

Education as a Tool of Dalit Metamorphosis: Sambharia's Short Story “Dr.RAMACHANDRA C G”

“Dalit Literature stood for universal freedom. The word Dalit did not denote caste; rather, it referred to those who were yesterday’s exploited and were now fighting back.”

- (Limbale 42)

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Abstract

The Ratan Kumar Sambharia was a notable Dalit writer from Haryana. He authored two plays, five collections of short stories, and a biography of the well-known Hindi author Premchand. His personal experiences served as the basis for all of his literary writings, which incorporated an unique quality and authenticity in interpreting the Dalit sufferings. He received the The Sahara Samay Katha Award and the Haryana Sahitya Academy Award. In rural Rajasthan and Haryana, royal families subjected Dalits to social and economic exploitation and made them economically reliant on feudal landlords. Using Limbale's Ambedkarism theory, this research analysed the relationship between education and the socio-economic independence of Dalits through a comparative and descriptive analysis of the short story "Phulwa."

This study investigates how education assists oppressed individuals in overcoming these restrictions through analysing the short story, "Phulwa" which is taken from short stories miscellany *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*. Additionally, this paper also demonstrates the impact of caste in rural and urban contexts by contrasting two characters: the narrow-mindedness of the rural landowner Rameshwar and the Pandit Ji's wife, Parti's adaptability respectively. In addition, the author stresses the deconstruction of gender and caste standards. This research shows how literacy empowers the downtrodden, improves their economic conditions, and helps them overcome caste stigma. In conclusion, along with education, equitable social advancement necessitates a transition from the old mindset of the upper caste to a more equitable and empathetic attitude towards the Dalit. This research contributes to our understanding of how Dalits challenge socially oppressive caste norms in contemporary

society by using education as a weapon for their socioeconomic advancement. consequently fostering casteless equality among Indians. This study was limited in that it examined just one of the fifteen short tales in this collection. There is a significant amount of research to be undertaken on other narratives with a wide range of themes.

Keywords : Dalits' transformation, social identity, Landlord's hegemony, learned Dalits, caste discrimination, Ambedkarism

Discourse on Dalit Literature

Social reformers such as E. V. Ramaswami (Tamil Nadu), Bhagya Reddy Varma (Andhra Pradesh) and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Maharashtra), drew attention to the inequalities inherent in a social framework designed to perpetuate caste-based exploitations. Additionally, they worked for Dalits' education, making them aware of their identity and the state of their community. Thus, literate individuals use writing as a weapon to promote human rights and equality awareness. Baburao Bagul and Arjun Dangle agreed that the philosophies of Buddha, Phule, and Ambedkar promoted education. The educated Dalits began writing against their tyranny after being encouraged and motivated by their thoughts. G. B. Sardar expands on this notion by discussing Ambedkar's effect on Dalit authors as "Dr Ambedkar's movement revitalised Dalit community and turned it towards self-respect. Forgetting their suffering, they got the inspiration to struggle for their natural rights from this movement." (45)

Irshad Ahmad Dar, in his study paper, "Indian Dalit Literature: Intersection of Caste And Gender Discrimination" published in *Perspectives on Indian Dalit Literature: Critical Responses* book edited by Dipak Giri, provides more support it by defined Dalit literature as "The literature about Dalits, the oppressed, broken people where they themselves are expressing their feelings and sufferings through life-narratives like poems, short stories,..." (226) Books like Baburao Bagul's *When I Hid My Caste* from Maharashtra and Bama's *The Ichi Tree Monkey* from Tamil Nadu. K. Purushotham's *14 April: Dalit Short Stories* from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh reveals the underlying struggles of the Dalits in the respective southern states of India.

Rajasthan Dalit literature

On the contrary to the South Indian states, Rajasthan is a land of kings, as its name indicates. Prior to its independence, it was comprised of nineteen princely states. It is still ruled by landowners and higher castes due to a feudalistic socio-political framework. Consequently, the underprivileged of Rajasthan were denied education and separated from societal consciousness. As a result, they were obedient to traditional, orthodox norms, while there was a constant struggle against injustice in Southern Indian states. In support of this position, Naveen Kumar argued that neither Arya-Samaj nor Christians could overthrow this ancient caste institution in Rajasthani culture. In spite of India's democratic system, a stratified caste system persists.

The underprivileged were classified according to their labour jobs, while others were labelled by the law as criminals. In elaborating this context, Research scholar Narendra Kumar Jangir pointed out in his research essay, "Voice of silence in Chaos: Socio-political Representation of Dalits: In Rajasthan Through Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories" that some Dalit castes endure social isolation owing to their traditional occupations. Such as Bairava, Meghwal, Bhangi, Dhanuk, and Jatav. Other castes, such as Guar, Kantar, and Bavaria, were stereotyped as criminals. Many of these people were forced to endure the stigma of caste for decades, particularly in Rajasthan and Haryana.

However, the educated marginalised eventually become aware of their potential to escape the socio-economic marginalisation trap. They employed writing as one of the means of resistance. For instance, contemporary Rajasthani short story writers such as Charan Singh Pathik and Dr Gopal Sahar portrayed the caste structure in rural Rajasthan and the Dalit's exploitation and persecution by the higher castes. In addition, they disclosed how dire economic conditions force people to think in unusual ways to survive. In particular, Dalit author Swami Gokul Das endeavoured to construct a Dalit identity via writing. In 1994, he published *Meghwansh Itihas*.

Despite, above authors, Sambhariya's method of addressing caste issues was unique compared to others. Sambhariya aimed to express the reversal of traditional hypocrisy and the

victory of the Dalits through education. He was born in Haryana on 1 January 1956, in the village of Bharawas of Rewari district. However, he spent more than three decades working in Rajasthan. Readings of Vivekananda, Jyotiba Phule, and Ambedkar influenced him. He believed education was emancipatory because it transformed his life from economic destitution to obtaining a secured job. He used literary narratives to illustrate the socioeconomic differences between Savarnas and Dalits. Simultaneously aimed at boosting the Dalits' consciousness, hope, and eventual triumph over the higher castes.

In 2015, Mridul Bhasin translated *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*, a collection of stories. Sambharia published couple of play collections, five anthologies of short stories, and a book about Premchand, a well-known author in Hindi. Additionally, he served as the editor of *Dr B. R. Ambedkar: An Inspiring Life*. The vice president of India presented him with the *Sahara Samay Katha Award* for his work, *Champadasan* (The Attendant). He also received *Haryana Sahitya Academy Award* in 2017. His writings have inspired nearly twenty-five PhD and MPhil theses and other research projects. Some of them are included in the school curriculum of Rajasthan educational institutions. Moreover, they have been translated into multiple languages like Punjabi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Oriya, Marathi, Kannada, and Malayalam. The objective of this study is to examine the influence of education on the transformation of Dalit lives [more than two hundred million Indians] and aiding them in contesting caste constraints.

The short narrative "Phulwa" is selected from the book *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*, analysed through qualitative examination using comparative and descriptive approaches in light of Limbale's Dalit aesthetics and Ambedkarism. The caste problem in rural and urban milieu and its harmful impacts on the majority of society must answer for their pain and struggle. And also The relevance of Dalit literacy in socioeconomic liberation. Due to deeply established superstitious beliefs related with social hierarchy, the Indian social system reveals upper caste tyranny and exploitation upon the marginal. Hence, the Dalit narratives are built mainly on a feeling of self-respect, and are rich with memories of protest against domination and oppression.

As Badri Narayan noted in his study *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India*, specifies, Dalits utilise their own tales to exalt their community in order to get social

respect. The canons established by Brahmanism for determining status in society, such as purity-pollution beliefs, birth-based ascriptions, specific caste characterisation, and status ascription, are rendered unstable by the identity created by the Dalits through their narratives. (40, 95) In the same vein, Sambhariya's stories try to give identity to the oppressed and reflects their authenticity. It is elucidated by the translator's note, while his stories are fictitious, they are based on his recollections and experiences as a Dalit. She elaborates on the depth of truth in his storytelling by stating, "What distinguishes his narratives is the gritty realism and propagate "self-respect and integrity." She affirms it as:

"Sambharia is openly proud of the fact that he has lived the life he delineates in his stories. And rightly so, for the authenticity of his narratives owes as much to his ability to draw on elements from his personal experience as it does to his natural empathy for his fellow men." (xi- x)

In Definitions of Oxford Languages , *metamorphosis* is defined as "a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one." In this study context, the term implies as, with the assistance of education, the lives of Dalits have been completely changed from silent, submissive, and powerless to outspoken, independent and influential status.

Dalits, though underprivileged, have acquired authority and wealth by adopting a progressive worldview and receiving an education. In contrast, the once-dominant Rajput's socioeconomic and power positions have declined due to their caste prejudices, false notions of superiority, and disregard for education. Baby Kamble stated, Ambedkar encouraged the marginals to get an education and urged villagers to go to the City to escape oppressive caste practices. In concretising his view, Sambhariya demonstrated the impact of education on caste hierarchy through the short story "Phulwa". This paper analyses the influence of caste in the rural and urban milieu, its impact in combating the patriarchy and how education altered their socio-economic standing, using Limbale's suggested Dalit theory, Ambedkarism. Following this view, Rathana Kumar Sambhariya demonstrates this through the titular character Phulwa and her family.

Caste prejudices in village

In the villages of Rajasthan, privileged communities were wealthy and predatory towards disadvantaged groups. For example, landlords and Pandits were rulers, landowners, and dominants over castes of inferior status. Hence, everyone respects and obeys their commands without question. Since they were landlords, they lived in magnificent mansions. Thus, Rameshwar's father, Balka Singh, being a renowned landowner in their area; he had a vast mansion staffed with servants and labourers. Being Dalit, Phulwa's husband is one among those labourers.

Due to the persistence of a feudalistic socio-political context, landowners and higher castes continue to exploit and attack them despite of laws and acts. In 2010, among the five Indian states Rajasthan took second place (Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh) with the highest Dalit crime. The life stories of Om Prakash Valmiki, Daya Pawar, and Urmila Pawar demonstrate that the influence of caste is harsher in rural than in cities. Similarly, Phulwa suffered significant caste-based prejudices in her hamlet.

The feudalistic framework accentuated the socioeconomic inequality issues between landowners and Dalits in remote areas. The primary issue is inaccessible to communal areas, the Dalit community is liable to discrimination. For instance, Phulwa was not authorised to collect water from the public well. Hence, she seeks the help of the landlord Rameshwar by addressing by his name. Being casteist, he felt insult and infuriated at her action. To teach her a lesson, he spits into her pitcher. She faced such humiliations daily in rural existence. Most of Dalit writers, such as Daya Pawar, Urmila Pawar and Bama, mentioned, the denial of their access to water sources through their life narratives. This social context not changed even today, according to the media report in The Hindu, on 16 August 2022, a Dalit youth [Indra Meghwal] was beaten to death by an upper caste teacher for touching the classroom's water pitcher. These examples exposes that even after seventy-five years of independence, the lives of Dalits continue to be miserable in rural India. Access to public water sources, such as wells, rivers, and even cremation sites, were strictly restricted for Dalits despite laws [Civil Rights Protection Act 1976 and Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989].

The secondary aspect is the landlords exploited them economically, denied minimum payment for their labour and were trapped in serfdom. Hence, it is hard for them to have minimum shelter to live and food. Phulwa was also a victim of feudal exploitation and power. Her spouse had worked as a labourer in the fields of Rameshwar. Due to the strike of the landlord's bull, he died. Later, Phulwa endured humiliations and "inherited her husband's legacy of serfdom and debt..." (4). She needed to work in the landlord's fields. Furthermore, her tiny thatched home is susceptible to all types of weather. The Author describes her poor status by describing her home as

Her kuchcha cottage, standing on a barren stretch of land, had lacked any cover; it had been open to the elements. The hot sun glared down into her home the whole day. The rains drenched everything outside and inside, and her hands would grow bone-weary, baling out the water. When winter came, the freezing cold would settle deep into her home. (9)

Caste shackled Marginals to poverty, hardships, exploitation, and the denial of their basic rights. The Dalit women much more vulnerable than their men. However, Sambhariya demonstrated that access to education awoke women to fight against gender hegemony and caste traditions via the character "Phulwa", represents enduring pain and not giving up in providing access to education to her son. 'Radhamohan', represents power of education in shifting power and social respect from the centre to the marginals. Finally "Santi," who symbolises contemporary, self-assured women free of caste conventions imposed on women.

Education combats caste supremacy

Eknad Awad, Vemula Yellaiah and Bhagya Reddy Varma found education (especially reading) as an escape from their socially ostracised lives in society. Baby Kamble, Bama, and Urmila Pawar considered education an empowering tool. R. S. Praveen Kumar, former the "Secretary of Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society", wrote an article "Education and Dalit Liberation". He writes that literacy transformed the status of the oppressed lives into reverential entrepreneurs fighting against oppressive social customs. He believes, "The key to liberation, happiness, and resurgence of the oppressed lies in education." In addition to that, he described that quality education acts as a "potent transformative force" (159). His statement concretised through Urmila Pawar and

Manoranjan Byapari's experiences demonstrated that education enabled them to challenge the repressive system and to transcend from destitute to outspoken.

In accordance with above thinkers, Sambharia believes that education has a significant role in liberating socially marginalised people from caste-related repressions. Through the character Phulwa, the Author, demonstrated how education transforms the lives of the Dalit. She is aware of the value of education to liberate from humiliations and discriminations. Thus, despite adversity and financial hardships, she encouraged her son Radhamohan to obtain an excellent higher education. As a result, he became a police superintendent, indicating that his family was set free from servitude to a landlord. The Author's declaration shows that lack education might end up every Dalit in a trap of labour work. He states that if Phulwa had not supported her son's education, "his hands would still have been ploughing." (10).

The majority of Dalit writers advocated Ambedkar's ideology through their works which reflects "rebellion is an indivisible part" (51) in resisting caste-based violence and exploitation. For instance, Kalekuri Prasad (1964-2013) the Dalit revolutionary militant from Andhra Pradesh, wrote *The Weed*. It reveals how the caste system impoverished their lives. Even their children need to work in order to earn money for school supplies. Regardless of gender, their social standing exposed them to harassment and violence by landlords. Due to their financial predicament, the narrator, a school-aged child, must work in the field. While working on a tea plantation, he was violently beaten by the landlord one day. His mother attempted to defend him after seeing this, but she too was bet by the supervisor. They represents all the helpless and submissive lower castes.

However, they both were rescued by the character, boy's Babai. He was an Ambedkarite, having revolutionary spirit, becomes infuriated at the landlord's merciless act. He resisted the supervisor by kicking him. As a result, his caste chiefs imposed social boycott on him. All the youth of his community, united and resisted the caste chiefs and took a revolutionary decision by replacing those positions with an Ambedkarite ideologists. The last line delivered by the narrator shows that his family prioritised continuing the narrator's education despite their poverty and hurdles. The narrator says, "My Amma never asked me again to go with her for labour." (25). This reflects, Dalits inherited Ambedkar's idea; that

education is a tool which emancipates them from landlords' imposed slavery and violence. Similarly, in Balbir Madhopuri's life story *Changiah Rukh*, his father expresses his intention regarding role of education as

Only education will free the untouchables' children from the landlord's brutality. His father states though he is not an astrologer, but he is confident that if a lawn cutter's kid can receive an education, he shouldn't be one. Therefore, study well as you [Dalit kid] can and you will not have to labour all your life for the landlords! (49)

This strongly illustrates the influence of Ambedkar's ideas in motivating the illiterate fathers and they realised and believed in the importance of providing education to their kids. Consequently, this helped Dalit [youth] struggle for their rights and justice. Another writer, Yendluri Sudhakar, Telugu Professor at University of Hyderabad wrote, *Heroes From The Untouchable Wada*. It demonstrates how education shields Yadantha, a Dalit, from caste discrimination and violence. It can be seen from the actions of Mirasaibu, the village chief, who rescued Yadantha from the community's caste vanguards out of respect for his father, a teacher. The author also proved through his narrative that caste hierarchy is favoured over knowledge and skill. Both narratives primarily emphasise caste superiority and the challenges encountered by disadvantaged populations. Secondly, these examples prove the significance of Ambedkar's principles, which see education as a tool to battle oppression, as well as how the voiceless Dalits utilised the legacy of Babasaheb Ambedkar to assert themselves against socioeconomic and political tyranny.

Similarly, literacy altered Phulwa's economic and social standing in the city. When Rameshwar came to the City, keeping the address papers of Pandit Ji and Phulwanthi indicates his notion of Phulwa's position in the City. Her address paper was folded and kept in the corner of his pocket, and Pandit Ji's paper was held in his hand, expecting her son might not be a notable person in the City. However, his notions proved wrong. Primary instance, no one recognised Pandit Ji. Phulwa's son, being Police Officer, not only people recognised him immediately but even dropped him in front of the gate of Phulwa's house. Adding to that, while Rameshwar enters into "an ornate and imposing mansion." (3) Because of his preconceived notions, by looking at the grandeur of the house, he expected, Phulwa might be

a tenant and her servant as her daughter-in-law. Realising Phulwa was the owner of the house, Rameshwar got envious about her financial status and glorified social identity.

Education improves the economic standards by providing secured employment. For instance, being a labourer to the land lord, Phulwa need to draw water at the public well at the mercy of the upper caste. Hence, she was not allowed to draw water from a public well when she was in the village, after sixteen years, in City her economic status improved and had an influential position. She has a constant water supply. This reflects the stark transformation of her social status in urban milieu.

Education dearth affects landlord status

Contrary to Phulwa, Rameshwar and other once-rich landowners experienced economic deterioration. For instance, Landlord Rameshwar, who had an entrenched feeling of superiority based on their caste, placed more importance on a false sense of caste glory than education. Balkar Singh was the owner of one hundred bighas of land. He divided his property among his five sons, each of whom got twenty bighas [five acres] of land. Rameshwar no longer represents as a landlord. Even though his son Deep Singh, of the landlord's family, could barely complete metrication. For the last five years, he has badly needed a job to survive.

In parallel, Pandit Mataprasad, due to his higher caste, has the most prestigious position in the village. However, his family is not granted the same respect in the City. Pandit Ji's house is modest, and they were not in a prominent location. Rameshwar states, "Here [City] he had become so insignificant, so puny that no one even knew of his existence." (2). Pandit Ji's poverty reflects through the status of his house, which has two charcoal drums that serve as the home's entryway. A gunny sack covers the bathroom door with a mud floor and a few old cooking vessels. Moreover, nobody in the City was familiar with them. Their son makes a living through a small job, which he obtained with the recommendation of Phulwanti's son, a Dalit officer. Even Rameshwar's rural estate and amenities are less than Phulwa's.

The adaptability of the Higher Castes in the City

Sambharia demonstrated no impact of caste in the urban social context. It vividly showed by Phulwa's words, "In villages, there are thirty-six castes. In cities, there are only two, the rich and the poor." Hence, though, Kunwar belongs to a Rajput family, being needy works as a maid to Phulwa's family. Knowing that Kunwar's caste is Rajput, Rameshwar got enraged. How can a Rajput family woman work as a maid to a Dalit woman?

Additionally, Rameshwar's caste pride intensifies, and he boils with rage. The Author vividly depicted Rameshwar's furiousness by stating, "He wanted to scratch her [Phulwa's] eyes out." (7), and he further can not digest Phulwa's transformation. Rameshwar, "felt himself sinking deeper into mire of shame and outrage; a woman from such a high caste working as a servant for a low-caste nonentity like Phulwa!" (11) When Phulwa worked for Rameshwar's family, she was treated inhumanely and degraded because of her low caste. He was entirely blind to a caste superiority attitude in the rural area where caste justifies their actions.

Sambharia, effectively illustrates the existence of just two classes, regardless of caste in the town social milieu; the wealthy and the impoverished. Even the upper castes have adapted to this urbanised milieu. The Author, takes a fresh look at these formerly affluent city residents and proves that the educated Dalit is superior to uneducated and poor upper castes. In this narrative, titular character, Phulwa believed in education as a transformative tool. Hence, though she was a widow, poor, and suffering from unexplainable troubles (8), she never compromised in educating her son Radhamohan, who eventually became a distinguished Police superintendent. Through the character Radhamohan, the Author concretised the idea that education creates social identity.

Acknowledging his view, Professor, Jangam Chinnaiah, in his book *Dalits and The Making of Modern India*, refers to Dalit literacy as "Dalit enlightenment." Which means it can create a sense of identity and can alter economic conditions. In addition Limbale, opinioned that "Dalit consciousness is a revolutionary consciousness motivated by the desire for freedom from slavery." and its works towards "ending caste, rather than a caste spirit." (76-77) Sambharia reflects both Dalit enlightenment and Dalit awareness via the character Radhamohan, whose Dalit consciousness inspires him to emancipate himself from caste

bonds while simultaneously working for the advancement of mankind regardless of caste. He never used his position as a police officer to pursue revenge on his abusers. In addition, regardless of caste background, he strived for a constructive social development. For instance, even though his family had suffered at the hands of the Brahmin community in his hamlet, he assisted the employment of Pandit Ji's son.

Dalits were addressed disrespectfully in rural social contexts. The title of this short story reflects the derogatory terms used towards Dalits. Despite the fact that the protagonist's name is Phulwanthi, he refers to her as "Phulwa" irrespective of her age. The translator, Mridula observed that Sambharia's narratives expose the poverty, and Dalits rural - urban "socio-historical" transformative experiences due to literacy. For instance, the change in the addressing ways. Author juxtaposed how higher castes in rural and Cities, address Dalits through two characters Rameshwar and Parti. Rameshwar, the landlord from her village, calls her in a humiliating way as, "Phulwa". The way how Dalits were referred to treated in a humiliating way without any age difference elucidated by Professor Jangam. He stated that "Hindu Brahmanical ideology imposed humiliating, insulting, and limiting nomenclature for dehumanising Dalits." Parti, although being Brahmin, refers to Phulwa with her full name, Phulwanti, since she has been exposed to the culture of the city.

Furthermore, Sambharia depicted the parallel transition of the upper caste's beliefs in an urban context through characters such as Parti, Pandit ji's wife. Who were adaptive and acquainted with city life, where caste is irrelevant. She internalised that caste no longer influences the City; rather, education and position do. She emphasises this perspective by stating, "...Now it is the era of position and influence, not of caste." Hence, one has to change according to the time. She elaborates on her own experience of getting a job for her son. She sought help from Phulwa's son, a superintendent of Police and a highly influential man. She also affirms that Radhamohan only helped her son get a job. As a gratitude, she always touches Phulwas' feet. Furthermore, Parti educates Rameshwar not to remain like a frog in the well and suggests changing his orthodox ideology. Victor Hugo opined, "...there is always more misery among the lower classes than there is humanity in the higher caste..." (p. 7). Therefore, rather than relying on the compassion and humanity of the higher caste, the better way for Dalits to free themselves from their trials and misfortunes of caste is through the pursuit of an education.

For instance, it is concretised through the Telugu Dalit author Yendluri Sudhakar's story *Heroes From Untouchable Wada*. He underscored the role of education in transforming educated Dalits' lives, notably in rural places. The character, Yadantham, a Madiga youth, survived caste atrocities twice for transgressing caste laws by swimming in a public tank and participating in the "Pareta" traditional game of a higher caste in his village. Only because of his father's reputation as a teacher and also his skill as one who can treat village patients regardless of their caste. Thus, village chief Mirasayabu supported Yadantham with reasonable arguments, as

This is a public tank; it belongs to everyone. ... The boy's father treats the patients of the village. When everybody went to him for medicines, you don't consider it pollution; when he taught the alphabet, he was not polluting then, either. You depend on him for writing promissory notes or doing calculations. Does the water get polluted if his son swims in the tank? (Purushotham 73)

Yadantham too acknowledges that his father's knowledge and reputation as a teacher saved him from his village caste hooliganism. Learning the alphabet broadens the horizons of the underprivileged and is often a prerequisite for giving the motivation to overcome poverty and discrimination. Simultaneously, the writer demonstrated, how the conventional thinking of the upper caste gradually gave way to rationality and their adaption of egalitarianism towards the Dalit through the character Mirasayabu. In the last line of the "Phulwa" narrative, the author illustrates Rameshwar's little mental shift when he chooses to seek refuge in Phulwa's house: "his feet turned towards Phulwa's [Dalit] mansion" (18). So, a change in the ideology of the upper caste might help to the reduction of caste humiliations.

Contrary to Sambharia and Sudhakar's notion that there is no caste impact in the Cities, a few examples demonstrate that caste still matters in urban areas. For instance, Pasunuri Ravinder's short story *What Caste Are You?* argues that even if Dalits are educated and have respectable occupations, they find difficulty in renting a house. The educated Dalit couple, Karnakar and Anitha, represent the hardships of Dalits in cities. He concluded that even in cities, caste matters at every level of the social hierarchy. Moreover, other life narratives, such as Sathyanarayana's *My Father Balaiah* (2011) and Yashika Dutt's *Coming Out As A Dalit* (2019), reveal that they were compelled to disguise their caste for renting and, sometimes, in their places of employment. Prof. Raj Kumar noted that despite the economic

and professional gains of the Dalit, they continue to be socially marginalised and excluded from mainstream society.(3) Valmiki too expressed similar views that every Dalit faces ceaseless caste humiliations and can not shed their 'caste marker'. (xxii) Bama [*Karukku*] and Urmila [*Weave of My Life*], despite being well-known authors and educators who had come to the city, remarked on their experiences with caste bias in the profession and throughout their home searches. It demonstrates that moving to a city and obtaining an education may aid persons in obtaining employment and liberation from slavery, but they cannot liberate from caste-related humiliations completely.

Combating Patriarchy

The title character, Phulwa, despite formal schooling and being a widow, never gave up on her desire to escape from her landlord's serfdom. Her enthusiasm for knowledge compelled her to ensure that her son continued his education. In turn, she freed her son from the legacy of ancestral enslavement. She successfully removed the shackles of slavery and the male-imposed limitations on widows' advancement in life. She escaped the rural patriarchal environment and built a mansion with a socially recognised position, a son and daughter-in-law, and well-groomed grandkids. She modernised herself by learning how to use a phone, refrigerator, and stove, all of which were alien to rural living in general and for Dalits in particular.

Additionally, the writer promoted education role in empowering women to challenge patriarchy. For instance, Santi, Phulwanti's daughter-in-law, is such a self-assured and independent lady. She was from the city, well-educated, and logical; thus, she rejected the old customs imposed on women. This is evident in her actions, such as removing the veil and not applying vermilion on her forehead at hair partition. Similarly, The memoirs of Baby Kamble, Bama, Shivakami and Urmila Pawar's life narratives demonstrate, education assists Dalit women in resisting patriarchy and caste. Therefore, despite the fact that [Santi] is from a Dalit household, her education fostered her social identity and freedom.

Furthermore, the Author highlighted the intersection of education, gender and caste through the character Kunwar. How a lack of education could devastate a woman's life regardless of her higher caste order. Kunwar's husband divorced her because of her illiteracy and married an educated woman. Kunwar, unaware of legal words such as divorce, still

thinks she is his wife. Her actions show her lack of awareness regarding life and legal judgements "... never fails to fill the parting in her hair with vermilion like a wife would-and weeps every day" (11). She weeps every day, recalling her husband. In addition, she hopes that he will return to her one day despite their separation. She was miserable after her divorce. Because of her illiteracy, she could not get employment to meet her son's needs. Hence, she begs Phulwanti, "Amma Ji... I am an unfortunate wretch. I do not want to beg for a living. Please employ me as a maidservant." (11) This reveals that she believes in destiny and that her spouse left her because of her karma. She was unaware that her illiteracy caused her spouse to divorce her.

Conclusion

Through the story of Phulwa, Sambharia skilfully uncovers the hypocrisy, inhumanity, and double standards that the caste system maintains and perpetuates. Even though landlords' areas have diminished, their biases keep them cognizant of their offences and dominance. As a result, they were prejudiced and had a superior caste mindset. Thus, Indian society is fundamentally unequal. In post-independence India, educated and knowledgeable Dalits negotiated for equality. Sambharia emphasised that knowledge and its economic growth had substituted the previous caste-based society's power structure and disparities since only "education" can elevate oppressed people to positions of leadership and social respect. In the same vein, this story depicted the progression of oppressed lives from hopelessness and despair to bravery, resistance, and ultimately power. Education therefore helped bring about the transformation of Dalits. Education aids Dalits in acquiring their own voice and identity, but it cannot liberate them from their humiliating Caste identity completely. Therefore, for the greater welfare of mankind, upper-caste groups should abandon preconceived conceptions of caste supremacy and purity-pollution. They must prioritise compassion over religion and caste prejudices. The limitation of this paper is that only one of the fifteen short stories in Sambharia's book *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories* has been examined. A large amount of study remains to be undertaken on remaining stories with a variety of themes.

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