

The Chair : A Critical Study

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Dr. Bimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) , an architect of the Indian constitution fought for the rights of untouchables. For the country he framed Constitution which was remarkable and his works did not confine only to untouchables but also to the poor people. His focus is mainly on socially deprived classes and he argued on behalf of them for their rights and freedom. Influenced by the ideology of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar here is a dramatist, who presented his drama in a very effective manner considering the social and economical problems of the people. His target is not to reach the erudite men but to awaken suppressed masses subjugated and marginalized ordinary human beings, who's being is always under question.

Indian constitution as far as its characteristics are concerned projects the social justice in India. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar being an architect of Indian constitution always focused on the deprived section of people in the society. He fought for the rights of poor and marginalized people. The very intention of the formation of constitution is aimed at whole society in general and underprivileged sections in particular.

In this paper, The Chair written by Dr. D. Vizai Bhaskar is explored with much attention to the constitutional rights formulated by

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Dr. D. Vizai Bhaskar is a remarkable modern dramatist in Telugu. He is born in a simple middle class family at Ampolu Village in Srikakulam District of Andhra Pradesh. His plays always presents the conditions of marginalised and suppressed people in India. His plays are thought provoking and message oriented.

This play acclaimed so much of popularity and recognition. Political reservations given to the Dalits in India is the subject of the play, The Chair. Political reservations which are given to Dalits have empowered them to some extent but when it comes to reality there are so many obstacles. The very opening of the play is set in a house of Narasaiah, Sarpanch of the village, which is located in a Dalit colony where Ambedkar's photo is put on the wall. The very appearance of the house projects the real poverty of dalits. It is a house of the sarpanch but the ambience is very poor. Previously Dora served as a Sarpanch to the village for almost two decades, this time Narasaiah got his turn by chance. Jogulu, the barber came carrying a chair in his hands and says to Narasaiah that :

Listen! Occupying this chair only, our Dora has ruled our village continuously for over twenty years and settled many issues, you know?

Our Dora is now an ex-sarpanch, and you are the present one! So Dora sent this to you.

Narasaiah hesitates to sit on it but Jogulu insists him by saying, when you are enjoying Sarpanch position why not this chair? with much difficulty Narasaiah sits on it. Sunkulamma, wife of Narasaiah comes and asks innocently that, will this chair be for us forever? She felt happy that her husband is given a position and authority. The hesitation of Narasaiah to sit on the chair reflects the worse condition of dalits and also shows the inferiority what they experiecne. Jogulu gives a very ridiculous answer to her question immediatly, which she cannot understand in her life time that, will this chair be touched again by Dora once it is used by Narasaiah , a Dalit Sarpanch?

But in the scene five we come across Narasaiah regretting to be on this chair and says that:

Damn it! (he gave kick to the Chair) with the entry of this chair only, my life became problematic and miserable! Who told that the chair changes lives? One should have a suitable shoe for one's own foot. When I was a daily labourer I used to have a sound sleep. But what is this unpredictable plight? After this sarpanchship I am destined to spend sleepless nights. As punishments for wrong actions in my previous births, I got this chair. I don't want this chair or cheer out of it. Power is a boon for the feudal, but it is a curse for the poor. Oh! God Please take away this chair from me as soon as possible. Please restore me with peace and happiness.

In scene-II , Bhimaiah laments that:

What hypocrisy, I say? It is life. Have we ever lived like human beings? Have we ever filled our bellies fully? Have ever covered our bodies fully? Have we ever been treated like humans by them? Just slaves... Slaves for whom shame is a rare feeling. Speech is an expensive things. Freedom is an object not only beyond our experience, but imagination too. Have you ever seen any Dalit who can stand before his landlord without his head bowed and hands folded?

His education motivates Narasaiah to be aware of properties and wealth accumulated in the hands of rich landlords and says:

How did their ancestors got it? (Properties, hundreds of acres) you have no answer. But I tell you listen! People who had money and might occupied lands. Those who had landed property commanded respect and leadership in the society. With that they ascended to positions. Position protected the property and property perpetuated the position. Unfortunate masses like Dalit remained forever in poverty and slavery. Now we got a chance to usurp everything. Let us not spoil this chance.

One effective dialogue by Patel regarding the fight of Tippadu and Jogulu in scene-IV changes the very confrontation of the play:

Dora! Remember the spectacular scene which reveals the naked truth hidden deep in the layers of history. Recollect how our

followers are fighting. It is a proved fact, the followers, the henchmen, the down trodden and the slaves have to fight for their kings and landlords and lay their live for our sake. But what you have done is exactly reverse, owing to your obstinate attitude; you caused damage to our dyanastic democracy. By offering reservations, we have to boost their incomes apparently, not their properties! Strengthen their living standards, not their ruling capabilities. Strengthen them individually, but not unitedly. Beware of a person like Bhimaiah! He will not satisfy with job, income, property and position. His suppressed desire get satisfied only after total annihilation of our landlords' community. To fulfill his desire, he resorts to anything including laying at stake of his own life.

By giving all account of atrocities of rich, at the end of the play Bhimaiah, motivated and convinced Narasaiah to attain chair and enjoy the power, superiority and strength by saying that:

.....I spell out the prologue for the history of our downtrodden castes! Let us not give up the aspirations of that great leader of all times! Let us not run after petty pleasures leaving the community welfare aside. If we do so, we get totally destroyed in the hands of so called feudal! I realized this fact belatedly! This truth is to be grasped by the entire educated fraternity of our communities! Inspite of our advancement in many fields, we are remaining still as their slaves and servants! This tendency should not be perpetuated any longer! My dear.

Brother! This particular Chair does not indicate only power, it's a sign for our social freedom and reform. This Chair should become a " Gandeevam" in our hands, a " paasupathastra" to baffle all the social barricades kept around us! That Chair is our! Adorn it! The power is ours! Exercise it! Its reigns are in our own hands! You start ruling the system.

Narasaiah, as advised by Bhimaiah adorned the Chair like a king. And acted as a sarpanch of that village boldly and bravely, as an administrator he orders Dora and Patel to get ready to face the case for attempting murder on Bhimaiah. The play concluded in a positive note that, the chair is now occupied by an appropriate person for whom it is reserved. Finally insisted that implementation is more important than legislation.

By observing these three instances in the play we could see the denotative meaning of the Chair changes. In the first quote we see Sunkulamma expresses her happiness regarding the Chair which is offered to her husband. But Narasaiah hesitates to sit on it, later mobilized by Jogulu, he sits. Sunkulamma's innocence, Narasaiah's fear are the key points here. He is sure that the Chair may pull him into problems in future. Chair stands a symbol of authority, power and domination. These are the three qualities, which are never exercised by Narasaiah so far. Therefore, he is afraid and not willing to take up the power and accept the shift of power.(from so called Doras to Dalits)

Looking at the second instance we observe the restlessness, fear, regret from Narasaiah because as he expected in the beginning his life became troublesome and problematic because of the Chair where he is sitting right now. He is not in a position to enjoy Sarpanchship and authority. Of course, the authority what is practiced by him projects that he is seemingly powerful but in reality no. He feels that power is not for poor but only for Feudal lords. He starts cursing the chair as well as his birth because he is dissatisfied hard pressed and conditioned by so called former leaders.

Constitution is prepared with lot of concern for the poor. This can be understood by an educated man but not a person like Narasaiah. As he is guided and awakened by his brother Bhimaiah(perhaps this name may be used by the writer to sensitize readers towards the name of Bhimrao Ambedkar) he gets awareness and proper idea about the rights which are formed by the constitution for them. This informative approach of Bhimaiah literally transforms the character of Narasaiah and makes him confident and assertive. Hence, the ascendance of Chair again. This transition transforms him from an illiterate man to a confident ruler.

The change is remarkable and this is the change what Ambedkar always awaited for .. He tried to break the dirty deeds of gentry who offers power and Chair to the deserving candidate (according to reservation) rule them and make them rule according to

‘their’ likes and dislikes and preferences. Dalits become mere puppets in the hands of the Former higher community leaders. Ambedkar expressed his disappointment and distress over Dalit degradation and their pathetic life style in the society. Dr. Ambedkar would have been alive now he would definitely feel proud and satisfied by looking at Dalits occupying Rastrapathi Bhavan in India or becoming the Prime minister or even becoming chief minister of the state. The strategy of empowerment has been definitely changed and it projects the difference in the situation of Dalits in terms of their being in the so called cultured and civilized society, which is always under a big question mark prior to Ambedkar. This play presents the positive hope of development in the existing condition and place of Dalits and of course encourages awareness regarding all these issues by creating awareness among suppressed and socially deprived sections of the society. As Ambedkar states:

I have brought the chariot of social change so far with great difficulty. If you can do it, take it further, if not leave it there. The next generation would take it forward. But never ever push it back or take it in the reverse direction.

Now the responsibility is on the shoulders of younger generations to continue the trend with ease and rationality. This play is an example of wrong deeds of wealthy and upper caste people on dalits and suppressed sections. The awareness must come to younger

generations to understand the rules of constitution and question the so called leaders for their atrocities. By focusing the theme of domination the playwright succeeded in creating proper understanding of constitutional rights among the young minds. On the whole this play stands as an example of helpless condition of dalits and their problems and also mobilizes them to be outspoken and daring.

References:

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