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Dr. Ambedkar and Dalit Literature: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

This present Marginal Discourse study critically analyses Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar's contribution to the Constitution, India, and Dalit Literature. His writing always guides students, scholars, and academicians to make a just and healthy society, where all can dream of equality, dignity, and peace. I have tried to explore the downtrodden, poor, and untouchable people's situation in India. The evolution of the word 'Dalit' is from Indian roots. The Marginal people, the fifth Varna or untouchable people, have been insulted, tortured, hated, and exploited for ages, yet they are innocent.

Downtrodden people are announced as dirty people by the religious scriptures, but actually, they clean the dirt of all. 'Caste' is a powerful, significant, and naked truth of our country, which can't be avoided in anyone's lifetime. They are made hungry, poor, and weak by so-called high caste people for three thousand and five hundred years, after the Aryans intruded into India. Caste names give respect or humiliation to Indians.

The caste system is an important part of the Hindu religion, which divides people. This hierarchy obstructs the progress, development, or betterment of all. Many socialists, missionaries, and social activists try to help needy people and improve their conditions. Many people convert to Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, or other religions. Some change their surnames, and others migrate to foreign countries. This is a serious matter to focus on present-day India, if we want to maintain a liberal, secular, and democratic value system.

Keywords: Dalit, Indian, Society, Untouchability, Downtrodden, Dr Ambedkar, Justice.



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Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, is one of the architects of the Indian Constitution. He was a well-known politician and an eminent jurist. His efforts to eradicate social evils like untouchability and caste restrictions were remarkable. He is a great leader who fought for the rights of the Dalits and other socially backward classes throughout his life. Dr. Ambedkar was appointed as the nation's first Law Minister in the Cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, in 1990. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is considered the father of Dalit Literature. He is the inspiration for all weaker sections, depressed people, victims, and helpless people. When we all belong to the same culture, nation, religion, and political system, yet few people are made untouchables and denied their share of self-respect.

Dr Ambedkar has greatly contributed to the Dalits and Dalit writing. He is a great scholar and a prolific writer. He has authored many books to uplift the marginalized community. They are *Annihilation of Caste*, *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, *Waiting for a Visa*, *Who Were the Shudras?*, *India and Communism*, *Pakistan or the Partition of India* etc.

"The root word of the term 'Dalit' is 'Dal' as given on page 471 of the Oxford Sanskrit English Dictionary, new edition, 1964, edited by the world-famous Sanskrit scholar, Sir Monier Williams. The meaning given to 'Dalit' in the dictionary is: 'burst, split, scattered, dispersed, broken, torn, destroyed, and crushed'." (46, Sharma). 'Daridra' is a popular word, is in vogue in many Indian languages, is derived from 'Dalit'.

This term is used in all the Indian languages, including the Dravidian languages. Initially, the word 'Dalit' was used by the Dalit Panthers of Bombay. They clearly defined it in their manifesto. The Panthers have included Tribes, Muslims, Women, and all those ill-treated minorities who have been subjected to exploitation by the upper caste people within the scope of this world. The ideology of the Dalits is known as 'Dalitism', which is based on the concept developed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Jayashree B. Gokhale-Turner, in her paper on *Bhakti or Vidroha: Continuity and change in Dalit Sahitya*, has remarked:

"It is Chokhamela and his son Karmamela who seem to show the most varied set of emotions in dealing with caste and untouchability. In dealing with the problem, Chokha travels through a whole gamut of emotions: confusion, pain, anger, bitterness, loneliness, resignation and finally acceptance and the affirmation of the deity. Life as an



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untouchable is a never ending procession of vital or pollution, beginning with birth and continuing beyond death". (50-51, Sharma).

Jayshree B. Gokhale-Turner explains that 'Caste' is a powerful phenomenon that can not be changed. It is permanent, problematic, and discriminatory. If a person is born as an Untouchable, will die the same. There is no way out for freedom. Gautam Buddha, Chokhamela, Kabir, Saint Ravidas, E. V. Periyar Swami, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Shahuji Maharaj, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, and Shaheed Bhagat Singh, etc., tried seriously to bring Equality. Chokhamela reconciles to this social malady at the end of his Abhangas:

"Johar maybap johar
I am your Mahar's mahar
I am hungry
For your leftovers
I am hopeful
I am the servant of your slaves
For your leavings
I've brought my basket". (51, Sharma).

Chokhamela submits himself and his community, the Dalits, to the privileged people for his tragic situation. Dalits were poor, hungry, weak, untouchable, and dependent on the Caste people. They were bonded labourers and have been serving touchable people for ages. From Uratia, when the Aryans intruded into India at the Khyber Pass, they brought with them the evil of this caste system. Dr. Ambedkar calls it a hierarchy of graded inequality.

Chokhamela mentions that his share of Balut is dirty or unhygienic. Dalits are not paid any salary, but are given joothan or stale food by the high-caste people. Untouchable people are ill-treated and humiliated based on their birth. Dilip Chitre narrates how the Upper-caste people tortured Tukaram,

"One of the obvious reasons why Tukaram's life shrouded in mystery and why his work has not been preserved in its original form is because he was born a Shudra, at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. In Tukaram's time in Maharashtra, orthodox Brahmins held that members of all



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varnas other than themselves were Shudras. Shivaji established a Maratha kingdom for the first time only after Tukaram's disappearance. It was only after Shivaji's rise that the two-tier caste structure in Maharashtra was modified to accommodate the new class of kings and warrior chieftains as well as the clans from which they came as proper Kshatriyas". (52, Sharma).

The Indian Caste System is an important part of the Hindu religion. They are divided into four castes. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The Dalits and the Tribals are not included in the Caste System, so they are considered outcast people. Bhansode's poem reveals the new account through Buddhist conversion, and he writes,

"We've lived our whole lives
At your doors
But we never met each other
You were inside we were outside
You were in the temple we were on the steps
Because you thought us untouchable
But those days are over
We've begun a new life
We've found our own temples
Regained our lost faith
Our Gods are where we are
All are equal here" (54-55, Sharma).

After accepting a new faith, Buddhism, Bhansode cries out about the past condition of the untouchable people. There is hope of better conditions, equality, and respect for the downtrodden people. Temple Entry was not possible for the Dalits in Hinduism, whereas Buddhism talks about Equality for all. Even Neo-Buddhists are close to God. This shows the innermost urge of an underprivileged devotee. In the mid-18th century, under British rule, the beginning of industrialization and urbanization was marked, and manual scavenging expanded.

"When urbanization set in – which should have rationally led to scientific sewage practices – Hindu society found it convenient to force 'madigas' and 'bhangis' into manual scavenging". (56, Sharma).



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In the past, employment was a problem for the poor and downtrodden. The labourers migrate from villages to lay roads and railway tracks. Later they were used for menial jobs. Gita Ramaswamy stayed with manual scavengers for a few months to get an authentic picture of the life of the bhangis, as she gives a distressing description of their plight and emphasizes the need to abolish manual scavenging at the earliest. She appeals intensely,

“The existing practices of sanitation in municipalities need to be reformed and upgraded so that no one – from any caste – has to pick up manually”. (56, Sharma).

Dalits have to clean dirt of all, yet they are treated as dirty people. Actually, they are the cleanest people who serve the whole society. Many poor labourers die untimely and unnatural deaths in India. Mr Martin Macwan is a Dalit human rights activist in Gujarat, India. He was born in 1959 in Nadiad, Kheda District, Gujarat, India. He founded the Navsarjan Trust in Gujarat. Navsarjan Trust operates in more than 3000 villages and works for the upliftment of the Dalits.

The U. S. A based Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights presented him with its Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award in 2000. In the same year, Human Rights Watch named him one of the year’s five “outstanding human rights defenders. Kisan Phagu Bansode, an untouchable modern poet, reflects deep inner pain for facing poverty, destitution, and humiliation. He writes,

“God, make me a beast or a bird but not a Mahar [untouchable] at all”. (57, Sharma).

Kisan Fagu Bansode is a Dalit writer who prays to God to make him a beast or a bird, but not a Mahar, an untouchable. Downtrodden people can no longer bear this discriminatory situation. Their life was worse than that of animals, cattle, or birds. People are fed up with this inequality. Their condition is more miserable than we can imagine. Here we can understand the original words of a real shit cleaner about his job,

“We lifted thirty to forty baskets full of shit, which the women heaped and left outside the CDL (Common Dry Latrine), into the tractor. Four of us accompanied the tractor which stopped some distance away from the compost pit. We carried the baskets to the field and threw the shit there. Our hands, legs, clothes... all were dirtied with shit. I will never do this work again. Never. Even if they dismiss me from service, I will take up some other manual labour.



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Though I don't smoke, I have asthma, and the doctor says that this is because of my work..." (57, Sharma).

Due to the dirty jobs that the Dalits were forced to do, they soon developed diseases. Their life span is shortened, and they live an unhappy, unhealthy, and unhygienic life. Dalit writers express their agony and pain through writing Marginal Discourse. The Untouchables' condition is the same, as they live a life of disgrace. Gita Ramaswamy narrates a few names of some shit cleaners of Hyderabad that are derogatory.

"We were told very categorically by the upper castes that our names were to be self-ridiculing. If any parent chose a fair name for the child, we were instantly abused for having lost sight of our *aukat* (social status). Yes, write down our names, they are Jhamta (spade), Kaloo (black), Gobar (dung), Tawa (black griddle), Bhiku (beggar), Ghodo (horse), Phullo, Dhappo, Bhetari, Angoori ... Our names are the first insight into our identity". (57, Sharma).

Gita Ramaswamy narrates the names of some shit cleaners of Hyderabad, which are insulting, humiliating, or of no importance. The 1949 Barve commission ended with a final word to the scavengers themselves. The practice continues, it argued,

"because the scavengers have submissively put up with its dirty nature and never raised their voices against it, as if it were ordained for them by birth". (58, Sharma).

Dalits were not allowed to get an education in the past, but have now started studying and working. Dr. Ambedkar taught us to educate, organize, and agitate. To have faith in yourself. Untouchables get very rare opportunities to make progress. Unless and until Dalits decide to make progress, nobody will be ready to help them. The Indian Constitution guarantees Equality; opportunities should be available to all. To make a just and healthy society, there needs to uplift every Indian.

Dr. Ambedkar says, "Indians today are governed by two different ideologies. Their political ideal set in the preamble of the Constitution affirms a life of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Their social ideal, embodied in their religion, denies them" (161, Goyal). He says about liberty, "So long as you do not achieve social liberty, whatever freedom is provided by the law is of no avail to you" (161, Goyal). He says about women, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved" (162, Goyal).



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