

Indian Journal of Modern Research and Reviews

This Journal is a member of the '*Committee on Publication Ethics*'

Online ISSN:2584-184X



REVIEW PAPER

From Subjugation to Self-Assertion: A Critical Analysis of Shyamlal's Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor

Ravinder Singh^{1*}, Dr. Ghanshyam Pal²

^{1,2} IEC University, Baddi, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author: *Ravinder Singh

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17195217>

ABSTRACT

This study critically engages with *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* (2001) by Prof. Shyamlal as a groundbreaking work in Dalit autobiographical literature. Unlike many Dalit narratives that emphasize victimhood and social exclusion, Shyamlal's autobiography foregrounds themes of change, mobility, and institutional empowerment. His rise from the Bhangi caste to the position of Vice-Chancellor serves as a powerful counter-narrative to entrenched caste hierarchies. The study explores how Shyamlal asserts agency not only through resistance but by strategically engaging with institutions such as education and governance. Using frameworks from Ambedkarite ideology, subaltern theory, and caste studies, it highlights how education and affirmative action can empower Dalits to access previously denied spaces. The text becomes a site of both individual assertion and collective representation. It challenges notions of merit, caste privilege, and structural discrimination, offering new pathways for Dalit empowerment. Ultimately, the autobiography embodies subaltern modernity and provides a transformative vision of social justice and equality.

Manuscript Info.

- ✓ ISSN No: 2584- 184X
- ✓ Received: 12-07-2025
- ✓ Accepted: 25-08-2025
- ✓ Published: 16-09-2025
- ✓ MRR:3(9):2025;70-76
- ✓ ©2025, All Rights Reserved.
- ✓ Peer Review Process: Yes
- ✓ Plagiarism Checked: Yes

How To Cite this Article

Singh R, Pal G. From Subjugation to Self-Assertion: A Critical Analysis of Shyamlal's Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor. Ind J Mod Res Rev. 2025;3(9):70-76.

KEYWORDS: Dalit autobiography, Caste and Education, Bhangi Community, Shyamlal, Subaltern Agency, Institutional Representation, Ambedkarite thinking, Caste and identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor (2001), written by Professor Shyamlal (b. 1944), presents a powerful narrative of personal and political transformation that challenges deeply entrenched caste boundaries, social exclusion, and institutional gatekeeping. Born into the Bhangi community—a Dalit sub-caste historically subjected to the dehumanizing work of manual scavenging—Shyamlal's life journey stands as a direct challenge to the Brahmanical ideologies that have shaped Indian social order for centuries. His rise from the margins of rural Rajasthan to the prestigious role of Vice-Chancellor is not merely a story of individual achievement; it is emblematic of collective Dalit aspirations, struggles, and the redefinition of self-worth.

This autobiography transcends the personal and becomes a critical social document that exposes the persistence of caste-based prejudice in post-independence India. Shyamlal's early life, marked by poverty, humiliation, and exclusion—particularly in educational spaces—reflects the harsh realities of caste discrimination. However, his success, rooted in education, resilience, and the implementation of affirmative action, exemplifies the transformative potential of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's emancipatory vision, especially the principles of "Educate, Agitate, Organize." His narrative emphasizes empowerment, dignity, and institutional assertion, expanding the thematic and ideological scope of Dalit life writing.

What distinguishes Shyamlal's story from many other Dalit autobiographies is its emphasis on intellectual autonomy and administrative leadership. While much of Dalit literature focuses on experiences of violence, oppression, and marginalization, Shyamlal narrates how he strategically entered and redefined the very institutions that historically excluded Dalits—academia, bureaucracy, and governance. His presence within these elite spaces subverts dominant notions of who has the right to produce knowledge and exercise authority, turning his life into a living critique of caste hegemony.

This study situates *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* within the broader canon of Dalit autobiographical literature, analysing its narrative techniques, ideological interventions, and socio-political significance. It explores how Shyamlal constructs a Dalit subjectivity that moves beyond victimhood or resistance, toward empowered institutional participation. His narrative serves as a counter-history, placing Dalit experiences and epistemologies at the centre of India's intellectual and political discourse.

Ultimately, Shyamlal's life exemplifies a new model of Dalit self-assertion that resists both neoliberal individualism and caste orthodoxy. His story also reveals how caste discrimination persists—even for those who reach positions of power—highlighting the enduring nature of caste in Indian democracy. *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* is a landmark in Dalit literature, offering both a critique of structural injustice and a hopeful vision of social transformation. It stands as an inspirational testament to breaking caste barriers and advancing toward a more inclusive and just society.

METHODOLOGY

This research paper employs a variety of methodological approaches—including qualitative, interpretative, historical, and analytical research methods—to critically engage with *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor*. At its core, the study focuses on a deep critical analysis of the text's themes, narrative structure, ideological underpinnings, and political implications. A hermeneutic approach is used to interpret the text in the context of the lived experiences, cultural codes, and socio-historical realities of the Dalit community, particularly the Bhangi sub-caste.

An interdisciplinary framework underpins the study, drawing from Ambedkarite philosophy, subaltern studies, and Dalit literary criticism. The autobiography's assertions of dignity, social justice, and institutional inclusion are rooted in Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's emancipatory ideals—especially his vision of annihilating caste through education, political assertion, and constitutional engagement. In this light, Shyamlal's life is seen not merely as a personal success story, but as a symbol of systemic change enabled through constitutional means.

Subaltern theory—especially the concept of the subaltern as a historically silenced figure—informs the reading of this text as a counter-narrative that challenges dominant caste-based epistemologies. The autobiography restores narrative agency to Dalits by reclaiming spaces of self-representation traditionally denied to them. The research also engages with the theoretical

contributions of scholars such as Gopal Guru, who critiques the “politics of representation” and the “epistemology of experience,” and Sharmila Rege, whose Dalit feminist standpoint theory critiques Brahmanical patriarchy and offers a gendered reading of caste experiences.

In this regard, Shyamlal's autobiography can be fruitfully compared to other seminal Dalit life narratives such as Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*, and Bama's *Karukku*, all of which foreground liberation and identity reclamation. Like these texts, *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* serves as a powerful assertion of Dalit identity, agency, and intellectual contribution.

Shyamlal's rise to the position of Vice-Chancellor is emblematic of Dalits entering the mainstream of institutional power, a significant development in the long struggle for equality. His life journey serves not only as a personal inspiration but also as a collective symbol of hope and resistance. The ultimate aim of this autobiography—and this study—is to inspire transformational action among marginalized communities and contribute to a broader discourse on caste, representation, and social justice in contemporary India.

Shyamlal: An Exponent of Social Change

Professor Shyamlal stands as a towering figure in Indian academia—not only due to his rise from extreme poverty, but also for his significant contributions to sociology, education, and institutional reform. A renowned scholar and administrator, he served as Vice-Chancellor at several Indian universities, including the University of Jodhpur and Patna University. Over more than two decades, his academic work has consistently addressed caste-based exclusion, structural injustice, and the transformative potential of education for Dalits. His autobiography, *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* (2001), is both a deeply personal narrative and a politically charged document. It traces his journey from a marginalized village in rural Rajasthan to the highest echelons of academic and administrative leadership in India. More than a story of personal ambition, it is a chronicle of Dalit struggle, resistance, and assertion in post-independence India. His life is a testament to survival, dignity, and the reclamation of space in a system long structured to exclude communities like the Bhangis.

The autobiography is organized chronologically into three major sections.

- The first section recounts his childhood, marked by extreme poverty, emotional trauma, and the brutal realities of untouchability and social exclusion. Spatial segregation and routine humiliation were not just social conditions but daily lived experiences.
- The second section explores his educational journey—a site of both aspiration and resistance. Despite facing systemic discrimination from teachers, classmates, and institutions, Shyamlal persevered, ultimately earning a Ph.D. His account of educational ascent underscores the empowering role of affirmative action policies like scholarships and reservations. However, he resists romanticizing education as a linear path to liberation. Instead, he exposes the

embedded casteism within so-called "neutral" meritocratic systems.

- The third section shifts to his tenure as an academic administrator, particularly as Vice-Chancellor. Here, personal growth intersects with institutional intervention. Shyamlal uses his position not merely to validate his own presence but to challenge discriminatory systems from within. He advocated for implementing reservation policies, reforming hiring practices, and creating inclusive academic environments. His efforts confronted the inertia and caste-based resistance within universities, often dominated by upper-caste leadership. His leadership marked a pivotal step in furthering Dalit participation and institutional equity in higher education.

What distinguishes *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* from many other Dalit autobiographies is its blending of personal narrative with ethnographic observation, policy critique, and sociological analysis. The text goes beyond personal anecdotes to incorporate statistical data, references to education policy, and institutional critique. In doing so, it straddles the line between memoir and academic analysis. This multidimensional approach allows Shyamlal to situate his life story within broader socio-political frameworks and debates around caste, merit, and systemic reform.

Moreover, the autobiography makes a powerful epistemological intervention. It disrupts conventional academic discourse by inserting lived experience and emotional authenticity into intellectual critique. The text challenges the boundaries of what constitutes knowledge by privileging experiential truth alongside scholarly reflection. In this way, Shyamlal's narrative not only recounts a life of transformation but also contributes meaningfully to conversations around social justice, Dalit identity, and the politics of representation in India

Literary and Political Essence of This Dalit Autobiography

In the latter half of the 20th century, Dalit autobiography in India emerged as both a literary movement and a political intervention, serving as a crucial tool for contesting dominant caste ideologies that had historically silenced or misrepresented marginalized voices. Foundational works such as Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Shantabai Kamble's *Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha (The Kaleidoscopic Story of My Life)*, and Daya Pawar's *Baluta* illuminated the brutal lived realities of caste oppression. These texts functioned as acts of testimony, resistance, and reclamation—foregrounding themes of humiliation, systemic violence, and social exclusion while simultaneously constructing a new Dalit consciousness grounded in identity, memory, and assertion.

Within this lineage, Professor Shyamlal's *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* occupies a unique and significant space. Unlike earlier Dalit autobiographies that dwell heavily on pain and suffering, Shyamlal's narrative emphasizes transformation, leadership, and structural engagement. His autobiography does not dismiss the sorrow and stigma of caste oppression, but it shifts the focus toward empowerment through education, institutional participation, and policy advocacy. As Shikha

Saxena aptly describes, it is "an account of indomitable courage and struggle"—a story that not only resists but also rebuilds.

Shyamlal's narrative aligns closely with Waman Nimbalkar's tripartite classification of Dalit autobiographical voices: *afflictive*, *dissident*, and *forceful*. His journey reflects a progression from personal affliction to community-centered activism. His advocacy for reservation policies, inclusive hiring practices, and equitable academic spaces moves beyond individual social mobility to collective upliftment. In doing so, he reimagines Dalit autobiography not just as a record of suffering, but as a blueprint for social transformation.

I was recollecting my past, 'when my mother and I were ousted from Mehrangarh Fort, suffered untold hardship, endured showers of abuses because we are Untouchables. The same despicable 'Untouchable Bhangi boy, as vice-chancellor, was honoured by the same royal family in the same fort' (*Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* 172).

Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor goes beyond being a critique of the caste system; it is a visionary text that recasts Dalit subjectivity not merely as a site of trauma but as one of intellectual agency, administrative power, and ethical leadership. By challenging Brahmanical dominance in knowledge production and occupying key institutional roles, Shyamlal redefines what it means to "write back" to power. His narrative is not confined to literary testimony; it is a strategic intervention—a plan of action for institutional reform.

This autobiography is part of a new generation of Dalit life writing that is forward-looking, intersectional, and inclusive. It asserts that Dalit lives are not only worthy of narration but also deserving of empowerment through education, policy change, and representation. In this sense, the text becomes more than a personal memoir—it transforms into a political manifesto that calls for democratizing knowledge, dismantling caste privilege, and constructing equitable institutions in contemporary India. As a construction labourer, his mother slogged for the Ummed Bhawan, famed as a Rajasthani architectural masterpiece.

"Labourers came from various Untouchable castes for this big project. Everybody from my caste worked there without any wages. With its splendid dome and more than 250 furnished rooms, this is the second most commodious structure in India after the Rashtrapati Bhawan. It took nearly 13 years to complete. (p. 7-8).

Thematic Study: The Body, Stigma, and Caste

In *The Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor*, Professor Shyamlal presents a compelling narrative that powerfully illustrates how caste stigma is inscribed not only onto society but also onto the physical body of the Dalit individual. His recollections of being denied access to drinking water, excluded from community functions, and physically segregated within classrooms are not isolated incidents. Rather, they are manifestations of a broader societal structure that stigmatizes and disciplines the Dalit body as inherently impure. These experiences resonate with what Dalit scholar Gopal Guru refers to as the "politics of untouchability."

In this context, the Dalit body is perceived as a site of pollution—something to be avoided, regulated, or erased from public and sacred spaces. This is vividly portrayed in Shyamlal's early life: he was barred from temples, publicly ridiculed, and made to sit apart from upper-caste students—often relegated to the floor or positioned near the door. This physical separation reflects the deeply entrenched belief in caste as a visible, bodily marker. Similar themes are explored in Dalit autobiographies like Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Bama's *Karukku*, where the body becomes a canvas upon which caste prejudice is written and reinforced. The VC says:

Public latrines were the places where, always in the morning and evening, all high caste men, Banias, shopkeepers, etc. came for defecation. As soon as a Bania, trader, or businessman was seen coming to the toilet, my mother requested them to wait for a few minutes to provide them with a neat and clean toilet, and when they came out, she requested to give one anna or so. Thus, she collected a few annas from which we purchased a book, pencils, a rubber, etc. (8-9).

However, Shyamlal's narrative takes a transformative turn—it does not stop at victimhood but reclaims and redefines the Dalit body as a site of strength, dignity, and resistance. Though his childhood was marked by exclusion and humiliation, his later life celebrates the same body entering elite and previously forbidden spaces—university corridors, academic conferences, government institutions, and intellectual circles. This shift is both literal and symbolic. What was once considered a polluted body becomes an empowered one—a body that produces knowledge, asserts authority, and drives change. Shyamlal recounts the days in his school.

Although the school was a government institution, the atmosphere in the school was not free from casteism. There were some prejudices and feelings. All such insulting refusals and ill-treatment engendered in me a burning hatred for Hinduism. In my childhood days, this was the experience | met at the hands of my co-religionists the galling humiliation and the inhuman treatment under which my whole community had been labouring for untold ages. (14)

In this way, Shyamlal enacts what Judith Butler might describe as a “resignification” of the body. He reclaims a stigmatized identity and reconstitutes it as a source of empowerment. This transformation is deeply political. Shyamlal does not simply transcend his caste background; he actively challenges and subverts the very structures that sought to oppress him. His ascent to positions of power—most notably, as Vice-Chancellor—disrupts the symbolic and institutional frameworks of caste hierarchy. It unsettles the spatial and administrative logic of Brahmanical dominance, which historically marginalized Dalit bodies to the peripheries of social and intellectual life. Shyamlal's journey underscores that caste is not merely a social institution—it is also embodied, lived, and contested through the physical self. His narrative compels us to rethink dignity not only as the absence of humiliation but as the presence of full and equal participation in public life, knowledge production, and institutional leadership.

In conclusion, this aspect of Shyamlal's life reveals the profound interconnection between caste, stigma, and corporeality, while also offering a powerful vision of embodied resistance. The transformation of the Dalit body—from impurity to dignity, from exclusion to inclusion, from silence to voice—emerges as a central metaphor for liberation, recognition, and social transformation.

Education as a Way to Liberation and Equality

In *The Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor*, education emerges as both a central theme and a transformative tool for achieving liberation and equality. For Professor Shyamlal, education is not merely utilitarian or career-oriented—it is a profound means of self-empowerment, resistance, and identity reconstruction. His life narrative powerfully illustrates how learning can catalyze radical transformation, particularly for historically marginalized communities like the Dalits. At the ideological core of Shyamlal's journey is Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's triadic call: “Educate, Agitate, Organize.” This mantra forms the foundational logic of his autobiography, where education is positioned as the first and most essential step on the long path to social justice and dignity.

Shyamlal's early educational experiences are marked by struggle, exclusion, and humiliation, setting the tone for his lifelong pursuit of knowledge as resistance. For him, the school is not just a site of learning—it becomes a battlefield, a place where hope and oppression coexist. Education, in his experience, is not only a means to social mobility but also a pathway to psychological liberation. It enables him to unlearn internalized caste-based inferiority and challenge the very structures that attempt to devalue his humanity.

He approaches education not as a ladder to economic success, but as a method of mental decolonization—a way to reclaim his dignity in a system historically structured to deny it. Through academic achievement, critical thinking, and institutional recognition, Shyamlal contests the symbolic violence of caste, particularly the Brahmanical equation of knowledge with upper-caste purity and entitlement. His eventual academic triumph—culminating in a PhD and a Vice-Chancellorship—validates Ambedkarite philosophy in practice. Ambedkar envisioned education as not merely self-improvement but as a tool of democratic empowerment—one that cultivates an enlightened citizenry capable of demanding justice and equality. Shyamlal's life is a living embodiment of that vision.

Furthermore, his educational journey reflects the larger aspirations of the post-Independence Dalit movement. His role as a Dalit Vice-Chancellor signifies a profound reclamation of intellectual space—where historically silenced voices now contribute to knowledge production, influence institutional discourse, and shape educational policy. This is both a symbolic and material shift, representing the broader struggle for epistemic justice, institutional representation, and equal citizenship.

At the same time, Shyamlal's story does not romanticize education. His autobiography critically engages with the casteism entrenched within the educational system—exposing

how teachers perpetuate discrimination, deny opportunities, and uphold caste hierarchies under the guise of meritocracy. These experiences dismantle the illusion of a neutral academic space and reveal the persistent barriers faced by Dalit students. Yet, his ability to succeed within such a hostile system demonstrates the power of subaltern agency to subvert and transform institutions designed to exclude them.

In Shyamlal's narrative, education is not a passive background element—it is the very site where caste is interrogated, resisted, and transcended. Through learning, the Dalit subject reclaims agency, engages with modernity, and challenges inherited hierarchies. True liberation, as his life shows, is not just the removal of external restrictions, but the awakening of critical consciousness. In essence, Shyamlal's educational and administrative success illustrates how education can be a deeply political act—a mode of resistance against caste-based injustice and a blueprint for a more equitable society.

Reservation, Institutional Power, Caste Equality, and Welfare

One of the most compelling dimensions of Professor Shyamlal's *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* is his strategic use of institutional power to advance caste justice and equality. As a senior academic and administrator, Shyamlal emerges not only as a beneficiary of affirmative action but also as a committed advocate for its continued and equitable implementation. His narrative serves as a powerful voice in defense of reservations—not as concessions, but as constitutional rights aimed at correcting deep-rooted historical injustices.

Shyamlal firmly rejects the dominant upper-caste narrative that dismisses reservations as a “threat to merit.” He critiques this argument as a casteist tool designed to delegitimize Dalit presence in elite spaces and make them feel unwelcome in institutions. For him, reservations are not about privilege; they are about justice, representation, and redress. He reclaims reservation as a redistributive mechanism, embedded in the constitutional vision of equality, meant to dismantle centuries of social exclusion and structural marginalization. Through both words and actions, he emphasizes that reservations are essential to building a truly democratic and inclusive society.

As Vice-Chancellor, Shyamlal actively used his administrative authority to implement and expand reservation mandates in faculty recruitment, policy-making, and university governance. His tenure was marked by a deliberate effort to ensure greater representation of Dalits in academic and bureaucratic roles. This assertive approach frequently drew resistance from entrenched upper-caste interests, demonstrating how institutional casteism often operates in subtle and covert ways. His memoir reveals how the battle over reservations is not only fought in public discourse but also within the quiet corridors of power, appointments, and policy frameworks.

Importantly, Shyamlal's vision of caste justice is intersectional and nuanced. He refuses to see the Dalit community as a monolith. Instead, he draws attention to internal disparities within Scheduled Castes—particularly the marginalization of communities like the Bhangis, who often remain politically

invisible even within Dalit politics. His advocacy for sub-categorization within SC reservations reflects a sophisticated understanding of intra-caste inequality and the need for more targeted policy measures. This makes him a significant voice in ongoing debates around refining affirmative action to ensure it reaches the most disadvantaged among the disadvantaged.

Shyamlal's journey underscores that Dalit representation in positions of institutional power is not merely symbolic—it is structurally transformative. He argues that personal educational achievement or individual success is insufficient. For systemic change to occur, Dalits must occupy decision-making positions and fundamentally reshape institutions that have long excluded them. His work as an administrator is inherently political: it challenges dominant caste norms in academia and reimagines institutional structures grounded in equity, accountability, and social justice.

The concluding sections of his autobiography function almost as a manifesto for Dalit empowerment within the state apparatus. His application of reservation policies, policy innovation, and administrative intervention demonstrates that institutions can serve as instruments of social change—if they are led by individuals committed to fairness and redistribution. For Shyamlal, reservation is not an obstacle to democracy; it is one of its most vital engines. His argument is clear: true inclusion, equality, and liberation are only possible when Dalits are not merely present in institutions, but actively shaping and leading them.

Identity and the Paradox of Elite Dalit Identity

In *The Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor*, one of the most persistent and complex themes is the protagonist's negotiation of identity as a Dalit individual navigating elite academic and institutional spaces. Professor Shyamlal's journey—from the margins of caste oppression to the apex of intellectual and administrative power—lays bare the profound contradictions and emotional burdens carried by those who embody the paradox of being an “elite Dalit.”

Despite his exceptional accomplishments—as a Vice-Chancellor, public intellectual, and nationally recognized scholar—Shyamlal remains shadowed by the social weight of his caste identity. His belonging to the Bhangi community, one of the most stigmatized within the Scheduled Castes, continues to mark him both visibly and invisibly. He recounts how higher-caste peers often greet his presence with suspicion, condescension, or subtle hostility, frequently attributing his rise to “quota benefits” rather than merit. Even with impeccable academic credentials, he remains on the margins of elite intellectual circles—an outsider within.

This persistent exclusion reveals the covert mechanisms through which caste survives even within modern, seemingly “meritocratic” institutions. While these spaces claim neutrality, they are often governed by informal networks, cultural codes, and epistemic gatekeeping that reinforce caste privilege. Shyamlal's experience illustrates how institutions may outwardly appear inclusive, but internally reproduce

Brahmanical dominance through soft barriers and social exclusion.

Yet the friction is not only external. Shyamlal also encounters criticism from within the Dalit community, where some accuse him of being co-opted by the very system that oppresses them, or of failing to do enough for his own people. This internal tension highlights the “double bind” faced by many elite Dalits: they are expected to assimilate into elite spaces to gain influence, while simultaneously being held accountable to their communities for authentic representation. His life reflects a form of “double consciousness”—being caught between institutional legitimacy and community allegiance.

Sociologist Gopal Guru addresses this contradiction in his discourse on the “ethics of representation,” which interrogates the complex responsibility of representing a marginalized group from a position of relative privilege. Shyamlal does not evade this ethical dilemma. On the contrary, he confronts it with clarity. In his memoirs, he emphasizes that his caste identity, his lived experiences as a Bhangi, and his deep-rooted ties to his village and community remain central to his intellectual and political worldview. Rather than shedding his identity for institutional acceptance, he reclaims it as a moral and political anchor.

This struggle echoes Sharmila Rege’s concept of “Dalit standpoint epistemology,” which centres knowledge production in the embodied experiences of caste marginalization. Shyamlal’s autobiography is not merely a personal success story—it is a deliberate intervention into dominant knowledge systems. His voice challenges the epistemological frameworks of upper-caste academia and asserts the validity of a Dalit intellectual tradition rooted in lived reality. In elite spaces, his identity is neither diluted nor hidden—it is articulated, politicized, and made central, even if this invites discomfort, exclusion, or backlash.

Throughout the text, we see how the visibility of an elite Dalit identity provokes contradictory responses. For some, Shyamlal becomes an inspiration—a testament to the transformative power of reservation and education. For others, he is a threat—a disruption of entrenched hierarchies and a challenge to caste privilege. Yet Shyamlal resists being used as either a token or proof of a casteless meritocracy. He is acutely aware that his achievements are not isolated victories but are linked to broader collective struggles. His role, as he sees it, is one of systemic intervention, not individual exceptionalism.

This brings into focus a broader sociological reality: that elite Dalit identity is constantly under surveillance—scrutinized both from above (by dominant castes) and from below (by one’s own community). It involves navigating the tension between symbolic inclusion and actual transformation, between expectation and lived contradiction. Shyamlal’s story shows that institutional power does not erase caste; it merely reshapes its contours and the forms through which resistance must operate.

He exemplifies what might be called the “Ambedkarite elite”—a figure who does not disown his origins but uses his access to elite platforms to challenge systemic injustice from within. His narrative is not one of assimilation, but of assertion. It presents

an alternative model of success: not as conformity to dominant norms, but as a radical reworking of institutional structures through a Dalit lens.

In the end, *The Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* offers a profound meditation on the contradictions, responsibilities, and transformative potential of Dalit upward mobility. It invites readers to critically engage with what it means to belong, to lead, and to resist within a system that continues to be shaped by caste.

Ethnography, Narrative Style, and Testimony

One of the most interesting things about *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* is its unique and mixed narrative approach. It goes beyond a simple life story to include personal testimony, anthropological observation, and social comment. The protagonist does not just tell stories about his life; he puts them in the context of caste, policy, and institutional authority, placing the intimate inside broader social and political systems. This mix of genres makes the autobiography a complex work that is both a memoir, a sociological case study, and a political statement.

The inclusion of ethnographic details is very important. He has written about the material and social realities of growing up in a *Bhangi* village in rural Rajasthan with anthropological accuracy. His depictions of housing, food, sanitation, rituals, and everyday humiliations are not just stories. They make up an insider’s record of what it was like to be a Dalit. Such detailed ethnography breaks apart the prevalent caste tales and frees the academic gaze from colonialism, giving Dalits the chance to write and tell their own experiences.

The autobiography is truly based on witness, which is a strong way to communicate the truth in Dalit literature. His writing is similar to the testimonial style found in works like Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* or Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke*. He talks of times when he was left out, such as when he was refused water, forced to sit alone in school, or made fun of by his friends. This autobiography, on the other hand, focuses on agency and intervention rather than the victim.

His story also includes numbers, such as literacy rates, job statistics, and caste demographics. These additions make his points stronger and give his criticism of systematic inequity more weight. For example, when he talks about reservation policies, he doesn’t just provide his viewpoint; he backs it up with policy analysis and historical context to illustrate how these policies are based on constitutional requirements for social fairness rather than being acts of charity.

The autobiography is a call to action for social change. Shyamlal says that autobiography is not an aim in itself, but a call to action via both story and criticism. His life story shows what can happen when legislation, education, and personal determination all work together. It motivates readers, especially Dalit youth, to not only work toward their own achievement but also to work for change in the system.

In the end, the way the story is portrayed in *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* is not merely a literary choice; it is also an inspirational act. It combines autobiographical writing with

ethnography and social analysis to come up with a new way to use Dalit autobiography to break down caste, rewrite history, and take back intellectual space. His art is a compelling illustration of how personal and political issues may come together to tell a story of resistance and change.

CONCLUSION

Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor redefines the Dalit autobiography—not just as a tale of survival, but as a powerful narrative of leadership, resilience, and institutional transformation. Shyamlal's journey from caste-based exclusion to academic authority challenges the conventional victim-outsider narrative and offers a compelling vision of Dalit agency from within the system. More than a personal memoir, his story becomes a blueprint for empowerment. It demonstrates how education, affirmative action, and ethical leadership can dismantle the barriers of caste. By framing education as liberation, reservation as justice, and institutional reform as resistance, the autobiography merges personal experience with political purpose—enriching both Dalit literature and the broader discourse on social justice.

The text serves as both testimony and manifesto. It urges educators, policymakers, and civil society to honor the ideals of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and continue the unfinished task of building equitable institutions. Shyamlal's life is a call to action: to dismantle caste privilege and to create spaces where marginalized voices lead and transform. Ultimately, this autobiography affirms that subaltern voices can reclaim history, reshape identity, and imagine new futures. It is not just a reflection on the past, but a roadmap for a more inclusive and just India. Anyone concerned with human dignity, equality, and social transformation will find in Shyamlal's life both inspiration and direction.

REFERENCE

- Jaiadia S. *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-chancellor*. Universal Publication; 2001.
- Ambedkar BR. *The End of Caste*. Navayana Publishing; 2014.
- Bama. *A Dalit Woman's Life in Karukku*. Translated by Holmström L. Oxford University Press; 2000.
- Deshpande S. *A Sociological Look at Modern India*. Penguin; 2010.
- Gopal G. Dalit Politics in Modern India. *Critical Quest*. 2001.
- Gopal G. Dalit from Margin to Mainstream. *India Today*. 2000.
- Saxena S. Stories of Assertion in Dalit Life Writing. *Journal of South Asian Literature*. 2018;53(2):44–59.
- Rege S. *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Telling the Stories of Dalit Women*. Zubaan; 2006.
- Thorat S, Newman KS. *Blocked by Caste: Social Exclusion and Economic Discrimination in India Today*. Oxford University Press; 2010.
- Valmiki O. *A Dalit's Life: Joothan*. Translated by Mukherjee AP. Columbia University Press; 2003.
- Waman N. Dalit Autobiographies: Forms of Resistance. *Indian Literature*. 2005;49(5):165–171.
- Zelliot E. *Essays on the Ambedkar Movement: From Untouchable to Dalit*. Manohar, 2001.

Creative Commons (CC) License

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.