

Review Article

ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR THE EMANCIPATION AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF DALITS IN INDIA

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Abstract

School and college is a place where young minds are nurtured and are allowed to understand the values of life by teaching them the different aspects of the same such as honesty, discipline, togetherness, equality, respectability etc. which are the fundamental issues of one's life. They learn new things about the world and get to familiarize themselves with various worldly affairs. But what will happen when school and college differentiate among the students on the grounds of caste and creed. Scenario for Dalits in the Indian edification system was pitiable. Children from lower strata were forced to take a seat in the open-air, whereas those who belong from upper castes were imparted inside the classrooms. Tutors used to prevent themselves from touching children from lower strata. They used to fling wicker canes on them from the distance hence making Dalits realize that they are polluted, hence instilling sense of alienation in the young minds. Study also shows that Dalits since time immemorial are not allowed to avail the facility of education. Although they went to school and colleges but they were denied the fundamental rights implicitly through different devious means.

Keywords: Education, obstacles, school, college, Ambedkarite philosophy, liberation.

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INTRODUCTION:

Dalits are always forcibly kept away from the education so that they can't achieve the equal status which they aspire to have in the society. Bhimrao Ambedkar has always maintained that education is the weapon which could help Dalits to erase their Dalitness. The term dalitness incorporates all the social stigmas which are inflicted on Dalits since ages; such as poverty, exclusion from the society, and above all they are devoid of fundamental human rights- equality, fraternity and liberty. Through education, Dalits could have understood the importance of organization and struggle which are the important tools of the movement against the ordeals which are imposed on them.

Promising and making it certain to entrée education for the people from lower strata of Indian society have always been the uphill task for government of our country. Consequently, we have failed in reducing the 'evil' effects of the caste system which still remain deeply ingrained in our society. The caste system of India continues to play a pivotal role in ostracizing people from lower castes. The Dalits have endured consistent denial to access to education since the 1850s.

In order to substantiate the arguments which I have mentioned in the earlier paragraphs, I have taken a Dalit autobiography which validates the aforementioned issues. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (1998) presents the pain of a student which he endured due to his belongingness from the lower strata. It's imperative for a child from lowest rung of the society to understand the locality and circumstances in which he or she is born because these things will help them to realize the realities of the society in the better way, and consequently will help them to make their future better by getting ready for the 'war'. Omprakash Valmiki showcases that post- Independent era was destined to bring a sea change in the lives of the Dalit. A lot was promised from the stalwarts, like Gandhi and many others but nothing changed drastically for Dalits. Desire and efforts to have egalitarian society which was the dream of every Dalit in the newly Independent country went in vain because the attitude of the countrymen didn't change towards them. Valmiki witnessed the same at his school where he was not treated like a human being. He says in the following passage that

"Even though the doors of the schools have begun to open for untouchables the attitude of the people had not changed much. Valmiki had to sit away from the others in the class, that too on the floor. Sometimes I would have to way behind everybody, right near the door". (2-3)

Valmiki portrays the cruel veracity of the society that he experienced at school when he was beaten up and molested by his school friends. He didn't only suffered physical assault but he also endured the abuses which were hurled on him. When he used to complain about the bad behaviors of the students instead of scolding those teachers used to scold him. This showcases and force us to think the atmosphere at school where a boy suffered just because he belonged from lower caste.

"Valmiki writes that children of the tyagis would tease me by calling me 'Chuhreka'. Sometimes they would beat me without any reason" (3)

Teachers are accorded highest place in society for they nurtures and give proper shape to a young life. Teachers are expected to be not partial at any stage and should not discriminate students because of their belongingness from lower strata. However, Valmiki experienced the bitter realities at his school. He was always criticized and chided by his teachers for trivial issues. He was always ridiculed and was often pushed to the corners thus depicting the indifferent nature of the teachers who were the custodian of high caste. The passage again proves that implicitly education was denied for the lower caste students at schools. Valmiki states the experience to be insulting

"When his teacher got to know about Valmiki's caste he treated him badly. Teacher engaged him in menial job of collecting the woods". (5)

Valmiki never garnered the respect during his stint as a student either in his school or in college. He suffered a lot of humiliation at both the places at the hands of staff and other students. The incidents narrated in the aforementioned passages informs us that though Dalits reached the doors of school and college to attain education they were not welcomed by the high caste people.

Omprakash Valmiki having suffered at various stages during student days but he didn't lose hope and kept on going forward by overcoming different obstacles. It was his struggle and motivation from his parents which played dividends for his better future. Valmiki got introduced about Ambedkar's movement at college and started to show his interest in the movement which was to have equal status for the Dalits. Such was the indelible impression on the minds of Valmiki that his life changed drastically. He started to write for the upliftment of Dalits, about their better future. Valmiki writes

"After reading Ambedkar Valmiki's approach towards life changed. Ambedkar's thought left an indelible impression on the minds of Valmiki. He was instilled with a lot of courage". (72)

Valmiki was not introduced about the term 'Dalit' before, but while going through the book, *Dr. Ambedkar: A Biography* He became aware of the same and consequently the various aspects of the term which left an indelible impression on his mind. Valmiki was now more confident, and well aware of the prevailing circumstances of the society. Valmiki felt that he till now he was not having any direction, his community men were not having proper direction and their lives was moving towards a certain doom. Valmiki states

"Getting acquaintance with the word Dalit brought a sea change in Valmiki's life. Till now he was not aware of many aspects of what a Dalit undergoes in his or her life. He decided to raise his voice against all the atrocities which were inflicted on them" (84)

Education provided much impetus to Valmiki who now was instilled with new zest and enthusiasm. Valmiki now thought to use this education as a weapon to fight against the atrocities that were inflicted on him and his community. He started to participate in dramas and penned down short stories to bring awareness among the people. Valmiki has understood the value of education and was in no mood to discontinue his studies. He was not having sufficient money to lead his life yet he never bogged down. He imbibed Ambedkar's thought of not letting anything come into his way of attaining good education because it was the only way through which he could overcome his poverty and get respect in the society. Here I want to again highlight how education would help Dalits to get rid of the suppression and subjugation; it will help them to understand the socio political scenario of the country in a better way and hence can unite themselves and join forces to have the egalitarian status for themselves in the society.

Education has the potential to transform lives. We witnessed the same in the case of Omprakash Valmiki who continued to enlighten people from lower caste about the value of education. Education helps people from the lower caste to raise the question about the norms and rules which are totally inclined in favor of the high caste people. Sharankumar Limble in one of his books *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* discusses about his novel *Upalya* where the protagonist of that novel fought against the brahminical hegemony after getting educated. He tried to organize and led the struggle from the front. By discussing this excerpt from Limbale's book I would like to assert that for many people from minority class, education has become a boon through which they have emancipated themselves from the age old atrocities and stigma of being a Dalit.

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