equality of Dalits. This movement played a very significant role as a shaping spirit of Dalit Literature." (Prasad: 2) In the 1960s, this movement took place in

literature named as Dalit Literature started from Maharashtra. Dalit literature is a representation of Dalits suppressed voice. "The Dalits (also known as Untouchables, Harijans, or Scheduled Castes) have historically been poor, deprived of basic human rights, and treated as social inferiors in India. They still face economic, social, cultural, and political discrimination in the name of caste." (Kethineni and Humiston 100) Dalits are marginalized people who are facing discrimination from many centuries at different level of the society.

The Dalits have been and are subjected to poverty, indignity, insult, humiliation, dishonor, terror tactics and trepidation. Within the inhuman caste system, right from the childhood, a Dalit is made to feel that he is an inferior being, an outcasted person, a person of loose morals and a person whose life is worth only for the service and the betterment of the dominant caste men and women. (Louis: 80)

Dr. Ambedkar gave a hope to these oppressed people to raise their voice for age long exploitations and discriminations. Through literature, it became an adamant tool to spread the awareness among the marginalized sections of the society "The Dalit literary movement that we see today is an outcome of the efforts of Dr. Ambedkar. He wielded a tremendous influence in developing a search for identity among the Dalit masses. He remained a driving spirit behind the literary works of many Dalit writers." (Khan: 106). Dr. Ambedkar was the follower of Jyotiba Phule, like his ideology he also focused on the importance of education. Social reformer Jyotiba Phule found in his study that Dalits are oppressed and suffering terribly due to lack of their education level. Because of the dominance of Brahmins, they are forced to live far from it. Jyotiba Phule expresses:

Vidhyabinamatigayi. Matibinanitigayi.
Nitibinagatigayi. Gatibinavittgaya.
Vittbinashudrgye. Itneanarthe kavidhya ne
kiye. (Banjara: 28)

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule teaches them that without education they cannot understand the concepts which are going in their surrounding and due to the lack of

their understanding they cannot become a part of the management. Without being a part of the management they lose everything, so Dr. Ambedkar thinks that only education can help them to improve their conditions. "Ambedkar's ideal for the low caste groups was to raise their educational standard so that they may overcome the social disadvantages imposed by their birth, and be in a position to use political power in resolving problems of injustice." (Shrivastava: 219)

Omprakash Valmiki is one of the famous writers who share his views and struggle right from the childhood. Today his voice is recognized as an authorized voice in Dalit literature. He was born in an extremely poor family with the lowest caste and belongs to an illiterate community of Untouchables. He describes that their community only considered as slaves or laborers. He was enormously influenced after reading Dr. Ambedkar's biography titled *Dr. Ambedkar: A biography*, written by Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu. He also made an aim to work for a casteless and discrimination-free society. Till the last breath of his life, he was concerned about Dalits. He belonged to Barla, Muzaffarnagar of Uttar Pradesh. He had suffered a lot to get admission in the school because of his lower caste. After getting the admission he was discriminated by teachers and other upper caste students. He has mentioned in his autobiography the discrimination which he had suffered in his school, college and at workplace also. At that time, all upper caste people used Valmiki's caste related name instead of his real name like 'Abhechure' or 'Oechure'.

His short-story collection *Salaam* is the real document of the long-silenced and long-denied sufferings of the Dalits. These stories depict pain, suffering, insult, humiliation, exploitation (social, economic, political and cultural), discrimination, etc. which they have to face the influential upper caste people in our nearby surroundings. Story "Where Can Satish Go?" (*Amma and Other Stories*), character Satish is struggling to get an education because he doesn't want to do his father's occupation as a sweeper in the municipality. "Salaam" story, is concerned with the importance of education. In this story, new

generations are getting an education and understanding the difference between good and evil issues of the society and taking decision what they should follow or what they should not. Harish bluntly says "Think whatever you like . . . I look upon this practice to be a conspiracy to crush our self-confidence."(49) For the expansion of knowledge in the Dalits, Dr. Ambedkar established an institution Entitled 'Peoples Education Society' and open two colleges one is in Bombay on 28th June 1946 name Sidharth College and the second is Milind College in Aurangabad on 1st September 1951. Story "Twenty-five Fours are a Hundred and Fifty" clearly shows the misguidance of calculation by the sahukar Chaudhary. Due to the lack of education Dalits are forced to return extra interest, but his son is getting an education, so he teaches his father. Dr. Ambedkar thought that nobody will help us to improve our circumstances, but education can do it. So Valmiki also tries to convince the Dalit society to get an education for the betterment of life. Education is an essential part of everyone's life, it will help them to live life with dignity.

However, Valmiki's exposure to new fields of knowledge and education musters his confidence to break the barriers of caste dominated identity and to register his protest against the convention and customs that are responsible for the wretchedness of Dalits . . . Valmiki asserts that education is the only medium to escape the trap of conspiracy. (Agarwal, Beena and Neeta 14)

The profession is a standard of survival in the society. Some basic needs like food, clothes, and shelter are far from them. Due to the lack of education, they are always compelled to do derogatory jobs (cleaning toilets, roads, and sewage, leather related works, removing the skin of dead animals, etc.). They are socially as well as economically exploited by the upper caste.

Dalits are at the lowest rung in the caste hierarchy based on ritual purity and occupation, and outside the varna system, which gives them the traditional name panchamas. They have been oppressed throughout the recorded history of India,

relegated to doing toiling and 'polluting' tasks like agricultural labor, disposing of dead bodies, working with leather, cleaning toilets and sewage etc. They have been stripped of their dignity and denied basic human rights. (Bhatt: 1)

The story entitled "Amma" is an appropriate document for their menial work in which major character Amma works as a sweeper in the upper caste house Mrs. Chopra. In their home, she faces humiliation as well as physical exploitation. One of Mrs. Chopra's friends Vinod clings to Amma with sexual feelings and Amma started to beat him; "Vinod slipped his hand round her waist and polluted her to himself with a jerk. This misbehavior stupefied Amma. She shouted: 'what are you doing? . . . Let me go.' And she tried to wrest herself free from his grip." (185) Dalit Women's are thrice exploited by the upper caste in the society, on the name of caste; the gender and poverty. They are exploited at their workplace socially, economically, politically and physically. Valmiki is very much concerned about the exploitation of Dalit women through "Amma" story he dedicated story to all female workers in the very beginning of the story "You could call it Amma's story- but not of one particular Amma; for you hardly know how many Ammas you would come across with broom and canister in hand early morning doing the rounds of lanes and galimohallas, whose decrepit bodies have wilted under the impact of time and like old trees have begun to waste away." (180) Because of her pitiable conditions Amma wants to send his son to school because she knows that in her occupation they only get exploitation and insult, only education will help them to get what they deserved. Sadanand Paswan opines, "Dalits have historically been allocated occupations that are considered demeaning or polluting by others- an estimated one million Dalits are manual scavengers who clean public latrines and dispose of dead animals and 60% of Dalits are dependent on casual labour."(15) Valmiki's another story "Storm" also depicts the traditional occupation through central character:

All life moving round pigs was not less than hell. The buzzing of flies everywhere made one feel

like vomiting. Pigs were rounded up and taken to the abattoir right in the morning. Killing them, roasting them and then washing the meat after cleaning it, and thereafter cleaning it into small pieces- all this was quite exhausting. (141)

But he has not chosen his forefather's occupation; he worked hard and achieved a job in a reputed company. Dalits are always combating with unemployment, poverty and treated like animals. In the story "The Hide of an Ox" Kale and Bhure also doing occupation related with the disposing of dead animals. Instant of wages they only get abused and insult "Where were you, you bastards? We've worn our knees out looking for you. . . . You're coming now like a maharaja Who will remove the ox . . . your father?" (56) Dr. Ambedkar knew that if their downtrodden want respectful and dignity full life so firstly they have to change their occupation and education is the only medium to get a respectful job in the society and make a dignity full identity so, Valmiki also accepted and reflected this ideology in his stories.

Although untouchability abolished in 1949, but in practice at today's scenario Dalits are still facing many problems "In many villages, untouchables still live in poverty and subjugation. They are forbidden from entering temples or drinking water from the same wells as upper-castes. It was customary wedding night, before her helpless groom." (Shrivastava: 231) In "Salaam" story Kamal Upadhyaya went to the marriage ceremony of his Dalit friend. Kamal is a 'Brahmin', and he goes to a tea stall for tea where he faced discrimination "He has come to Jumman sweepers with the marriage party. Now you people decide. If he is a baaman, why has he come in a party of sweepers? To drink urine? He's concealing his identity to get tea. I told him plainly-at Budhu's shop no tea for the sweepers-cobblers. Go look for it elsewhere." (43) "In many Indian villages tea-shop in which Dalits are still forbidden to take in the same glasses used by people of high caste." (Paswan: 14) Dalits are always considered as untouchable and low in the upper caste dominating society. They are forbidden to touch the public tap, enter in the

temples, etc. They are denied to participate in the higher caste functions.

They were "untouchables" –others would be polluted by their touch, even by their shadows. To avoid such "pollution" dalits were segregated and denied access to many other community facilities- schools, temples, water, tank, etc. To this day thousands of villages have a separate area for Dalit houses (including houses built for them by the government), separate wells for Dalits, class rooms where dalit children sit separately, tea shops with separate glasses for dalits. (Bhatt: 1-2)

Dr. Ambedkar tried very hard to abolish untouchability because he knew that without abolishment of untouchability development cannot emerge and same by the influence of Dr. Ambedkar, Valmiki also raises these issues in his stories. Dr. Ambedkar unites the Dalits to take entry in the Hindu temples. In these movements, they enter at Ambadevi temple in 1927, Ganpati temple, Bombay in 1929 and Kala Ram temple, Nasik in 1930. Dr. Ambedkar fights a battle for Dalits to destroy the age-long untouchable tradition. "Ambedkar wanted to destroy the caste pyramid through democracy, but the rule of law has been slow in reaching many villages where upper-caste landlords, often in league with local police, are keeping the Dalits down." (Shrivastava: 232) Due to the caste discrimination behavior by the upper caste people Dalits feels fear to expose their real identity. So the author portrays the condition of Dalits in his stories in which his characters are in fear or feeling hesitation, they are in the dilemma of telling caste and to hide their caste. Omprakash Valmiki was very bold writer in that sense he fixes his surname with his name. Due to this, he faced many problems but he never feels discomfort ever. "The adoption of "Valmiki" as his last name is also a mark of his protest at this own community's desire to hide behind an upper-caste bourgeois identity in its path to upward social and professional mobility." (Ganguly: 429). About his surname and identity he is very much impressed and influenced by Dr. Ambedkar, he expresses in his autobiography:

This surname is now an indispensable part of my name. Omprakash has no identity without it. 'Identity' and 'recognition', the two words say a lot by themselves. Dr. Ambedkar was born in a Dalit family. But Ambedkar signifies a Brahmin caste name; it was a pseudonym given by a Brahmin teacher of his. When joined with 'Bhimrao' however it becomes his identity, completely changing its meaning in the process. Today 'Bhimrao' has no meaning without 'Ambedkar'. (Valmiki: 132)

Valmiki's stories characters are somewhere feeling embarrassment in the name of caste. In the story "Storm", Mr. Sukkar changes his name due to get rid of social insult; he seems that his name represents his rank in the society. He changes his name Mr. SukkarLal to Mr. Lal. These types of a name also create a feeling of harassment by the upper caste people. So they all are compelled to hide their identity. Mr. Sukkar is running from his identity, because of this, he does not want to go out on the occasion of the funeral of his father-in-laws and says to his wife "I don't want that people here should know that we belong to the Scheduled Castes. The day they come to know, all this respect will turn into hatred and envy." (139) "Where Can Satish Go?" story's Satish runs away from their home to make his own identity. He lives with a fake identity, but when landlady comes to know about his caste she insults him. Story "Fear" also highlights the problems of superstition and Dinesh the character of the story rebelling against it.

Dalit literature is deeply concerned with identity formation and its assertion to regain the self-confidence and self-worth of the marginalized sections of our society. Most of their creative imagination is structured around these premises. There is an agenda of rebuilding society on values which promote honor and dignity, justice and equality. (Khan: 103)

His character no doubt hiding their caste and living under fake identity but somehow they are making their strong identity and are continuously fighting. The highest purpose of Dalit writing is not a beauty of craft, but the authenticity of experience. OmprakashValmiki is a composition of oppression of

Dalit community. His stories are a voice of voiceless for numerous generations. Like Dr. Ambedkar, he also actively involved in the social work for the upliftment of Dalits and providing self-dignity and respect in the society. His stories showed a pitiable condition of Dalit community after a long gap of independence and are still facing problems in the society.

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