



POTRAYAL DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF CASTE IN ENGLISH NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

It contextualizes caste hierarchy prevailing in India. It deals with the issues of marginalization of lower caste people, their lack of voice and their subjectivity as reflected in the novel. This study has investigated that caste was not only in past but in present scenario also is a definitive aspect of Indian society. It is depiction of the human feelings and aspirations of the lower caste people, their attempts to create a new order, the dangers and difficulties which confront them in their task.

This article tries to interact with Indian English fiction narratives and their representation within the academy as a nationwide, secularism, but mostly casteless land. That point raised is about the relationship between caste and the English language in respect to phenomena that are completely ignorant of scientific knowledge. Caste or Varna is certainly not the creation of God, the privileged class created this for their own selfish gains. Many great Scholars and writers like Dr. B R Ambedkar, Om PrakashValmiki, Kanchallaiaah, Sharan Kumar Limbale, and others have taught a relentless battle against the caste system by their thoughts, ideas, and writings.

Keyword: - Caste, Purity, Population, Novels, literature

I. INTRODUCTION

A few decades ago the caste system controlled every aspect in the life of an ordinary Indian, like the profession, the marriage partner and the everyday life. One does not really know about its origin but it is assumed that the castes were introduced by priests to steady their position of power. The myth of Purusha, the divine ancestor, can give an explanation for the emergence of the main castes called varnas in Sanskrit. The Brahmans originated from Purushamouth, his arms are represented by the Kshatriyas, his thighs by the Vaishyas and the Shudras are building his feet. The Brahmans traditionally were priests and academics, the Kshatriyas warriors and superior

officers, the Vaishyas land owners, farmers and merchants and the Shudras mechanics and day labourers. Below these four castes the Untouchables are found, called Paria, Harijans or Dalits. The four varnas are again split into jatis (subcastes), of which 2000 to 3000 are said to exist.

In a multi – lingual country like India, Indian Literature in English cannot be studied in isolation, as many Indian English writers happen to be bilingual and are nourished on native as well foreign literary traditions. Hence, there is an urgent need for correlating the Indian Regional Literatures with Indian English Literature to set a broader pattern of thoughts and emotions of Indian people as a whole. The scholars of Indian writing in English are also in a deliberate need to know the cultures and life style of specific region in connection with India as a whole.

The caste system is one of the most dehumanizing Institutions of our society, which we are following since ancient times. Despite this, the system has grown stronger than becoming weak no matter whether you are rich or poor. This brutal custom is excruciatingly painful, it violates human dignity and identity, majority of people in India are still following it blindly. We are all basically human beings though we are identified in terms of different castes and religions. The same blood runs in our veins though we follow different caste and creed. The caste system was created by the priestly class to retain its hegemony over society.

II. CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

In many autobiographies written by the Dalits, we come across how Dalit children are ill-treated without allowing them to enter the classrooms, not allowing them to join with other children they were treated like animals. The Dalits were meant for leatherworking, street sweeping, agriculture work, and scavenging, if they did not clean latrines, dead animal skinning, and remove the carcasses, and the social life of the upper caste will be completely in a mess. Recent development in the Una district of Gujarat is a reminder of the terrible situation caused by caste conflicts. Many argue that Dalit autobiographical narratives are an unstructured, artless outpouring of unmediated experience and have become repetitive and stereotypical, in my point of view they are grim reminders of the horrible caste situation in India.

Throughout India, individuals are also ranked according to their wealth and power. For example, there are "big men" (bare admi , in Hindi) and "little men" (chhoteadmi) everywhere. "Big men" sit confidently on chairs, while "little men" come before them to make requests, either standing or crouching down on their haunches, certainly not presuming to sit beside a man of high status as an equal. Even men of nearly equal status who might share a string cot to sit on take their places carefully--the higher-ranking man at the head of the cot, the lowerranking man at the foot.

Within families and kinship groupings, there are many distinctions of hierarchy. Men outrank women of the same or similar age, and senior relatives outrank junior relatives. Several other kinship relations involve formal respect. For example, in northern India, a daughter-in-law of a household shows deference to a daughter of a household. Even among young siblings in a

household, there is constant acknowledgment of age differences: younger siblings never address an older sibling by name, but rather by respectful terms for elder brother or elder sister. However, an older sibling may address the younger by name (see Linguistic Relations, ch. 4). Even in a business or academic setting, where colleagues may not openly espouse traditional observance of caste or class ranking behavior, they may set up fictive kinship relations, addressing one another by kinship terms reflecting family or village-style hierarchy. For example, a younger colleague might respectfully address an older colleague as chachaji (respected father's younger brother), gracefully acknowledging the superior position of the older colleague.

III. MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF CASTE IN NOVELS

Untouchability is an important topic in the God of Small Things. When Mammachi is referring to the past, there is a part in which is said that the Untouchables were not allowed to walk on public roads and that they had to wipe out their footprints so that nobody of a higher caste could accidentally step into them. They had to cover their mouths while they were speaking so that nobody had to breathe in their polluted air. They actually were not given permission to exist. This non-existence is referred to several times in the book for example when Velutha does not leave footprints or ripples in the water. This makes him almost inhuman and supernatural.

In Hinduism one believes in rebirth. This is a considerable part of the caste system as it explains some facts which are difficult to understand. Hindus believe that if one lives a moral and religious life and does not commit crimes or injustices one will be reborn in a superior caste. As a conclusion one will be reborn in a lower caste if one does not respect moral and religious instructions and the law. Thus the Untouchables believe that it is justified that they are badly treated and avoided by the community and hence bear their nearly unbearable life. This aspect the author refers to in the person of VelyaPaapen, Velutha's father. He feels that it is not right for his son to work in the pickle factory, for this is not a position an Untouchable may hold. When VelyaPaapen finds out about his son's relationship to Ammu he is so ashamed that he offers to kill Velutha with his own hands.

In the Indian constitution of 1950 the Untouchability is legally abolished. Today any discrimination due to the caste system is forbidden by law. Nevertheless the caste system has not disappeared from everyday life. Notably in villages the Untouchables are still excluded from the society and live in separate colonies. However, contingents in the education system and in public administration are granted to Untouchables in order to integrate them into the society and increase their standard of living.

The unjust and malice treatment meted out to the Untouchables in India have been a matter of great concern. Since times immemorial, they have been suffering severe Humiliations at the hands of the upper sections of the society. Even after attaining political autonomy, there has been no improvement in their status. 'Caste' still continues to play a highly important role in shaping the

lives of the masses. Today there are about 250 million Untouchables. Although the Government has banned the Caste discrimination since 1950, but prejudice continues. Postcolonial Indian society has managed to achieve only political liberation, and not the social freedom; though the later certainly needs to be invoked in an active way. Because caste has got the inherent capacity of positioning oneself, it can be, at once, both beneficial as well as dangerous, to the people who practice it. The emergence of so many regional political parties in India has only magnified this problem.

They have made the 'untouchables' and other castes occupying the lower hierarchy in the society a political tool through which they construct their own identities. Caste, then, can be highly paradoxical, especially when we view it in the context of the Indian society.

Here in this paper, I propose to examine the maltreatment meted out to Velutha, one of the characters in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). Before I proceed, it would not be a bad idea to have a look at the word 'caste'. The word 'caste' is derived from the Portuguese word 'casta' which means pure or unadulterated (sharing a Latin root, with the word 'chaste'). The caste system in India is an important part of ancient Hindu tradition and dates back to 1200 BCE. In ancient India there developed a social system in which people were divided into separate close communities. These communities are known in English as caste.

It is generally believed that the origin of the caste system can be found in Hinduism, but it has plagued the entire Indian social system. The caste system in the religious form is basically a simple division of society in which there are four castes arranged in a hierarchy and below them the outcast. But socially the caste system was more complicated, with much more castes and sub-castes and other divisions. The religious theories explain how the four Varnas were founded, but they do not explain how the Jats in each Varna or the untouchables were founded. According the Rig Veda, the ancient Hindu book, the primal man - Purush - destroyed himself to create a human society. The different Varnas were created from different parts of his body. The Brahmans were created from his head; the Kshatriyas from his hands; the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. The Varna hierarchy is determined by the descending order of the different organs from which the Varnas were created. Other religious theory claims that the Varnas were created from the body organs of Brahma, who is the creator of the world.

Presently, there are about 3,000 castes and 25,000 subcastes in India, each related to a specific occupation. This occupation, it must be remembered, has been assigned to them by the ancient rishis. These different castes fall under four basic varnas,

Brahmins ----- priests

Kshatriyas----- warriors

Vaishyas ----- traders

Sudras ----- laborers

The lot of the socially deprived, the untouchables, has occupied Indian English writers centrally and remarkable works have been written on the plight of these lowest of the lowly. One of the prominent novelists to have focused on it is Mulk Raj Anand whose novel *The Untouchable* has become one of the strongest works on the subject. Its protagonist Bakha, though portrayed in a different mould, is as strong as Velutha. Arundhati Roy has been targeted by critics for not treating the subject as sharply as it deserved.

The criticism loses much of its sting if we take into account the fact *The God of Small Things* is about several things at the same time. Questions have been raised about many social institutions, assumptions and agencies that affect common man's and woman's life. Besides being a political satire, as we have seen in the last section, it is also about the treatment of woman in traditional Indian society and, more importantly, the untouchables, as one scholar observes, "Untouchables as a canker are dealt with in the novel at same depth"

IV. CASTE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY DIVERSITY OF COMMUNITY AND GENDER NORMS

Community plays a determining role in the generation of normative patterns and the creation, continuation, transformation or reproduction of gender norms are constructed differently in each community, the variations being related to the diversity is occupational, geographical and historical factors. The various aspects of community like notions of social and personal morality, privilege defined at birth, and the space to negotiate and choose, have a direct impact on the lives of women.

Men and women belonging to the same social group do not necessarily have similar life experience. Both Pyari and Sukhram in *KabtakPukaroon* are repressed because of their lack of social status. The experience of deprivation is similar in some situations but completely dissimilar in others, while Sukhram is beaten up physically, Pyari is sexually harassed. Sex, social status and community ethics thus interplay with each other to shape the nature and quality of individual experience.

Different determinants need to be examined while studying the process through which gender norms are created. Class and caste are in some cases cognate's categories and this becomes evident in the existence of different sets of social norms for women belonging to high and low class or caste.

For example, the norm of seclusion and segregation that operates for the Rajput women of *Inside the Haveli* becomes redundant for the women who serve them. The division between the male and female real the public and the private sphere in the Rajput community reflect patriarchal control.

The study of these different communities provides a comparative perspective and makes us aware that a number of gender stereo types that are largely accepted by the middle class as a fixed,

almost ‘natural given are actually socially constructed’. The love between Pyari and Kajari, the two wives of Sukhram in *KabTakPukaroon* challenges the generally accepted view that wives of the seal man must be jealous of each other.

The novel also shows how that Nat community does not judge female chastity and faithfulness according to the norms of middle class sexual morality, and prostitution is considered almost a part of the natural order of things that a women cannot denies.

V. FINDINGS

It is time to realize that the Indian English writer cannot claim to be superior to the regional writer as they happen to write in a world language. They are no more rivals or enemies or aliens, fighting desperately for space. Actually, they are blood brothers, born of the same mother. They have more in common with each other. They both express the Indian sensibility and psyche, and narrative sensibility. Indian literature is a vast ocean into which several mighty rivers merge. Among these are rivers like Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, etc

By the end of 19th century there was a major shift in the Indian writings. Earlier the writing dealt with the themes of freedom struggle, identity, partition, exploitation, social issues and nationality. Now they took step forward to look into post – colonial, feminism, gender and most intricate and complex of all problems is the caste system in India. The findings highlight the difference in approach in presenting a national issue “caste” in David’s and valmiki’s novel. My interest in caste study drove me to work on the issues of caste as a theme in mainstream and marginal writing.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

This article suggests that language is not a barrier to have a comprehensible and complete view of any literature. Therefore one should always be aware of Indian English literature (mainstream literature) and Indian regional literature (regional literature) to interpret. The sensitive issues like caste, gender and other social issues should be dealt more authentically by the mainstream writers. The mainstream writers though they use flowery language to portray the susceptible issues it should reveal the approximate concern.

VII. CONCLUSION

Caste is not specific for India and no country, despite the issue whether fundamental to its reality, should be confined to a single social group. Nonetheless, understanding India necessitates an understanding of caste, whose complexities are undeniably complex. This might not be one of India's foremost visible social aspects; this is also at the root of several of the country's historic and contemporary heresies. What else is caste, and how does it affect one's life? User may well have got to hear (perhaps in a high school or college classroom) that India has four ancient and

unchanging castes, ranging from Brahmins at the top, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in the center, as well as Lower caste only at base, with such a group followed like so Lower castes correct term is now Dalits—even farther and farther down. All Indian English writers used to write about Dalit or untouchables, how they are deprived of upper caste and succeeded in their life.

Whatever the conflict between the two schools of writers, one interesting thing is to note is that, they are able to produce good works of literature that stand the test of time. It is hypothesized that the theme of caste is represented more authentically in marginal writing than in the mainstream.

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