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Dr. Namaedo Nimgade's *In the Tiger's Shadow*: A Study of Cultural Transgression

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Abstract

Culture has always remained a dynamic phenomenon just like literature. They both complement each other. In fact, culture directly or indirectly affects the literature. Culture has the power in itself to transgress from non material aspect to material one. In fact, the novel of Dr. Namdeo Nimgade, *In the Tiger's Shadow* is an appropriate example of cultural transgression from rural setting of culture to modern urban set up. Dr. Nimgade was born in a very desperate poor family from Mahar untouchable caste. His family comprises of landless bonded labourers, who was settled in the dustbowl of Sathgon on Western India. He was fourteen years old when he finally managed to attend his school. He was beaten and humiliated because he was an untouchable Dalit caste. He was forced to stand on the hot verandha and listen at the window lest his touch should pollute the others and at the same time was smarter than the rest of the upper caste students of his classroom. Inspired by the life of B. R. Ambedkar, he pursued his education and revolt back at the atrocities of the upper caste people in a dignified manner. In a conventional narrative technique, he expresses his anger and resentment towards the social inequality. The aim of this paper is to present the changing aspects of life from non-material culture (rural aspect) to the material culture (urban aspect) through the life of Dr. Nimgade as exhibits in the novel.

Keywords- *Culture, Transgression, Dalits, Untouchable*

During the last two decades i.e. 19th and 20th century in India, the interest of the reformers, philosophers, writers, etc. has been evinced in the study of under-privileged class. Their main motto lies to present a new life to the decadent contemporary society which glorifies itself and have callous attitude towards the down-trodden class of the society. This poor, deprived, under-privileged section of people is deprived of their socio-economic opportunities for their sustenance. They have been embarked as the victims of social, cultural and political exclusion. Among them Dalits hold special attention as the dejected rundle of the civil ladder.

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They have been confined to coercion and degradation by the elevated castes through centuries in India. It is a blot on the so-called modern society that this merciless practice still preserves in various parts of our country. Dr. Namaedo Nimgade through his life depicting in the novel, *In the Tiger's Shadow* tries to make visible to the reader about the hidden exploitation of the Dalits, marginalized and down trodden people.

In today's world, Social and economic inequality has become a global phenomenon and this produces horrendous ignominy across the globe. These ignominious people can be located in any part of the globe, classes, communities and groups who are backward. They are deprived of the basic amenities of life. These neglected people are called as "aborigines" in Australia, "blacks" in America and "Dalits" in India. The aborigines, black, Dalits are devoid of their fundamental rights, to participate in the social, cultural, political, economic, educational and religious sphere of their lives. They are isolated and segregated physically from the general public or the privileged class of the world. If anyone peeps into their lives, one can easily find out that they are simply managing the two square meals for their family and children.

In the Western countries, however, they have made law against the issues like racial discrimination, apartheid, capitalism, communalism, and so on. But in India, these social issues have not been taken up till date. Indian civilization is one of the oldest civilizations of the world. There are some fundamental peculiarities which are entirely different from the issues and problems prevalent in the rest of the world. A thorough study of Indian social history shows that the privileged people have been exploiting the poor people since ages. This exploitation may have been based on gender, race, colour, language, religion and politics. For maintaining the hegemony, the exploiters divided the human race into several classes: ruling and servile, affluent and deprived, rich and poor, finally high and low. This social population of servility, deprivation and lowness is called Dalit population or Dalits.

Indian society laid its basis on casteism and this has the sanction of religion behind it. Casteism is man-made phenomenon and is undoubtedly the wicked brain-child of Hinduism. The Hindu religious order considered Dalits as impure and untouchable. With the emergence of Dalit literature, the attention of the readers also focused towards the sorrows, tribulations, humiliations, sufferings, etc. of the under privileged people to whom we were unaware of. The novel points out:

The Revolt is the stage that follows anguish and rejection. I am human I must receives all the rights of a human being- such is the consciousness that gives birth to this revolt. Born from unrestrained anguish, this explosive rejection and piercing revolt is like a flood, with its aggressive character and an insolent, rebellious attitude. (Limbale 31)

In *The Tiger's Shadow*, the autobiographical novel of Nimgade, he presented his journey of life, his transgression from low to high through his hard work. He was highly

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influenced by B. R. Ambedkar and made up his mind to raise the voice of his caste to the deafening ears of the world. The motto of Nimgade finds echoes in the book *Dr. Ambedkar: Important Messages, Saying Wit and Wisdom*:

Caste is not physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents Hindus from co-mingling and which has therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion; it is a state of the mind. The destruction of caste does not therefore mean the destruction of physical barrier. It means a social change.
(114)

For such vision, India is in a dire need to have enlightened Indians like Nimgade who works for bringing this balance in the society. His novel is a crescendo of untouchable's culture to a contemporary Dalit culture.

Culture has always remained a dynamic phenomenon just like literature. They both complement each other. In fact, culture directly or indirectly affects the literature. Culture has the power in itself to transgress from non material aspect to material one. Culture refers to the capabilities acquired by men. It is the creation of men. It emanates from men but is responsible for giving a direction and purpose to the life. It may be called as a social heredity. It is the important determinant of thought and feeling. It is the culture which influences future developments. It also helps in the enrichment of human life and progress of societal values namely co-operation, sympathy, social awakening and social sensitiveness, etc. These societal values have led the different nation of the world living together as brothers sharing each other's joy and sorrow. In short, culture is a collective term for all behavior patterns socially acquired and transmitted. It is social inheritance. It is actually a way of life-doing feeling, appreciating and thinking. Lastly, culture is the quality of soul and not of body. In the words of Mathew Arnold to man, “

Culture is a way of life, the habits, the manners, the very tone of voices, the literature, the things which gave pleasure to community, the words, the thoughts which make the furniture of their minds. In the broad sense, it is sweetness and light. (Sachdeva 397)

Culture is broadly categorized under material culture and non-material culture. Material culture consists of man-made things such as tools, implements, furniture, dams, buildings, bridges and in fact the physical substances which have been changed and used by man. It is concerned with the external, mechanical and utilitarian objects. It includes technical and material equipments like a printing press, a locomotive, a telephone, a tractor, etc. It comprises of our banks, parliaments, insurance schemes, currency systems, etc.

The story of the novel starts with a dark, earthen hut lighted by a flickering clay lamp and Nimgade was just six years old. At the time when he was just 12 days old, his mother had to return to working fields. Feeding Nimgade was the biggest challenge at that time for his mother. She would cook just spoonful of flour in a cup of water for him. There was a

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female donkey that had recently given birth to a young-one. So his mother took some of the creature's milk for him. Several kinds of women also suckled him along with their own babies. Sometimes his mother used to give him a little speck of opium for his sleep as she lacked her breast milk. This was the kind of the infancy that Dr. Nimgade had. When he was a few years older the child had little clothing and often played around the hut naked. As a child, he did not know what the word school meant. The child did not have any kind of schooling, toys, clothing and even food during his childhood when the children of his age enjoy the so called golden childhood. This was the kind of the economic aspect of the culture of Dr. Namdeo's life.

The religious aspect of the culture was very bleak for the untouchables at that time. The other concept of culture for which Dalits have to suffered is non-material aspect i.e. the term culture when used in the ordinary sense means the abstract and non-physical values. It also inculcates our customs, traditions and tastes. Thus, culture can be taken as a continuous and cumulative stock containing material and non-material elements that are socially transmitted from one generation to other generation. It is incessant because cultural structure transcend years, reappearing in all generations. Culture is cumulative because each generation contributes to the reservoir.

In those days, people had strong religious faith and believed that pilgrimages to holy places obtained religious merit. There is a strong belief throughout India that just listening to the religious stories of the *Puranas* will cleanse the soul. Until then, no one in the mahar society of the village had the opportunity to hear epic stories such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabhart*. The school at that time was the Hindu religious centers. They used to practice untouchability to the highest level. During the festivities, the untouchable like Nimgade were given food not on plates or glasses they were given food on pieces of paper and poured water from above into their cupboard hands. At the same time, Nimgade was beaten a lot times whenever he went to get water from the village well. He had seen cats, dogs and donkeys drinking water from the pond. Cows and buffaloes would drink water and even bathe and frolic in the water. As an untouchable boy he tried to take one or two vessels full of water, he was beaten and cursed severely. He used to think they were considered lower than animals.

Then there was a turning point in the life of Nimgade when he got a chance to listen Dr. Ambedkar's address on the first day of the conference on July 18, 1942:

My final words of advice to you are Educate, Agitate and Organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the personality. (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Caravan Web)

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When he was a 9th grade student he was one among 70000 of the gathered public. Ambedkar's words provided the necessary guiding light to this untouchable lad and he ended up choosing Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics as his major subjects. This led to the transformation of his own personality from the non-existing cultural values of his own family to a person of self-awakening and self-awareness i.e. to the culturalisation of his own self-individuality. Dr. Ambedkar proved a kind of catalyst in triggering the culture change in Nimgade. With the motivating speech of Ambedkar, Nimgade was fostered to a clear commitment to himself that whatever difficulties come ahead, he would preserve with strong determination and hard work to gain higher education. It was there that he decided to get higher education and ultimately decided to go for doctorate. When his name was published in *Wisconsin State Journal*, he was startled to find his picture on the front page under the heading "Untouchables gains PhD."

In 1968, he was invited to present a paper based on his research at International Science Congress in Adelaide, Australia. On 15th August 1968, the leading Adelaide newspaper, the *Adelaide Advertiser*, carried an article declaring "An U touchable has won World Status" a that led to more interviews form the press including television interview. Finally on 17th August 1968, the South Australian Premier Dr. Hall picked him up in his official car, took him to his own family, met his parents and even had a meal with them. . In 1985, he retired from the Indian Agricultural Research Institution after thirty-three years of service as senior class I Agricultural Scientist.

Hence, hailing from mahar community of untouchables, Dr. Nimgade rose from the dust of Sathgain, a remote village of subsistence farmers; he tended cattle while children of greater privilege attended school. Passing his examination narrowly when the plight of the family members, friends divided his time but he ultimately graduated from the agricultural college in Nagpur, the Indian Agriculture Reaches Institute in New Delhi, and the University of Wisconsin, where his PhD was heralded as the second such degree earned in U.S. by a person of untouchable birth. Therefore, the journey of Nimgade from rags to riches is aptly the transgression of values and humanity from one aspect of culture to another i.e. from rural untouchables Dalit's non-culture to the urban modern set up of modernity exhibition of the values patterns from Rural India to Urban India.

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