



GATES OF LITERATURE: ROLE OF LITERATURE IN INSTIGATING A SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

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Literature is not only for pleasure reading but also serves other purposes as well. There are writers who use literature as a safety valve to deal with critical issues. For these authors literature is a mere device where one can express one's views and still stay far from trouble.

This mode of writing was pioneered by Ambedkar and Virginia Woolf who were socially conscious and felt their respective responsibilities to the society. Therefore, Ambedkar and Virginia Woolf also used literature as a safe means to address delicate issues in a society, whereby they did not get into trouble and still were able to communicate the issues in an effective manner. They chose this method as a pretext to talk about the caste system operating within Hinduism (Ambedkar) and oppression of women (Virginia Woolf).

The course of this work will proceed in seeing how far symbols and images are used in Dr. Ambedkar's essay 'The House the Hindus have Built' and Virginia Woolf's fiction A Room of One's Own. In their works they concentrate not only on their ideas but also on the way to be expressed. Their works have a punching effect on the readers because of the symbols and the images they have used in their writings. This work aims at seeing symbols and images found in their works and how they effectively communicate their ideas. Each of their major works is dealt in detail and is analysed elaborately in this work.

Key words: Ambedkar, Peeping into Tradition, Viewing Culture, Virginia Woolf

Literature is not merely a representation of reality. It has become a visual representation of reality, especially in the context of modern literature. While many writers attach importance to mere form rather than content and exaggerate the formalistic aspects of writings, there are some writers who use literature as a safety valve to deal with critical issues.

A remarkable example for this mode of writing is Solzhenitsyn's 'Gulag Archipelago', in which he addressed the issues of Stalin's prison camp, which would have been otherwise impossible if he had chosen to write in a direct manner. In one of the three volumes of Solzhenitsyn, he writes a section with a subtitle 'A literary Investigation'. Surprisingly one finds no great literary criticism or analysis in the investigation. Much attention has

been paid to the subject rather than the form. Thus, for this author literature is a mere device where one can express one's views and still stay far from trouble.

This mode of writing was pioneered by Ambedkar and Virginia Woolf who were socially conscious and felt their respective responsibilities to the society. Therefore, Ambedkar and Virginia Woolf also used literature as a safe means to address delicate issues in a society, whereby they did not get into trouble and still were able to communicate the issues in an effective manner. They chose this method as a pretext to talk about the caste system operating within Hinduism (Ambedkar) and oppression of women (Virginia Woolf).

Theories of literature have been produced in such a great number that it formed a major part

of the English curriculum. In some of the universities the theory of literature has been offered either as a course or as a separate diploma. While there is a rousing reception for such theories of literature, there is very little interest in literature. D. H. Lawrence has articulated this sentiment. David Lodge in *Modernism, Anti-modernism and Post-modernism* fails to understand the force of D. H. Lawrence's argument and tries to justify the mushrooming of literary theories.

On the contrary Giles Deleuz, passionately takes up the issue of literature. In his study on Kafka he identifies "A Kafka effect" introduced in the history of literature. He extends this argument to address the issue of the function of literature. So, he condemned psychoanalysis for appropriating the insights and force of literature and formulating concepts like sadism and oedipal complex. It is in this sense that this study hopes to enter into the gates of literature opened by Dr. Ambedkar and Virginia Woolf.

This study aims at seeing literature through the gates opened by the two great personalities in the field of society and literature respectively. Anyone who is interested to enter into the house of literature should open such gates of Dr. Ambedkar and Virginia Woolf.

It is irrefutable that many modern poets introduced many revolutionary ideas regarding poetry writing and the form in which it was written. As in the words of Virginia Woolf's 'Modern Fiction' the expression of man's self and his elevated feelings are more important than putting them in order, according to the conventional rules of writing. In the same way many modernist writers have chosen the path of writing where priority is given to the feeling rather than the form.

Hereby, the course of this work will proceed in seeing how far symbols and images are used in Dr. Ambedkar's essay 'The House the Hindus have Built' and Virginia Woolf's fiction *A Room of One's Own*. The reason for taking Ambedkar's and Virginia Woolf's works is that they concentrate not only on their ideas but also on the way to be expressed. Their works have a punching effect on the readers because of the symbols and the images they have used in their writings. Both are dealing with the marginalized in their work. Ambedkar in his dealing

with the 'untouchables' shows how they are suppressed within the Hindu caste system. Virginia Woolf shows how women are suppressed by the men folk as well as how their literature is in such a suppressed state.

This work aims at seeing symbols and images found in their works and how they effectively communicate their ideas. It is a well-known fact that Ambedkar and Virginia Woolf have established themselves in the field of research and study towards the society. Each of their major works is dealt in detail and is analysed elaborately henceforward.

Viewing Culture

'The House the Hindus have built' is a masterpiece by Dr. Ambedkar. Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891, in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh. His parents both were Dalits. His father was a retired army officer and headmaster in military school and his mother an illiterate woman.

Because he was born a Dalit, he was made to sit in a corner of the classroom, separated from other students. His teachers feared pollution that is why they would not touch him. Despite of all kinds of humiliations, he passed his high school in 1908. This was such an exceptional achievement for a Dalit, that he was felicitated in public meeting.

After his graduation he went to USA to study economics at the Columbia University. After his return to India he got a job as Military Secretary in Baroda Raja's office. There he was ill-treated again by the caste-Hindu employees. Even drinking water was not given to him and files were kept at distance from him.

In 1920 he went to London where he got his Bar-at-Law at Gray's Inn for Law. While coming back to India in 1923, Ambedkar again experienced humiliation. The caste-Hindu lawyers would not even have tea at his desk. But his greatest consolation was his clients, whom he treated with a liberal mind. His reputation and fame among the Depressed Classes began to grow. He was one of the greatest thinkers that India has produced. He visualized and struggled for a casteless and equal India.

At this time he was fully convinced that nothing could emancipate Dalits except through a complete destruction of the caste system. He asserted: 'I was

born a Hindu, but never will die a Hindu. Hinduism should become a religion of social equality. What is required is to get rid of the doctrine of 'Chatuvarna'. That is the root cause of all inequality and is also the parent of the caste system and untouchability, which are merely other forms of inequality.

In 1924 he started the organization 'Bahiskrit Hitakarini Sabha' for the enlistment of the Dalits. Ambedkar adopted a two-pronged strategy: Eradication of illiteracy and economic uplift of the downtrodden, non-violent struggle against visible symbols of casteism, like denial of entry into temples and drawing water from public wells and tanks.

Ambedkar won two major victories when the High Court of Bombay gave a verdict in favour of the Dalits and made successful non-violent march and entry into a temple. The two struggles shook the religious foundation on which the caste system is built. He formed a political party; Scheduled Castes Federation in April 1942. Ambedkar was also an advocate of women's rights. He struggled for women's liberalization from the caste-entrenched patriarchal system. At the Conference of the Depressed Classes Women in Nagpur in 1942, he stated: 'Let every girl who marries stand by her husband, claim to be her husband's friend and equal and refuse to be his slave'.

He was the prime architect of the constitution of independent India. In August 1947 a drafting committee was appointed to prepare a draft and was submitted to the Governor General of India on February 21, 1948. The Constitution was finalized in November 1949 and came into force on January 26th, 1950; the day that India became a Republic. In that same year he became Law Minister in the first cabinet after Independence, but he resigned from the ministry as Nehru's cabinet refused to pass the Women's Rights Bill.

Ambedkar was justifiably bitter and disenchanted with Hinduism and thus he changed his religion. In October 1956 he, along with about two lakh Dalit men and women, converted to Buddhism in Nagpur. For Ambedkar Buddha was one of the main inspiring personalities in history who raised a strong voice of protest against inequality between people and between men and women.

On 6th December 1956 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar died. Dalits will always remember him as their Liberator and Champion of their rights. 'Rights are protected not by laws, but by the social and moral conscience of society', Ambedkar said: The social organization of the Hindus is normal and natural to the Hindus because they are unaware of the peculiarities of their own ways and manners. But for the outsiders (i.e.) non-Hindus it is peculiar.

Three foreigners have recorded the division of the Hindu Caste system. The three foreigners were Megasthenese, Alberuni and Duarte Barbosa. Megasthenese came to India as the ambassador of the Greek king Seleukos Nicator to the court of Chandragupta Maurya sometime about the year 305 B.C. He has divided the population of India into seven parts. Alberuni wrote an account of his travels in India in about 1030A.D. He has divided the population of India into seven parts. Duarte Barbosa was a Portuguese official in the service of the Portuguese government in India from 1500 to 1517. He has divided the population into eighteen parts.

The foreigners were unable to give a full picture of the Hindu caste system, which is the most distinguishing feature of the Hindu society. One should know something to tell about a thing. He should have involved in that at least to some extent. That is why these foreigners were unable to give a full picture of the Hindu Caste system. Actually the caste system in its form and shape is inconsistent. At the time of Megasthenese it was different. It changed at the time of Alberuni and again at the time of the Portuguese official. So, we should get the more exact idea of the nature of the caste system.

Basically there was only Varna system in the Hindu social organization. In this there were only four classes. They were

1. Brahmins, the priestly and the educated class
2. Kshatriyas, the military class
3. Vaishyas, the trading class and
4. Shudras, the servant class

Only later the classes were divided and became castes which became four thousand then.

Table 1: Record of the division of the Hindu Caste system by three foreigners

The Hindu-Caste System

Megasthenese	Alberuni	Duarte Barbosa
1.Philosophers	1.Brahmins	1.Resbutos
2.Husband men	2.Kshatriyas	2.Baneanes
3.Herdsman and Hunters	3.Vaisyas	3.Bramenes
4.Workers at trade	4.Sudras	4.Nayres [cuiavern]
5.Fighting men	5.Antyaja	5.Biabares
6.Overseers	1.Fuller	6.Mainatos
7.Councillors and Assessors of the King.	2.Shoemaker	7.Caletis
	3.Juggler	8.Tuias
	4.Basket and Shield maker	9.Manen
	5.Sailor	10.Canaqus
	6.Fisherman	11.Ageres
	7.Hunter	12.Mongeres
	8.Weaver	13.Monger
		14.Betunes
		15.Paneens
		16.Revdeens
		17.Poleas
		18.Pareens

Ambedkar says that this is absolute nonsense. Present caste system is not an evolution of the Varna system. It is only a cleavage of the Varna system.

Hindus are divided into so many castes and the castes are divided into different classes. The old system made a distinction between the first three Varnas: the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas and the fourth Varna namely the Shudras. The three former were classed as the regenerate classes. The Shudra was held as the unregenerate class. The distinction was based upon wearing sacred thread and studying the Vedas. This line of cleavage forms the basis of the present day class division.

There is another line of cleavage just below the 'low class castes'. It is the distinction outside the Varna system. They were called the Avarna Hindus [Non-Caste Hindu]. The four castes are called the Savarna Hindus

According to Ambedkar the cleavage line is not uniform. A caste system involves the study of the mutual relations between different castes. In the Hindu Caste system, the caste touch but they do not interpenetrate. The order is vertical and not horizontal.

In other countries social groups have remained unorganized and voluntary groups while in India they have become organized and involuntary.

Factors determining the place and status of a caste in the Hindu hierarchical system of caste:

1. Religious Ceremonies

The Hindu scriptures prescribe 16 religious ceremonies. A caste which can claim to perform all the ceremonies is higher in status than the caste which has a right to perform a few.

2. Incantations

A caste which is entitled to use Vedic Mantras is superior to a caste which is entitled to use Shastrik Mantras . A caste which is entitled to use Shastrik

Mantras is higher than caste which is entitled to use only Puranokta Mantras .

3. The Position of the Priest

The caste at which a Brahmin will officiate is held as superior to caste at whose functions a Brahmin will not officiate.

A Hindu is not only caste conscious but also class conscious. Here Dr. Ambedkar talks of the cleavage between the Savarna Hindus and the Avarna Hindus [Non-Caste Hindus]. The cleavage is not uniform.

The rule as laid down by Manu, the Hindu Law giver is that there are only four Varnas and that there is not to be a fifth Varna. He actually means that the 'untouchables' are not a part of the Hindu caste system, they should remain separated and segregated. If they are a part, they are a part but not of the whole. Ainpure Shastri, the leader of the Orthodox Hindus, at a conference held in Bombay said that 'untouchables' were related to the Hindus as a man is to his shoe.

ANALYSIS

Ambedkar in his essay 'The House the Hindus have Built' shows how the other caste people are suppressing 'untouchables'. In his essay he brings in the image of a house. Let us see how the image of a house develops in this essay. According to Ambedkar there are only four varnas basically in the Hindu social organization. They are the four pillars of the house of the Hindus.

- 1. Brahmins, the priestly and the educated class
- 2. The Kshatriyas, the military class
- 3. The Vaishyas, the trading class and
- 4. The Shudras, the servant class

A caste may be defined as a social group having

- A) Belief in Hindu religion and bound by certain regulations as to
- B) Marriage
- C) Food and
- D) Occupation

In the matter of marriage the regulation lays down that the caste must be endogamous. There can be no intermarriage between members of different castes. This is the first and the most fundamental idea on which the whole fabric of the caste is built up.

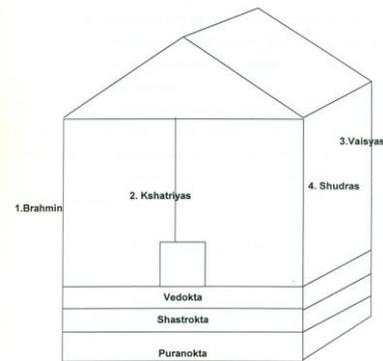
In the matter of food he can interline only with those he can intermarry. In the matter of occupation, he should follow the traditional

occupation. The base of this house is made up of the Hindu Scriptures like

- 1. Vedokta
- 2. Shastrokta and
- 3. Puranokta

Figure 1: Representation of the Hindu Caste system with its scriptures as base and with its castes as pillars.

THE HOUSE THE HINDUS HAVE BUILT

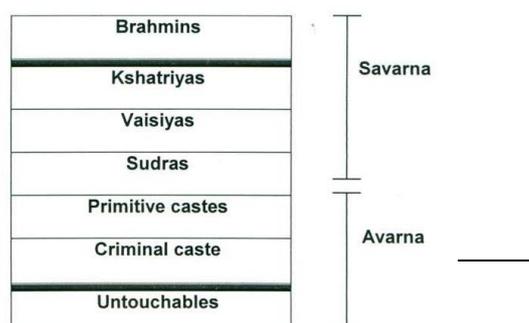


The four castes remained as four pillars only in the early period, later these four castes itself divided into high and low castes. According to Ambedkar the base of the house itself is not strong. In religious scriptures itself there is difference in Sanctity. The Vedas have the highest sanctity. So the baseless house is sure to fall. It should be built with a good foundation.

The four castes which remained as four pillars saw many cleavages. Now they are put in hierarchical order. The cleavage has split the Hindus into Savarna Hindus and Avarna Hindus. The Avarna Hindus are considered as non-caste Hindus. To leave out the cleavage between the Savarna Hindus and the Avarna Hindus is to relate Grimm's Fairy Tale which leaves out the witches, the goblins and the ogres(165).

Figure 2: Representation of the cleavage of the Hindu caste system.

The Hindu Caste System



According to Ambedkar this cleavage is not uniform. How Avarna Hindus are related to the Savarna Hindus is a big question. Here the case of the 'untouchables' is different. They remain separate and segregated without being a part of the Hindu society. They are not a part of the Hindu society. And if they are a part, they are only a part but not of the whole. Here Ambedkar brings the image of a man and a shoe. The 'untouchables' are attached to the Hindu society like a shoe to a man. "A man wears a shoe"(169). It is attached to man but not a part of himself. It can be attached or detached. Like this the 'untouchables' are attached when their labour is needed and during other time they are detached.

PEEPING INTO TRADITION

Virginia Woolf is a British author who made an original contribution to the forms of the novel – also a distinguished feminist essayist, a critic in *The Times Literary Supplement*, and a Central figure of Bloomsbury group.

Woolf, who was educated at home by her father, grew up at the family home at Hyde Park Gate. Woolf's youth was shadowed by series of emotional shocks. Gerald Duckworth, her half-brother, sexually abused her. Stella Duckworth, her half-sister, took her mother's place, but died a scant two years later. Leslie Stephen suffered a slow death from cancer. When her brother Toby died in 1906, she had a prolonged mental breakdown. Vanessa, Virginia's sister influenced a number of her characters: in childhood they bathed and slept together. Later in *FLUSH* (1933) Woolf parodies her own devotion to Vanessa.

Following the death of her father in 1904, Woolf moved her sister and two brothers to the house in Bloomsbury. Vanessa, a painter, agreed to marry the critic of art and literature Clive Bell. Virginia's economic situation improved when she inherited L 2,500 from an aunt. Their houses became central to activities of the Bloomsbury group.

From 1905 Woolf began to write for the *Times Literary Supplement*. In 1912 she married the political theorist Leonard Woolf (1880-1969), who had returned from serving as an administrator in Ceylon.

In the event of a Nazi invasion, Woolf and Leonard had made provisions to kill themselves.

After the final attack of mental illness, Woolf loaded her pockets full of stones and drowned herself in the River Ouse near her Sussex home on March 28, 1941. On her note to husband she wrote: "I have a feeling I shall go mad. I cannot go on longer in these terrible times. I hear voices and cannot concentrate on my work. I have fought against it but cannot fight any longer. I owe all my happiness to you but cannot go on and spoil your life." Woolf's suicide, like Sylvia Plath's, has much coloured the interpretation of both of their work.

A Room of One's Own is an essay based on Woolf's lectures at a women's college at Cambridge. Woolf has been asked to speak on the topic of 'Women and Fiction'. Her thesis is that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.

This essay is designed as an explanation of Woolf arrived at her thesis. Her essay is constructed as a partly-fictionalized narrative of the thinking that led her to adopt this thesis.

In the first chapter she dramatizes that mental process in the character of an imaginary narrator who is in her same position, wrestling with the same topic. The narrator begins her investigation at Oxbridge college, where she reflects on the different educational experiences available to men and women as well as on more material differences in their lives. The narrator sits on the banks of a river at 'Oxbridge' where she is interrupted by the university security guard who enforces the rule by which women are not allowed to walk onto the grass. When she enters the library she is told that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the college or furnished with a letter of introduction.

The narrator then reflects on the history of the university, thinking in particular of the materials, labour and money upon which it was founded and maintained. At that moment the clock strikes interrupting this train of thoughts. She describes the elaborate lunch that was served at the college, where the flood of wine and the dessert and the wealth of good company create an overwhelming sense of abundance and optimism. Then the narrator ponders on why women have always been poor.

In the second chapter the scene changes from Oxbridge to London where the narrator sits in a room attempting to write about women and fiction. She goes to British museum and looks for books about women. She sees one professor's statement "the mental, moral and physical inferiority of women." She decides that these all had been written in the red light of emotion and not in the white light of truth. She decides that male scholars have been interested in the inferiority of women than in preserving and authenticating their sense of male superiority. Women have served as mirrors to men, reflecting their figure at twice its natural size.

The narrator is interrupted by the necessity of paying the bill. She takes the opportunity, while on the subject of her own finances, to inform us that she was left a legacy of five hundred pounds a year by her aunt, Mary Beton.

Returning home, the narrator finds herself entering into a strikingly domestic setting. She thinks to herself that it is nearly impossible to say whether the kinds of labour that have traditionally been performed by women are more or less valuable than the work done by men. The question is unanswerable: not only does domestic labour fall outside of any economic indexes of value, but its cultural value also changes from decade to decade. She envisions a future in which there will be no gender-based division of labour.

In chapter III, the narrator returns home disappointed at not having got anything useful for her research work at the British Library. Then she chooses to look into the lives of English women during the Elizabethan period. During that period Shakespeare was very famous, whereas there were no women writers like Shakespeare. She illustrates the reason with the imaginary character, Judith Shakespeare. Judith Shakespeare, sister of Shakespeare with her talent of acting goes out. But she only gets a child and finally she commits suicide.

In chapter IV, the narrator continues her history by tracing the gradual emergence of women writers out of that blank past. The first would have been aristocrats like Lady Winchilsea, Margaret of Newcastle. It was Aphra Behn, a middle class woman making a living by her writing, in defiance of conventions of chastity. The later eighteenth century saw droves of women following her

example. All these women writers were without any formal literary training.

In chapter V, the narrator picks a book from the shelf which is Mary Carmichael's *Life's Adventure*. She praises her writings and shows how women are portrayed in a different manner in this work.

In the final chapter, the narrator says that a writer should have an androgynous mind, in which each mind has male and female elements.

Woolf closes the door on her fictional narrator with the essay on 'Women and Fiction' still unwritten. It is a story that will continue.

ANALYSIS

Virginia Woolf was given an assignment to talk on 'Women and Fiction.' She builds an image of a room in her novel. According to her a woman should have a room of her own to write fiction. She says in the first chapter "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction"(4). She brings the image of a fish in this chapter. "The sort of fish that a good fisherman puts back into the water so that it may grow fatter and be one day worth cooking and eating"(5). Here she compares a woman to the fish. Women are fed and brought up well only to work as a servant to men.

And also she brings the image of "a cat without a tail"(11). The cat lacks the tail. Likewise women seem to lack something without their literary and other talents put out.

In the second chapter, she quotes Samuel Butler saying "wise men never say what they think of women"(29). Woolf's thinking in this case must be different. The general saying is that wise men think alike. But in the case of Women they never think alike. That is why they never say anything about women.

Then she brings the image of a black snake. She tells that the anger of men is like a black snake. She says that "men's writings on women had been written in the red light of emotion and in the white light of truth."

Then she goes on to say that men told about women not with the intention to tell about them but to boast of himself. They talked about the inferiority of women only to show the superiority of men.

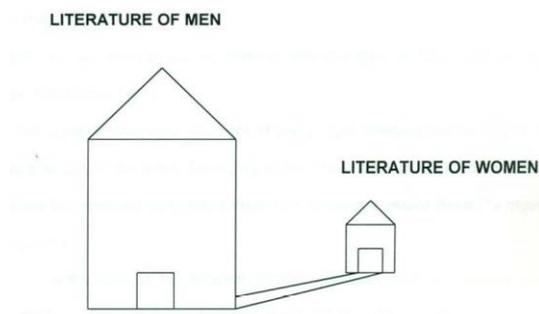
She brings in the image of a mirror. "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of

reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size"(35).

"For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks, his fitness for life is diminished"(36).

In this novel, Woolf brings the image of a room and a house. She compares the literature of men to the house and the literature of women to the room. Women write literature only after reading men's literature. Yet their literature remains separate.

Figure 3: Representation of literature of men and literature of women.



The room lies somewhere in the backyard. She explains this image taking an imaginary character Judith Shakespeare. She shows what would have happened if women had tried to enter into the house during Shakespeare's time. But according to her one day women will enter the house. She says, "Anything may happen when womanhood ceases to be a protected occupation, I thought, opening the door"(41).

She compares fiction to a spider's web. It is attached to life at all four corners. But if it is based on material things it is like a web torn in the middle. Woolf satirically quotes Professor Trevelyan's line "Wife-beating was a recognized right of man"(44).

In the name of chastity, women are tortured. She says, "Chastity may be a fetish invented by certain societies for unknown reasons - but were none the less inevitable." According to Dr. Johnson "a woman's composing is like a dog's walking on his hind legs"(56).

In chapter IV, we see her saying "women live like Bats or Owls, labour like Beasts and die like Worms"(51).

In the last chapter, she sees the sight of two people meeting and getting in a cab. She compares

this to the mind. According to her, there are two sexes in the mind also. They should be united for complete satisfaction. Coleridge refers this as "a great mind is androgynous."

Woolf closes the door on her fictional narrator with the essay on 'Women and Fiction' still unwritten. The point has been to show the thought process behind her theory that fiction writing requires a private room, and the process has become the substance of the essay itself. It is a story that promises to continue.

CONCLUSION

Ambedkar in his essay 'The House the Hindus have Built' has used symbols and mages which are not as important as the message of the oppression of the untouchables which he is primarily concerned with. Thus, a common reader overlooks the usage of symbols and imagery and is automatically pulled towards the subject matter. Thus, a literary piece even when flooded with formalistic aspects the readers are well aware of the importance of the subject and do not go into a deep study of symbols. Thus, an actually non-literary piece in the hands of Ambedkar has been crafted into a fine piece of literary merit.

Similarly Virginia Woolf in her A Room of One's Own which is a masterpiece of women's writing is filled with symbols where she is addressing a serious matter. Her novels which are by themselves symbols justify very well their usage. But on the other hand serious 'social writing' is also written in the same way where the significance of stylistic device like the symbols is thrown into the background.

Literature is not a mere event of recreation but has higher purposes. It is not just a reflection of life but a serious pursuit to re-present and re-create life. It also aims at constructing a new reality that is definitely better than the earlier one. It is not only constructing a reality but to change and reconstruct the existing reality. Hereby, literature also targets social change. Literature is not an activity to while away time but to achieve a revolution, a major social change which would help in making the world a better place to live in.

In this context we realize the importance of the pioneering activity of Dr. Ambedkar and Virginia Woolf who started the two great movements in the history of the world- the Dalit movement and the

feminist movement. Their importance doubles when we recognize and appreciate their use of literature as a device in bringing up changes that altered the course of mankind.

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