

Essayist Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and His Contemporaries

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Abstract

Dr. Ambedkar is known as the architect of Indian Constitution. People know about his multifaceted personality. His political, social, constitutional works are well known to us. How many among us know about his Contribution to English literature as an essayist? If we don't know, why don't we know? The question invites enquiry. Perhaps nobody told about his literary contribution or there were efforts to keep his valuable writing out of canon. The books of history of English literature also are silent on his contribution to English Literature. In the absence of writing in the main stream literature, the comparison of his essays with his contemporaries also remained missing. Let there be a fair trial and comparative study. It will not only fill the gap but also will enrich the study of English Literature. The greatness cannot stand by itself unless there is comparison. The further study will prove what sustains and what collapse.

KEYWORDS: Essayist, contemporary, canon

Introduction:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a great sage of knowledge. He was the last doyen in the series of great intellectuals like Tilak, Ranade, Bhandarkar, and Telang. He was a politician but his politics was laced with intelligence. A journalist, Beverly Nicholas in 1944 had counted him amongst the six most learned men in India. He edited newspapers, published Pamphlets, opened schools and colleges, argued before courts and in legislative chambers, held conferences, conducted controversies, led Morchas and Satyagraha campaigns throughout his volcanic career to win the dignity for the depressed community.

Dr. Ambedkar frankly, fearlessly and lucidly put the facts before the readers through his essays with his complete sincerity and devotion for the welfare of his people. He worked day and night, sought interviews, supplied information and even addressed thousands of meetings. He took every opportunity of contributing articles to foreign journals with the sole object of exposing the intolerable, humiliating and unbelievable sufferings under which the Depressed Classes had been groaning in India for ages. Due to his written work, the world came to know for the first time that the fate of untouchables in India was worse than that of the Negroes in America. Dr. Ambedkar's profound study, great industry and conquering intellect gave new dimensions to the Indian English Literature through his essays. Another solid outcome was the definite emergence of the Depressed Classes in the political picture of India and more important was the brilliant and moving exposition of their sufferings, intolerable conditions by him before the bar of world opinion.

Dr.Ambedkar has given a new humanitarian outlook to the Indian Essay writing. The constitution drafted by him is one of the best creations ever made by any writer.He has given inspiring self-confidence to the untouchables who were blind, deaf and dumb. Some called him Moses, some Abraham Lincoln and Some Booker T. Washington. He was one in all as far as his accomplishments were concerned. After emperor Ashoka, he was the greatest one who brought millions of his followers in the fold of Buddhism.

Dr.Ambedkar is a multifaceted personality. Time to time the different angles of his personality is focused by the scholars. He is as an eminent writer famous for his written works who published many books, articles; essays delivered many speeches and have written many letters. And now everything of his writings has been the part of Ambedkarite literature. Various social, political, religious incidences have laid permanent imprint on his psyche and have made him more rebellious and serious and nothing is unnatural in it.

His written works are considered lengthy and bulky but each work consists of self contained, well shaped and well balanced innumerable essays on different topics which can be read as separate essays. If we use any touchstone to fathom his essays, it can be easily proved that they are perfectly neat. His writing is a treasure of many important essays. He has produced a series of essays through his various works and these essays should be taken into consideration as small units of Ambedkarite literature. Almost all his essays are given titles; they have excellent beginnings, contents and conclusions. While writing all these essays, norms of essays are strictly followed and his essays deal with a particular topic. When he finds himself difficult to wind up that essay, he makes chapterization and goes on adding information. It happens in his essays because he has had too much information to add and he wants to give justice to the topic and subject matter.

His essays are most logical and historical way to reach the ultimate truth. He continuously has tried to chase the truth through his essays. He has written essays to create history. When essays are written with such intention, they become subject matter of research.

Review of Literature:

1) Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development:

This is a research work submitted by Dr.Ambedkar in *Anthropology Seminar of Dr. A.A. Goldenweizer* at the Columbia University on 9th May 1916. He was 23 then. He has explained the complex subject of *Castes in India* in the simplest way by giving lucid exposition of the mysteries of caste. He discussed definitions of Mr.Senart, [a French writer] Mr.Nesfield, Sir.H.Risley and Dr.Ketkar.But he frankly opinions that none of these is complete or correct by itself and all have missed the central point in the mechanism of the caste system. He reaches to the conclusion that the absence of intermarriage is the real essence of caste. He introduces and explains the new concept of *Surplus Man* and *Surplus Woman* in this essay.

2) The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India-The Problems of Rupee -

In this research work Dr.Ambedkar has made a realistic assessment of economic problems forced by the country during the British Rule and had expressed his views very boldly about the administration of public finance, sharing of taxes between the centre and the provinces and decentralization of financial powers to the provinces. He has also advocated that India depends almost wholly upon agriculture, and has surplus landless labour from agriculture to industry. Like many renowned economists and planners he has rightly equated industrialization with modern economic development and sought rapid industrialization.

The Problems of Rupee is a brilliant exposition of how the country was being exploited by the British Government through the exchange ratio fixed for the rupee with the pound sterling. The currency manipulation he argues, 'is unfavourable to India'. The reckless printing of currency, he has warned, 'is leading to inflation and price rise'. He has some positive formulations, too. He has advocated that the land revenue should be based on the same principle as the income tax. Politically he has rejected communism outright but he has supported some of the measures adopted by the U.S.S.R. He believes in collective bargaining for he thought it would be more productive. The Russian experience does not seem to confirm this condition. He also believes in nationalization of industries and transport. He is a firm advocate of equitable distribution of wealth. Thus the "equality" for which he fights so doggedly is not conceived only as social equality but economic too.

3) Untouchables or the Children of India's Ghetto:

In this essay Dr.Ambedkar has pointed out the irrelevance of the caste system and its essential inequality arising out of the emphasis on status by birth. It provides a preface to a programme of socio-economic measures to realize the ideals of equality and freedom.

This essay encompasses various aspects of the problems of Untouchables and Untouchability in India. There are essays within essays which discuss various aspects of this issue which is a scourge of the Hindu Society. Dr.Ambedkar's analysis of caste system, untouchability and Hindu social order has intended to bring about a homogeneous Hindu society on the basis of the human values of equality, liberty, justice and universal brotherhood.

4) Philosophy of Hinduism:

It is a treatise produced by Dr.Ambedkar. In this grand essay he raises some questions – *Does Hinduism recognize fraternity? How does Hinduism stand in this matter? Does Hinduism recognize fraternity? What is the value of such a religion to man? On what level does Hindu morality stand? Of what use is this philosophy of the Upanishads?* All these questions are separate and complete essays interlinked all together. The title of the essay itself shows the gravity and seriousness of the topic.

The essay begins with a question as typical Ambedkarite style. It discusses the philosophy of Hindu religion. Dr.Ambedkar uses the word Philosophy in its original sense, which was two-fold. It means teachings as it did when people spoke of the philosophy of Plato. In another sense it meant critical reason used in passing judgments upon things and events. He sums, "Philosophy of religion is not a merely descriptive

science. It is both descriptive as well as normative.”He uses ‘Justice’ as a criterion to judge Hinduism.

5) Revolution and Counter–Revolution in Ancient India

In this grand essay he considers the rise of Buddhism as revolution .The counter revolution pioneered by Brahmins’ resulted into decline and fall of Buddhism. He illustrates that much of the ancient history of India is not history at all. It has been made mythology to amuse women and children. He believes it has been done deliberately by the Brhaminical writers.

6) Buddha or Karl Marx

This essay is a comparison between Buddha and Karl Marx. Dr.Ambedkar has attempted to convey the message in this essay that shorn of violence but coupled with moral fiber. Buddha’s teaching is Marxian in content, and can fill the vacuum being created by the fall of International Marxian movement. It can also help sustain whatever progress has so far been achieved.

The heading of this essay suggests either a comparison or a contrast between two such personalities divided by such a lengthy span of time and occupied with different fields of thought, is sure to sound odd.

7) Who were the Shudras?

This thesis is the most memorable contribution to the sociological literature of the modern India. “Who were Shudras? - How they come to be the fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan society ; This prose work has influenced the thinking of the present century which has witnessed emergence of the individual as the autonomous unit in the constitutional Jurisprudence of equality and liberty.

This essay marks the inauguration of the age of reason in our history and impresses upon us the need to reverence our social institution in harmony with the dynamics of technological changes which have made it possible for masses to enjoy freedom.

Dr.Ambedkar’s Contribution to English Literature as an Essayist:

Dr.Ambedkar has written on divergent topics and each topic deals with a new problem. He is a social scientist who has analyzed social, economical, political and judicial aspects on the basis of his personal experiences and which has remained neutral and impartial. His research on Untouchability, Varna and castes is based on historical facts and subjective analysis. He believes in facts and has not proposed traditional theories. He has rejected the theories of Nasefield and Senart as they were not based on facts.

He sincerely and impartially has tried to find out the truth and link the lost episode of history together. He has taken help of available literature of Vedic Age , Upnishads , religious books , scriptures , Buddhists Literature , Smrutis , Puranas and studied various social changes which could focus on the problem of Untouchability . He reaches to the conclusion that the root of the problem of Dalits is fully Hindu Social order and various torturous rules and regulations made by them. His purpose of research is not only to find the root cause of problem but also to reform Hindu social order lawfully.

Dr.Ambedkar has taken lot of pains and labours while writing his books. His research papers, essays, articles are the documents of declarations of liberty, equality, justice and fraternity for Dalits. His written work is the most scientific way of a great writer to focus on various social evils. He has not preached mere philosophy but succeeded in changing the course of direction of history. His writing and mission is so forceful, sincere that it has changed the life of more than nine crore Dalits in India that no essayist ever could have done in the entire history of the world.

Dr.Ambedkar's Contemporaries:

1) Dr.Samuel Johnson :

Samuel Johnson was the literary dictator of his age. Johnson's best known works are his *Dictionary and Lives of Poets*. He contributed a number of articles in the periodicals *The Rambler, the Idler*, and the *Rasselas*. In them his style is ponderous and verbose, but in *Lives of Poets* his style is simple and charming.

In the preceding generations Dryden, Addison, Steele and Swift wrote in elegant lucid and effective standards to be followed by others. Johnson wrote , with some commanding authority that might set standard of prose style and lay down definite rules and compel others to follow them .This is what was actually done by Johnson .He set a model of prose style which had rhythm , balance and lucidity ,and which could be limited with profit. In doing so he protected English prose style from triviality and imitation. The model was set by Dr.Johnson.

Dr. Johnson was a bigoted Tory, a royal pensioner and up holder of Monarchy. He failed to understand Milton's advocacy of freedom of speech and freedom of press. Johnson advocated the suppression of objectionable books as well as stated that authors should be prevented from writing harmful books. On the contrary Dr.Ambedkar never worked under anybody's obligation. When he joined Nehru Government, he made it clear that he joined the government and not the congress party. He even left the Law Minister-ship when Hindu Code Bill was rejected. He advocated the freedom of press and always kept the way of logic opened. He said "it is evident that until doubt began, progress was impossible." Dr.Ambedkar is the symbol of self-respect, human dignity and self less personality and the most important fact is that his philosophy is never one- sided.

2) Karl Marx:

Marxism is looked upon as the kind of philosophy that touched all spheres of life. It has thought about social, political, Economical part of human life .Karl Marx put forward a specific theory about the direction of history since the emergence of human culture on the basis of this theory he tried to imagine about the future. Classless society of primitive people based on work is nothing but the primitive communism. The society has been changed from that primitive period as the means of production went on changing.

Karl Marx was the greatest European Essayist. His thoughts changed one of the faces of the world literature but also changed the maps of the world giving birth to the great revolutions in U.S.S.R, China and many other countries. Marxist attitude towards literature is historical as well as social. According to Marxism social structure is based on its concept of economical production and hence it reflects in literature.

Dr. Ambedkar observed that Marx said the same thing what was exactly stated by Lord Buddha 2400 years ago. There are many common theatrical understandings in the views of Marx and Dr. Ambedkar. But he differed from Marx in the theory of the "Dictatorship of Proletariat." According to Dr. Ambedkar "dictatorship is dangerous and it leads to anarchy, curbs public opinion and human liberty. If the mind is not converted, force [dictatorship] is necessary, and when force fails there is deluge or bloodshed." It can be said that Ambedkar's vision of democracy won the battle where as Marx's communism failed to be the world's philosophy. Its impact did not last for longer period. There is quite a similarity between views of Dr. Ambedkar and the ideology of Marx. Of course, they were born and brought up in different societies, but their aims and objectives were the same. It can be realized that the ideas of Marx and Ambedkar, are complementary to each other.

3) Mahatma Jotirao Phule: Father of Modern Marathi Literature:

The period between 1820 to 1870 was the period of evolution of modern Marathi literature, which was marked by the publication of Chiplunakr's Series of Essays i.e. *Nibandhmala* in 1825. Stories, Novels of Hari Narayan Apte, Poems of Keshaosut, and Plays of Kirloskar are the landmarks of the Modern Marathi Literature.

Modern Marathi Literature enriched till 1920 with many varieties but there was monopoly of handful of upper caste writers. Still 95 % of the people were indifferent about the making of literature. The fact is that only handful of people in the society can create literature. But the literature created by such people did not show impulses of common people. It was a city literature, the literature of few-higher class white collared people only.

Jotirao Phule stands as the sole representative of a large Marathi society who gave a new voice to the speechless people. He is called the father of Rural Marathi Literature as well as of Modern Marathi Literature. He is the first essayist who gave voice to the woes and agonies of farmers, the poor, the downtrodden and the Untouchables. He attracted public attention towards religious mental slavery; social injustice and economic exploitation. Jambhekar, Dadoba Pandurang, Ram Balkrishna, Lokhitwadi, Bhandarkar, Ranade, Vishnushastri Pandit, Agarkar were all great, noble essayists but their vision and working field was limited.

Dr. Ambedkar's writing style is well balanced with language accuracy, references, evidences and perfection in grammar which shows his vast command on English. Whereas Laxmanshastri Joshi says, "Jotiba's criticism of the scriptures is harsh and ascorbic; but has failed in his attempt to study the etymology of Sanskrit and Marathi words." "He need not have ventured into a subject which is a linguist's territory"; a point which the late Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, a champion of orthodoxy, made to attack Jotirao. However, he failed to disapprove the basic arguments put forward by Jotirao Phule. "Jotiba's thoughts were undoubtedly inspired by noble, lasting human values. The language he used to express these thoughts was infused with the ardour of fiery emotion." Jotiba's genius had the power to transcend the present and to look into the remote past and the very distant future through his literature.

Dr. Ambedkar gave a better expression of his thoughts in the most scholastic way but Phule could not. Lakshmanshastri Joshi says "Phule was not responsible for this drawback

.For, in his time there was no inclination for education. His writing contained obscenities and abuse, and his language was unwieldy and coarse.” “ His writing “, said the late Annasaheb Shinde” was like some wild fruit.” Dr. Ambedkar had a great respect for Jotirao Phule. Drawing on Jotiba’s thoughts on the ancient social History of Hindus, Dr.Ambedkar too wrote books and essays on sociological history.

4) **Vishnushastri Chiplunkar:**

Lokhitwadi Deshmukh, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, Jotirao Phule, and Lokmanya Tilak were responsible to shape the Literary Movement in Maharashtra. Vishnushastri Chiplunkar gave new dimensions to Marathi Prose and gave a new language to the new thoughts. Around 1874, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar became the first great Marathi Essayist. He is the pioneer of all contemporary essayists to Dr. Ambedkar. Vishnushastri Chiplunkar discovered the lengthy and complex sentence construction suitable to Marathi essays which were lacking in Marathi .Chiplunkar had a powerful pen and edited a Marathi Magazine , *Shala Patrak* .In 1872 he wrote an article entitled, : The Mission of a Teacher”.

Dr. Ambedkar has criticized Chiplunkar in his essay **Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah** .He remarks: “The intelligentsia was divided into two schools- a school which was orthodox in its beliefs but apolitical in its outlook and a school which was modern in its beliefs but primarily political in its aims and objects .The former was led by Mr. Chiplunkar and the latter by Mr. Tilak. Both combined against Ranade and created as many difficulties for him as they could. They not only did the greatest harm to the cause of social reforms, but as experience shows they have done the greatest harm to the cause of political reform in India.” Dr. Ambedkar never had such one sidedness in his essays. He studies all religions and criticized also, but his criticism was armed with logic, historical proofs, intellectual analysis and scientific vision

5) **Gopal Ganesh Agarkar :**

Gopal Ganesh Agarkar was the most eminent, rebellious essayist and an active social reformer born in Maharashtra. He and Lokmanya Tilak were bosom friends but they developed differences on thinking and turned away from each other. Tilak adhered to traditionalism and thrown himself in Freedom struggle. On the contrary Agarkar upheld social reforms and devoted his life for social cause. Lord Rama deserted his wife for the sake of his subjects and Agarkar invited unrest and fury of blind society for the sake of public awareness. He even accepted staunch opposition from his once bosom friend Tilak and proved that an idealist had to lead life alone. He was a worshiper of truth. He was much ahead of his time. There were vast differences between the secular, matured, modern philosophy of Agarkar and the traditional, orthodox Hindu Society. The orthodox Hindus took Mock funeral procession before his eyes to ridicule him. People failed to understand the greatness of Agarkar.

Agarkar never approved religious dogma and over influence of religion, tradition and rituals. His vision was aesthetic and utilitarian. He attacked recklessly and mercilessly on religion, traditions and meaningless customs. His anger gave birth too many great, revolutionary essays which are full of irony, sarcasm, euphuism and aphoristic style. His writing became more forceful while attacking the orthodox Hindus.

There is great resemblance between the philosophies of Agarkar and Dr. Ambedkar. Social liberty, social development, welfare of women are the core issues of their essays. They both had historical approach and developed a research method in their essays. It can be said that Agarkar criticized Hindi orthodoxy even more severely than Dr. Ambedkar. They both were men of great intellectuals who never accepted the supremacy of orthodox religion and traditions. Their attack on various religious customs and traditions was very rigid and rigorous. Very few contemporary essayists as Agarkar dared to express their thoughts as boldly and fearlessly as Dr. Ambedkar.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Vinayak Damodar Sawarkar, Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Laxmanshahstri Joshi and many other prose writers and essayists draw attention while writing about Dr. Ambedkar and his contemporaries. But the limitations of a research paper do not allowed proceeding further in the discussion. It is a wonderful experience to find difference and similarities among these stalwarts. The comparative study also tempts the scholar for further investigation.

Conclusion:

The paper is a sincere attempt to piece together the available information on Dr. Ambedkar's expertise on English Literature as an Essayist in a very briefest way. It is surprising that literary angle of his prose work remained hidden till date. Only a few of us know Dr. Ambedkar as an eminent English Litterateur and many are unaware of his contribution to English Literature as an essayist. Hence there is surely a need to highlight literary aspects in his essays also to make the people aware of his contribution to Indian English Literature as an Essayist. While delineating his contribution as an Essayist, the survey of his contemporary strengthens the arguments and clarifies the qualitative literary contribution of Dr. Ambedkar to English Literature.

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