

**Education as a Tool of Dalits’
Metamorphosis: A Study of Sambharia's Short Story “Phulwa”**

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Abstract

This study employs "Phulwa," a story from Ratan Kumar Sambharia's short story collection *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*, to examine the function of education as a transformative agent in the lives of Dalits. Sambharia, a distinguished novelist from Haryana, draws upon his personal experiences to portray the realities of caste-based persecution with both candour and profound emotional resonance. The research, grounded in the theoretical construct of Dalit aesthetics, illustrates how Phulwa embodies essential traits of Dalit literature, including resistance, the affirmation of dignity, and the quest for social justice. In addition to that the narrative contrasts the intricacies of caste dynamics in rural and urban settings, embodied by Rameshwar, a steadfast rural landlord, and Parti, an urban Brahmin woman whose evolving perspective reflects the shifting contours of caste prejudice. Building on the context, the narrative centres on the transformative journey of two individuals, Phulwa and Radhamohan, whose attainment of education empowers them to transition from economic reliance to self-determination and a redefined identity within the Dalit community. Furthermore, the narrative delves into the intersection of caste and patriarchy, underscoring the essential role of literacy in challenging both frameworks. Finally, the paper succinctly underscores that authentic social reform necessitates the deconstruction of upper-caste hegemony and the elevation of Dalit agency by means of education and cultural expression, as illustrated by the story "Phulwa".

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

Introduction:

Discourse on Dalit Literature:

Dalit writing has become a powerful counter-discourse to centuries of cultural erasure, dehumanization, and oppression based on caste. It is a social and political movement based on the real-life experiences of the oppressed, not only a literary form. Dalit writers express the trauma, defiance, and ambitions of a community that has been marginalized for a long time in Indian society through poetry, short tales, autobiographies, and essays.

According to Daya Pawar, remembering his Dalit heritage was like "digging through rubbish," but it was necessary to comprehend the past in order to manage the future. The foundation of Dalit literary expression is this act of storytelling and recollection, which inspires resistance and reform while conserving forgotten histories.

The intellectual and ideological underpinnings of Dalit literature originate from the efforts of seminal south Indian social reformers like Jyotirao Phule, E.V. Ramaswami, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and Bhagya Reddy Varma, who illuminated the systemic injustices of caste and advocated for education as a means of emancipation. Their philosophies profoundly impacted Dalit literary expressions. Authors such as Baburao Bagul and Arjun Dangle highlighted the transforming influence of the ideologies of Buddha, Phule, and Ambedkar in inspiring educated Dalits to respond to injustice via writing. G.B. Sardar observes that Ambedkar's campaign rejuvenated the Dalit community and fostered a sense of self-respect, motivating them to advocate for their inherent rights. In this context, Dalit literature serves as both an artistic expression and a socio-political engagement. In a similar context, Irshad Ahmad Dar, in his examination of "Dalit literature," characterizes it as a kind of self-representation wherein Dalits articulate their own experiences and adversities via life tales. This section seeks to examine how Dalit literature, rooted in Ambedkarite philosophy and Dalit aesthetics, functions as a literary platform for resistance, identity construction, and social change.

Research Methodology

Sharankumar Limbale's Dalit aesthetics theoretical framework serves as the foundation for the qualitative research approach used in this study. Through the perspective of the marginalized, the analysis aims to comprehend the lived reality of caste discrimination. The study examines certain personal accounts that highlight the resistance and agency of Dalit communities while also exposing the exploitation and dehumanization perpetrated by the upper castes, using comparative and descriptive methodologies. Additionally, the use of Ambedkarism enables a more thorough examination of the structural inequalities ingrained in the Indian caste system and emphasizes the ways in which literature, education, and self awareness are instruments of liberation for the downtrodden.

Statement of the Problem:

The objective of the study is to provide insight into how education has affected Dalits' socioeconomic standing, specifically how educational access has enabled a shift from historical subordination to a position of more autonomy, rights consciousness, and social recognition. It tries to study how education might be used as a catalyst to empower Dalits to question long

standing caste-based hierarchies and assert their dignity within the larger social system.

Trajectory of Dalit Literary Expression in Rajasthan:

Unlike the southern states of India, which experienced early anti-caste reform movements, Rajasthan, a region historically associated with royalty and princely states, has maintained a deep connection to feudal socio-political structures. Prior to the independence of India, Rajasthan was made up of nineteen princely states, and remnants of that feudal legacy persist, with landlords and dominant upper castes maintaining significant sway. As a

result, the Dalit community in Rajasthan has faced a long-standing deprivation of educational opportunities, social mobility, and political representation. Unlike Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, where reformers led vigorous opposition, the marginalized communities in Rajasthan largely remained silent, constrained by deeply rooted traditional societal norms. It reflects through the statement of Naveen Kumar that "a miracle was still awaited in the Rajasthan desert," referencing the absence of substantial societal change in the region. Even reformist organizations like the Arya Samaj and Christian missionaries found themselves incapable of dismantling the deeply rooted caste structures within Rajasthani society.

Despite the promises of democratic governance, caste-based discrimination remains deeply entrenched in the rural landscape of Rajasthan. In the year 2010, the state was recognized as one of the top five in India for its egregious violations against Dalits. The caste system continues to classify populations based on traditional occupations, with specific castes having been historically subjected to criminalization through legislation. Research scholar Narendra Kumar Jangir, in his essay "Voice of Silence in Chaos: Socio-political Representation of Dalits in Rajasthan through *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*," highlights the ongoing social ostracization experienced by Dalit communities, such as the *Bairava*, *Meghwal*, *Bhangi*, *Dhanuk*, and *Jatav*, due to their inherited occupations. Moreover, groups such as the *Guar*, *Kantar*, and *Bavaria* were classified as "criminals" within the frameworks established by colonial and postcolonial administrations. The persistence of these stigmas across generations has fostered a framework characterized by exclusion and systemic violence.

In rural Rajasthan, the feudal system has widened the divide between upper castes and Dalits. Thus, the Dalit community remains vulnerable to systemic violence, exploitation, and degradation. Nonetheless, as access to education grows, people from these marginalized communities are increasingly opposing oppression. Some people have adopted literature as a form of protest and self-expression. Modern Rajasthani authors such as Charan Singh Pathik and Dr. Gopal Sahar have employed short narratives to explore topics of caste injustice, economic adversity, and Dalit survival challenges. Their writings shed light on the restrictive caste systems that exist in rural Rajasthan, as well as the harsh economic situations that influence marginalized people's decisions. Swami Gokul Das, a Dalit author, tried to construct a distinct Dalit identity through his historical work *Meghwansh Itihas* (1994), which was a pioneering initiative to regain cultural memory.

Among the aforementioned voices, Sambharia distinctly asserts a clear stance against caste injustice. He dedicated more than thirty years to residing and engaging in professional endeavours in Rajasthan. His conviction in the transformative power of education was shaped by the insights of Swami Vivekananda, Jyotirao Phule, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Drawing from his own journey through economic adversity to social advancement via education, Sambharia intricately woven these themes into his literary works. His narratives not only illuminate the systemic disparities that persist between upper castes and Dalits, but they also underscore the critical role of education in empowering,

enlightening, and ultimately facilitating the triumph of the marginalized. The text titled *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*, translated by Mridul Basin in 2015, adeptly engages with the significant issues at hand.

The author's contributions to Dalit literature encompass five collections of short stories, two theatrical works, a biography of the esteemed Hindi literary figure Premchand, and editorial endeavours on *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: An Inspiring Life*. His celebrated narrative, *Champadasan* (The Attendant), garnered the esteemed *Sahara Samay Katha Award*, conferred by the Vice President of India. In 2017, he received the esteemed Haryana Sahitya Academy Award. His works have motivated nearly twenty-five doctoral and MPhil dissertations and are incorporated into the educational curriculum in Rajasthan. His works have been rendered into various Indian languages, such as *Punjabi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Oriya, Marathi, Kannada, and Malayalam*, reflecting his extensive impact.

Most of the Dalit narratives are intrinsically anchored in the affirmation of dignity and frequently abound with recollections of defiance against societal subjugation and caste-related oppression. For instance, Badri Narayan in his study, *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India*, observes that Dalits employ both personal and collective narratives to elevate their communities and assert their dignity in a society that has long denied them acknowledgment. These narratives interrogate the conventional structures established by Brahmanism, especially the concepts of purity and pollution, hierarchies based on birth, caste assignment, and rigid social standing. Through the construction of identities shaped by lived experiences, Dalit writers challenge and disrupt established social norms and narratives (Narayan 40, 95). Considering this perspective, Sambharia's short story "Phulwa" presents a thought-provoking literacy intervention. While his narratives are works of fiction, they are profoundly shaped by his personal memories and lived experiences as a member of the Dalit community. In the commentary by translator Mridul Bhasin on *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*, it is observed that Sambharia expresses a sense of pride in the authenticity of his narratives. She writes 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).

Further, she emphasizes the distinguishing characteristic of his work as its "gritty realism," noting that Sambharia's stories transcend mere depictions of rural poverty and socio historical oppression; they serve to actively foster self-respect, integrity, and dignity within the Dalit community (x). Within this context, the notion of metamorphosis, as articulated by Oxford Languages as "a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one," emerges as pivotal for comprehending the transformations depicted in his narratives. Through the pursuit of knowledge, Dalit characters experience a significant transformation, evolving from silence to expression, from subservience to confidence, and from obscurity to prominence. This theme is distinctly manifested in the short story "Phulwa,"

where the Author demonstrates the role of education as a catalyst for the social transformation of Dalits. Reflecting the enduring influence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who advocated for the empowerment of the marginalized through education and urban migration as a means to transcend caste-based oppression, the narrative unfolds the journey of a Dalit woman, Phulwa, who embraces learning and moves to the city to affirm her socio-economic identity.

The Rajputs, previously prominent in the caste and class hierarchy, are portrayed as declining in socio-economic position due to their unwillingness to adapt. Their commitment to caste dominance, along with their disregard for education, results in their slow collapse. This narrative inversion critiques the inertia of upper-caste ideology and emphasizes education as a catalyst for social advancement among the marginalized. This dissertation examines the interplay of caste, gender, and education in rural and urban settings, employing Sharan Kumar

Limbale's Dalit aesthetic theoretical framework to analyse the dynamics. The protagonist Phulwa character exemplifies this transforming journey. As a Dalit woman, she not only contests the gender conventions of her rural background but also actively redefines her socio-economic identity through the pursuit of education and migration to the city. The author's experience exemplifies how literacy education facilitates resistance to patriarchal tyranny and caste-based exclusion.

Caste Prejudice in Rural Rajasthan:

Within the rural landscapes of Rajasthan, the intricacies of caste-based hierarchies are profoundly interwoven into the socio-economic framework. Historically, certain communities, notably landlords and Pandits, have wielded significant influence over marginalized populations. As prominent landholders and members of the social elite, they naturally elicited respect and compliance from individuals of lesser caste standing. Their economic influence was manifest in the opulence of their residences; for example, Balka Singh, the progenitor of Rameshwar in "Phulwa," was a formidable landlord possessing an expansive mansion upheld by a multitude of servants and Dalit labourers. Among them was Phulwa's husband, who laboured on the landlord's estate, constrained by his social standing and economic hardship.

Dalit auto biographers like Om Prakash Valmiki, Daya Pawar, and Urmila Pawar have emphasized local caste rigidity. Their life accounts show that rural caste persecution is worse than urban. In Phulwa, her village dehumanizes her. She is denied public well water, which is crucial. In anger that she called him by name, feudal landlord Rameshwar refuses her and spits into her water pitcher. Typical local caste violence is shown by such daily humiliations. Dalit literature often discusses public resource exclusion. Daya Pawar, Urmila Pawar, and Bama have all written on water shortages. Casteism persists, which is disturbing. An upper caste teacher beat Dalit schoolboy Indra Meghwal to death for touching a classroom water pot, according to The Hindu (16 August 2022).

The story also illustrates the use of language as a mechanism of oppression, alongside social exclusion. The title Phulwa illustrates the tendency to refer to Dalits in dismissive and disrespectful terms, irrespective of their age or status. Professor Jangam asserts that Hindu Brahmanical ideology has imposed derogatory and restrictive nomenclature that dehumanizes Dalits. The protagonist's name is Phulwanti; however, in the village, she is referred to as 'Phulwa,' a diminutive and less formal variant of her name. In contrast, Parti, a Brahmin woman from the city, refers to her with respect by using her full name. This contrast underscores the differing perceptions of Dalit identity in rural versus urban contexts and illustrates the nuanced role of language in reinforcing caste hierarchy.

Additionally, Dalits experienced social degradation and economic exploitation through systems of bonded labour and feudal control. Fair wages were frequently withheld, and debt bondage ensnared numerous individuals in intergenerational cycles of servitude. Phulwa is also a victim of structural violence. Following her husband's death due to an incident involving a landlord's bull while he was working in the fields, she inherits his burdens of serfdom and debt, perpetuating her labour under the same oppressive conditions. Her living conditions exemplify her marginalization. The author describes her fragile thatched cottage as completely exposed to nature's extremes:

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, bailing out the water. When winter came, the freezing cold would settle deep into her home (9).

Thus, the story effectively illustrates the impact of caste on Dalits, depicting their experiences of persistent hardship, poverty, and subjugation, alongside the frequent denial of their fundamental rights. Nonetheless, the narrative concludes on a note of hope. This highlights the transformative potential of education, especially for Dalit women who experience dual discrimination based on caste and gender. Sambharia's depiction of rural caste prejudice in "Phulwa" reveals the harsh realities of systemic oppression while highlighting the transformative potential of education in altering the fate of marginalized individuals.

Education as a Challenge to Caste Supremacy:

In the realm of Dalit discourse, education is persistently regarded as the paramount instrument for fostering social transformation and achieving liberation. Intellectuals and advocates like Eknath Awad, Vemula Yellaiah, and Bhagya Reddy Varma recognized education, particularly the practice of reading, as a means to escape the social exclusion imposed by caste. Similarly, notable Dalit women authors such as Baby Kamble, Bama, and Urmila Pawar regarded education as a formidable instrument for empowerment. R. S. Praveen Kumar, former Secretary of the Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society, in his article "Education and Dalit Liberation," underscores that literacy has the power to transform the lives of the oppressed into those of "reverential entrepreneurs" who now actively challenge social customs entrenched in caste hierarchy.

He contends, “The essential pathway to liberation, happiness, and the revival of the oppressed is through education,” further stating that quality education functions as a “powerful transformative force” (159).

In accordance with aforementioned perspective, Sambharia emphasizes the theme of education as a transformative power in through his story “Phulwa.” The protagonist, in the face of significant adversity and financial challenges, holds education in high esteem. Understanding its profound impact, she guides her son Radhamohan to engage with his studies earnestly. Her unwavering commitment and resolute efforts culminated in Radhamohan attaining scholarly excellence and ultimately obtaining a distinguished role as a Superintendent of Police. The author astutely notes, “Had Phulwa not supported his schooling, his hands would still have been ploughing” (10), emphasizing the connection between education and liberation from the cycles of labour and servitude that span generations.

The author’s perspective is consistent with the broader tradition of Dalit literature, which is significantly influenced by Ambedkarite ideology. Authors like Kalekuri Prasad, recognized for his impactful short story “The Weed,” illustrate the lived experiences of caste based violence and labour exploitation. This poem illustrates the compulsion of children to engage in manual labour to obtain educational resources. The protagonist, a school-aged child, experiences physical abuse from a landlord while employed at a tea plantation. Upon her intervention, his mother is also subjected to assault. Resistance is exemplified by Babai, a character who rejects humiliation and responds by confronting the oppressor. The community’s caste elders enforce a social boycott. The younger generation is replacing established leaders with Ambedkarite thinkers, indicating a shift towards social justice ideologies. The poem concludes with the narrator stating that his mother no longer requested his assistance in labour: “My Amma never asked me again to go with her for labour” (25). This statement illustrates how Ambedkar’s legacy enabled Dalit families to emphasize education rather than subservience.

In Balbir Madhopuri’s autobiography *Changiya Rukh*, the importance of education is underscored by a father’s declaration: “Only education will liberate the untouchables’ children from the oppression of the landlord...,” (49) Should the offspring of a lawn cutter have the opportunity for education, it ought not to be requisite for him to partake in the act of lawn cutting. Consequently, immerse yourself in thorough scholarship to mitigate reliance on property owners. The assertion highlights the profound impact of Ambedkar’s teachings in motivating uneducated parents to emphasize the importance of their children’s education as a means to combat the entrenched violence linked to caste systems. Sambharia elucidates that education plays a pivotal role in fostering both dignity and facilitating material and social progress. Initially relegated to the periphery and devoid of land, Phulwa later encounters the advantages of urban life and earns recognition. In her village, she faced restrictions that prevented her from accessing water from a public well. Sixteen years later,

in the city, she inhabits a residence characterized by a dependable water supply, reflecting her evolution in both status and independence.

The contrast is further highlighted when Rameshwar visits the city with the address slips of both Pandit Ji and Phulwa. Demonstrating his caste bias, he folds Phulwa's address slip and places it in the corner of his pocket, while retaining Pandit Ji's in hand, presuming Phulwa's family to be inconsequential. No one recognizes Pandit Ji, contrary to his expectations. Phulwa's son, now a police officer, acknowledges Rameshwar and respectfully escorts him to Phulwa's residence. The discovery that Phulwa currently lives in "an ornate and imposing mansion" (3) astonishes Rameshwar. Initially perceiving her as either a tenant or a servant, he experiences intense envy upon discovering her success.

Rameshwar and other members of once dominant caste groups are suffering economically as a result of their caste prejudice and disregard for education. Despite his father, Balkar Singh, possessing one hundred bighas of land, subsequently apportioned among five sons, Rameshwar's status as a landlord has waned. His son, Deep Singh, has scarcely finished matriculation and has remained unemployed for five years. Similarly, Pandit Matapasrad, formerly esteemed in the village, grapples with insignificance in the city. His unassuming residence, characterized by charcoal drums at the entrance and a bathroom door constructed from a gunny sack, serves as a poignant emblem of their diminished circumstances. His kid obtains a subordinate position, ironically facilitated by a reference from Phulwanthi's son, a Dalit official, so further subverting the conventional power hierarchy.

Notwithstanding the developments and progression, Rameshwar remains ensnared in his Casteist mentality. Upon visiting Phulwa's residence, he declines to consume even water, asserting, "Even if Phulwa were to transform into gold, her caste would remain unchanged." I did not consume any water in her residence. "I would prefer death over the betrayal of my principles" (17). His refusal to acknowledge her advancement illustrates the continued existence of caste bias despite evident societal transformation. Sambharia's "Phulwa" effectively demonstrates how education undermines caste superiority and reconfigures social systems. Based on Ambedkar's ideology, the narrative asserts that literacy not only ensures economic stability and access to justice but also fosters self-respect, establishing it as the foundation of Dalit empowerment. The narrative reveals the emptiness of caste pride and asserts that education serves as the paramount equalizer in the transition from servitude to self determination.

Challenging Patriarchy through Education:

"Phulwa" vividly demonstrates caste oppression and exposes patriarchal conventions, illustrating how education acts as a spark for women's resistance beyond caste boundaries. The author demonstrates that education enables women to confront societal and domestic constraints, thereby altering their lives and identities. An example is Santi, the daughter-in-law of Phulwanti, shown as a self-assured, astute, and autonomous individual. Santi repudiates patriarchal norms, including veiling and the ceremonial application of vermilion,

which are typically enforced upon married women. Although originating from a Dalit family, her education empowers her to assert herself and challenge traditions that oppress women. This representation corresponds with the accounts of Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar, whose autobiographies emphasize education's significance in empowering Dalit women to combat caste hierarchy and gender-based subjugation.

The character of Phulwa further underscores the interplay of gender, caste, and class. Despite her lack of formal education and being widowed, Phulwa resolutely rejects the inheritance of servitude. Her life experiences and inherent appreciation for information drive her to ensure that her son, Radhamohan, completes his schooling. Her perseverance not only emancipates him from generational oppression but also subverts the gendered expectations placed upon widows in rural patriarchal society. Her metamorphosis is significant; Phulwa moves to the city, establishes a socially esteemed life, and nurtures a prosperous family. Notably, she acclimatizes to contemporary technologies like mobile phones, freezers, and stoves, instruments frequently alien to rural Dalit households, exemplifying her autonomy in forging a new identity.

Conversely, the character Kunwar exemplifies the ramifications of female illiteracy, irrespective of caste privilege. Although Kunwar belongs to a higher caste, her lack of knowledge renders her powerless against abandonment and legal precariousness. Her husband divorces her in favour of a more educated lady, resulting in her mental and financial devastation. Kunwar remains oblivious to the legal finality of their separation, still perceiving herself as his wife. The author highlights this sad ignorance by persistently applying vermilion to her hair parting and engaging in daily mourning: "...never fails to fill the parting in her hair with vermilion as a wife would and weeps every day." 11 Her lack of comprehension of the legal and emotional ramifications of her circumstances stems from her illiteracy.

Moreover, Kunwar's economic precariousness is apparent when she implores Phulwanti for employment: "Amma Ji..." I am an unfortunate individual. I refuse to solicit for my livelihood. I request employment as a maidservant. (11) Her statements indicate a profoundly ingrained belief in fate, ascribing her suffering to karma instead of acknowledging the institutional obstacles posed by her lack of education. Sambharia presents a stark contrast: educated women such as Santi and self-taught women like Phulwa liberate themselves from patriarchal and caste limitations, whereas illiterate women like Kunwar remain confined, irrespective of their caste rank. The narrative illustrates education as a vital element in women's liberation, emphasizing its role in dismantling the intersecting oppressions of caste and patriarchy. The characters in "Phulwa," exemplify how access to education, or the lack of it, influences women's autonomy, self-esteem, and social status in both rural and urban settings.

The Adaptability of the Higher Castes in the City:

The author critically examines the transformation of caste dynamics in urban settings, indicating that caste hierarchies become more fluid and are supplanted by class-

based divisions. This is articulated most clearly by the protagonist herself: There are thirty-six castes in villages. In urban areas, there exist only two classes: the affluent and the impoverished. Sambharia depicts urban space as a locus of transformation, wherein caste identity yields to economic position. For example, Kunwar, a lady of Rajput heritage, is driven by destitution to serve as a domestic worker in Phulwa's residence, representing a reversal of conventional caste dynamics. Upon discovering this, Rameshwar is incensed, his caste pride affronted by the sight of a Rajput woman attending to a Dalit household.

This reversal profoundly disturbs Rameshwar, whose pride and inflexible caste sensibilities are entrenched in a rustic, feudalistic perspective. The Author, adeptly conveys this through vivid imagery: "He desired to gouge out her [Phulwa's] eyes." The metamorphosis of Phulwa, formerly a low-caste labourer in his household, into a prosperous matriarch in the City is something Rameshwar finds intolerable. He experiences humiliation, as indicated by the line: "He felt himself sinking deeper into the mire of shame and outrage; a woman from such a high caste serving a low-caste nonentity like Phulwa!" (11) Sambharia highlights how Rameshwar's perspective, rooted in caste-based supremacy, is undermined in the metropolis, where social mobility is increasingly associated with education and affluence.

The author highlights a clear distinction between the rigid caste structure of the village and the dynamic social interactions of the urban environment. In the urban environment, caste is subordinated to merit and influence. Additionally, he emphasizes education as a transformational force through the character of Phulwa. Despite her initial destitution and widowhood, Phulwa invests in her son Radhamohan's education, ultimately facilitating his ascent to the esteemed position of Police Superintendent. The Author underscores that without her insistence on his education, "his hands would still be engaged in ploughing." 10. This account of elevation encapsulates what Professor Chinnaiha Jangam refers to as "Dalit enlightenment," the development of a Dalit identity founded on self-respect and intellectual strength. Radhamohan exhibits the concept of achieving professional achievement while simultaneously embodying ethical integrity.

Notwithstanding his family's historical grievances against the upper castes, he has little propensity for retribution. He helps the son of Pandit Ji, a Brahmin, in obtaining employment. This gesture indicates a forward-thinking perspective on social justice, rooted in ethical accountability and collective advancement rather than punishment. Sambharia concurrently illustrates the higher classes' adaptation through the character of Parti, the spouse of Pandit Ji. Residing in the city, she recognizes the insignificance of caste in urban existence and concedes that "now it is the age of status and power, not of caste." Her actions of soliciting assistance from Phulwa's son for her son's employment and consistently patting Phulwa's feet in appreciation signify her acceptance of a new social hierarchy. She further counsels Rameshwar to transcend his limited perspective, cautioning him against remaining "like a frog in the well." The transition is reflected in Victor Hugo's assertion: "There is perpetually greater suffering among the lower classes than there is compassion in the upper

echelon.” Thus, the author, contends that Dalits ought not to rely on the goodwill of upper castes but should instead seek education as a means to attain freedom and dignity.

Similar instance is illustrated in Telugu Dalit author Yendluri Sudhakar’s short story “Heroes from Untouchable Wada,” when the character Yadhantham, a Madiga adolescent, endures caste persecution solely because of his father's esteemed status as an educated healer and teacher. The village chief Mirasayabu states, “This is a public tank; it is owned by all...” When everyone sought his medicines, you did not regard it as pollution... Will the water get contaminated if his son swims in the tank? Purushotham 73. In this context, education serves both as a defence against oppression and as a stimulus for rational thought within the dominant classes.

Despite such optimistic representations, Sambharia’s assertion that caste holds no significance in urban settings is not consistently echoed throughout Dalit literature. Writers such as Pasunuri Ravinder contest this optimism. In the narrative "What Caste Are You?", an educated Dalit couple, Karnakar and Anitha, encounters caste-based discrimination while seeking to rent a residence in the city. Memoirs like M. Sathyanarayana’s *My Father Balaiah* (2011) and Yashica Dutt’s *Coming Out As A Dalit* (2019) illustrate that Dalits frequently feel the need to hide their caste identities in both professional and personal contexts. These narratives demonstrate that, although economic progress is achievable, social acceptance continues to be difficult to attain. Prof. Raj Kumar emphasizes that, despite achieving professional success, Dalits continue to be “socially ostracised and unaccepted into the mainstream” (Kumar 3). Daya Pawar articulates the persistent stigma associated with caste in his autobiography *Baluta*, stating, “However much I scour my face, even to the point of bleeding, it [caste] will not be wiped away.” 62. While Sambharia offers a persuasive perspective on caste transcendence in urban life, other contributors to Dalit literature emphasize the ongoing and subtle presence of caste, even within contemporary urban environments.

Conclusion:

In a nutshell, through the story “Phulwa,” Ratan Kumar Sambharia skilfully analyses the systemic inequities of the caste system, revealing the hypocrisy, inhumanity, and entrenched double standards that perpetuate the marginalization of Dalits. In post independence India, despite the reduction of feudal power, caste-based discrimination persists, especially among higher castes who maintain beliefs of social superiority. Sambharia demonstrates that education serves as a vital tool for transformation, empowering Dalits to confront systematic injustice and redefine their social identity. In “Phulwa,” education facilitates a transition from inherited oppression to economic autonomy, dignity, and leadership. The protagonist's journey symbolizes the extensive transformation of Dalit existence, transitioning from quiet and suffering to assertion and empowerment. Sambharia acknowledges the significant significance of education in challenging caste systems, however he also understands its limitations: caste identity continues to delineate and isolate Dalits, even in the face of professional and economic success. Consequently, the narrative not only champions the emancipatory power of literacy but also exposes the persistent

societal attitudes that obstruct real equality. The story advocates for an ideological transformation, pushing upper-caste communities to relinquish caste-based hubris and adopt a more humanitarian, egalitarian perspective.

The author ultimately asserts that education alone cannot eradicate caste, but it empowers the disadvantaged with the means to oppose, assert, and redefine their societal position. Sambharia enhances Dalit literary discourse by integrating personal experience with Ambedkarite ideology, emphasizing that structural transformation necessitates both individual enlightenment and communal reform. This analysis is confined to a singular narrative from *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*. A thorough examination of the remaining narratives may provide profound insights into Sambharia's influence on Dalit aesthetics and the intricate interconnections of caste, class, gender, and resistance that define his literary realm.

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