

Discourses of Caste Identity, Social Inequality, Colonial Oppression, and Marginalized Voices: A Humanitarian Perspective on the Works of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama

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Abstract—This paper examines the representation of caste identity, social inequality, colonial oppression and marginalized experiences in the literary works of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy and Bama from a humanitarian perspective. The study investigates *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* to explore the realities of caste discrimination, poverty, labour exploitation and colonial domination experienced by the oppressed sections of Indian society. Social realism of Anand reveals the inhuman conditions of the marginalized and pleads for dignity, equality and social justice. The paper also discusses *The God of Small Things*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* and *The End of Imagination* with special reference to Roy's critique of caste hierarchy, political violence, social exclusion and cultural alienation. Her stories focus on the silenced voices of women, minorities and socially neglected communities. Further, the study discusses *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam* to demonstrate Dalit consciousness, gender oppression and resistance against caste-based marginalization. Bama's writings are a powerful articulation of lived experiences of the Dalit communities and highlight self-respect, identity and collective resistance. The paper concludes that these writers employ literature as a formidable tool to contest oppression, reconstruct marginalized identities and project humanitarian values in Indian society.

Index Terms—Caste Identity, Social Inequality, Colonial Oppression, Humanitarian Perspective, Dalit Consciousness, Marginalization, Resistance, Indian Writing in English, Subaltern Studies, Social Realism

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian Writing in English has developed as a vigorous literary tradition that mirrors the socio-cultural, political and economic realities of Indian society.

Many Indian writers have used literature as a medium to depict the struggles of marginalized communities victimized by caste discrimination, poverty, colonial domination, and social exclusion. The literary works of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy and Bama hold an important place in Indian literature because of their humanitarian concern for oppressed and marginalized people. Through their writings they expose the grim realities of the caste hierarchy, social injustice, gender discrimination and political oppression that exist in Indian society.

The novels *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud* are representations of the pain endured by oppressed classes in colonial and caste systems. Moreover, *The God of Small Things*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, and *The End of Imagination* deal with issues of social discrimination, politics of violence, and identity crises. Besides, the novels *Karukku*, *Sangati*, and *Vanmam* reflect the lived experience of the Dalits and focus on both caste and gender oppression.

The writings of Indian authors in English have consistently brought to light the issues faced by disadvantaged groups that find themselves living in oppressive conditions within hierarchical societies. The authors chosen here may come from varying historical backgrounds and societies; however, they have one thing in common: they all have written about issues concerning human beings and social justice. Mulk Raj Anand has been recognized for his literary depiction of social realism through untouchability, poverty, and labor exploitation in colonial India. Arundhati Roy has addressed the issue of caste discrimination, political violence, and alienation

within modern-day India. Bama, as a Dalit author, has drawn attention to the life of Dalits.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the promises of equality and social justice made by the constitution, the reality of caste oppression, exploitation, and marginalization continues to persist among sizable portions of the population in India. Literature becomes crucial in highlighting the existence of these problems and giving voice to those who have been oppressed. In the chosen texts, it becomes clear that issues of caste oppression, colonial rule, gender oppression, and marginalization persist. The question that this research seeks to answer is the portrayal of the plight of these marginalized people in literature.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To study the depiction of caste identity and social oppression in the chosen novels.
- To analyze the depiction of colonial oppression in the works of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama.
- To analyze the depiction of the humanitarian approach in the chosen novels.
- To study the depiction of marginalized communities in the chosen novels and their struggle for respect and identity.
- To find out the way literature acts as a tool for resistance against social oppression.

1.3 Research Questions

- How do the chosen authors depict the issue of caste identity and social inequality in their writing?
- How does colonial oppression and exploitation come across through the chosen texts?
- How are marginalized people portrayed through the literature chosen?
- What humanitarian ideas do the characters and stories in the chosen books express?
- How have the writers challenged oppressive social systems through their literature?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present study holds great significance because of its focus on the use of Indian Writing in English in fighting against social injustice and human misery. This research helps in literary studies as it explores the

way literature portrays caste oppression, economic exploitation, colonial rule, and social ostracism. Moreover, it stresses the importance of the humanistic perspective of the concerned writers and their contributions towards raising social consciousness and resistance literature.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Previous Studies

Several scholars have examined the representation of caste discrimination, social inequality, colonial exploitation, and marginalized identities in Indian Writing in English. The literary works of Mulk Raj Anand have received critical attention for their realistic portrayal of oppressed communities and socio-economic struggles. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, in *Indian Writing in English*, states that Anand's fiction reflects humanitarian concern and social realism by exposing untouchability, poverty, and labor exploitation in colonial India (Iyengar 356). The novels *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud* are widely recognized as significant texts that depict caste oppression and economic inequality (Anand 45).

Scholarly studies on Arundhati Roy mainly focus on caste hierarchy, political violence, and social alienation. Researchers have analyzed *The God of Small Things* through postcolonial and feminist perspectives, emphasizing the representation of gender discrimination and social exclusion (Roy 67). Critics argue that Roy challenges rigid social structures and exposes the suffering of marginalized communities through fragmented narrative techniques and political commentary (Nayar 112). Similarly, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* explores themes of minority identity, state violence, and displacement in contemporary India (Roy 94).

The writings of Bama are considered important contributions to Dalit literature and feminist discourse. Scholars observe that *Karukku* portrays the humiliation and discrimination experienced by Dalit Christians within caste-based social systems (Bama 23). In *Sangati and Vanmam*, Bama highlights the intersection of caste oppression, patriarchy, and economic exploitation affecting Dalit women and communities (Rajkumar 58). Her works strongly articulate Dalit consciousness, resistance, and identity assertion.

2.2 Research Gap

Although many studies have analyzed the individual writings of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama, limited research has been conducted from a combined humanitarian perspective that collectively examines caste identity, social inequality, colonial oppression, and marginalized experiences. Most earlier studies focus separately on postcolonialism, feminism, or Dalit consciousness in selected texts (Spivak 271). However, there is a lack of integrated research exploring how these writers collectively portray oppression, resistance, and the quest for dignity among marginalized communities. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this gap by providing a broader socio-political and humanitarian analysis of the selected works.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The present study employs multiple literary theories to analyze the themes of oppression, identity, and resistance in the selected texts. Postcolonial theory is used to examine the effects of colonial domination, cultural displacement, and power structures in Indian society. Edward Said argues that colonial discourse creates systems of domination and cultural marginalization (Said 25). Feminist theory helps analyze gender discrimination and patriarchal oppression, especially in the writings of Arundhati Roy and Bama.

Marxist criticism is applied to study class conflict, labour exploitation, and economic inequality represented in the selected novels. Subaltern studies theory, particularly Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of marginalized voices, examines how oppressed communities are silenced within dominant social structures (Spivak 287). Dalit theory provides a framework to understand caste oppression, untouchability, and Dalit identity assertion. B. R. Ambedkar strongly criticizes caste hierarchy and advocates equality and social justice in *Annihilation of Caste* (Ambedkar 44). Trauma theory is also used to analyze the psychological suffering and emotional scars caused by social oppression, violence, and exclusion.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative and analytical methods have been employed in this research to analyze and understand themes like caste identity, social disparity, colonialism, and marginalization, which feature prominently in the literary writings of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama. The research is an interpretive one that will try to understand and analyze the socio-political and humanitarian aspects of literature. A literary and theoretical analysis will be used in order to understand how the selected writers capture oppression, social exclusion, resistance, and formation of identities among the Indian populace. In addition, post-colonial, feminist, Marxist, Dalit, and subaltern perspectives will be integrated in the analysis of the selected pieces of literature.

3.2 Primary Sources

The primary sources for this study consist of selected literary works written by Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama. The selected texts include *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud* by Mulk Raj Anand; *The God of Small Things*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, and *The End of Imagination* by Arundhati Roy; and *Karukku*, *Sangati*, and *Vanmam* by Bama. These texts serve as the foundational materials for analyzing themes related to oppression, caste discrimination, social injustice, and resistance.

Literary texts written by Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama form the basis of the primary sources used for this research. Literary texts to be used for analysis will include *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, and *Two Leaves and a Bud* by Mulk Raj Anand, *The God of Small Things*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, and *The End of Imagination* by Arundhati Roy, and *Karukku*, *Sangati*, and *Vanmam* by Bama.

3.3 Secondary Sources

Some of the secondary sources employed in the present study are scholarly books, journal articles, research papers, literary criticism, and scholarly websites on Indian Writing in English, Dalit literature, postcolonial criticism, feminist criticism, Marxist criticism, and subaltern studies. Significant literary criticism written by eminent literary critics like K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,

Edward Said, and B. R. Ambedkar is incorporated to support the theory and analysis involved in this project.

3.4 Method of Analysis

This research uses textual analysis as well as thematic analysis for the examination of selected literary works. The research analyzes the portrayal of oppression on the basis of caste, poverty, social marginalization, gender discrimination, colonial oppression, and oppression in general through close readings and interpretations of the literary works. Thematic analysis is applied in order to highlight some themes that recur throughout the works analyzed in the research including issues like identity crisis, social marginalization, dignity of man/woman, and subaltern consciousness. In addition, discourse analysis is applied to explore how the use of language in the literary works analyzed defies dominant socio-political structures of power.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Caste Oppression and Social Hierarchy

The theme of oppression, discrimination, and exclusion on the basis of caste hierarchy dominates in the literary creations of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama. The authors depict the discriminatory nature of the rigid caste hierarchy in the Indian society through the lives of their respective characters, thereby showing how such oppressive nature of social hierarchy leads to the social pain of marginalization of the concerned community. Through his story *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand captures the reality of caste oppression through the depiction of the sufferings of Bakha, the untouchable sweeper boy, who is treated cruelly under the social injustice prevailing due to the caste hierarchy.

Similarly, Arundhati Roy explores the impact of such rigid social structure in her story, *The God of Small Things*, where she shows how Ammu and Velutha are victims of social prejudice.

4.2 Marginalized Voices and Identity

The chosen literary works highlight the voices and perspectives of those people who find it difficult to claim their identity and humanity against oppressive social systems. Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama utilize literature as a medium through which to

bring to light the identities of marginalized groups of people who experience oppression by society. Coolie introduces Munoo, who represents the challenges faced by poor working-class people and the oppressed classes. Through the journey in the novel, Munoo goes through emotional hardships caused by exploitation and displacement from one place to another for the sake of survival. The character has no stable identity due to the lack of recognition and dignity in society.

In a similar way, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* portrays fragmented identities that arise from social exclusion, political violence, and cultural estrangement. Roy brings out the experiences of marginalized people, transgender people, and communities that have been socially ostracized through her writing. The novel underscores the effects of marginalization on identity.

In the novel *Sangati*, Bama presents the common struggles of the Dalit women who overcome social oppression through their unity and fortitude. The book highlights how the marginalized women develop their sense of identity under the oppressive forces of caste and patriarchy. Using realistic narratives and oral story-telling techniques, Bama subverts mainstream narratives and gives a voice to the marginalized.

4.3 Colonialism and Economic Exploitation

Colonialism and exploitation contribute to marginalizing people in the literary works chosen above. The authors Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama illustrate how an oppressive system makes people suffer without dignity and basic human rights. The exploitation of Indian plantation workers in British colonies is exposed in the book *'Two Leaves and a Bud'* by Mulk Raj Anand. The protagonist Gangu experiences suffering as he works in poor and degrading conditions alongside his fellow plantation workers on British-owned tea plantations. Anand condemns the capitalist nature of the colonial system, where people are exploited but denied justice and equality.

Likewise, *The End of Imagination* denounces the political domination, militarism, and power relations in the world that lead to violence and economic disparity. Roy argues against the authorities that oppress weaker groups of people and undermine the value of humanity in the interest of nationalism and development.

Moreover, the writings of Bama highlight the issues faced by Dalits due to economic deprivation owing to discrimination based on caste, and the lack of education, adequate wages, and social mobility. In *Vanmam*, economic disparity leads to conflicts and divisions within the oppressed community. All these excerpts illustrate the effects of colonialism, capitalism, and social stratification on the plight of marginalized people.

4.4 Gender and Double Marginalization

Gender issues and double marginality are some of the main subjects of study within the literary works chosen. The oppression of women from low-caste backgrounds and marginalized communities is brought about by more than just economic and social factors; it is also due to patriarchal oppression. Gender oppression is intertwined with caste and class oppression to make women suffer doubly. In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu turns out to be an example of how patriarchal and social oppression can victimize women. Ammu's divorce, social alienation, and incestuous relationship with Velutha highlight how oppressive society can be towards women who break its moral rules.

Similarly, *Sangati* brings into focus the plight of Dalit women who have to struggle against poverty, violence at home, caste discrimination, and gender bias. Bama provides realistic sketches of women workers who work very hard but continue to be socially and economically repressed. Dalit women are doubly oppressed because not only do they receive discrimination from upper castes but also from the patriarchal society of their own caste. However, women in Bama's work are shown as strong people who resist being oppressed.

The book *Karukku* provides us with reflections of the author's personal experience with humiliation and discrimination as a member of a low caste who is also a woman. Using autobiography, Bama fights against the dominance of caste hierarchy and patriarchy. All these books together portray to us the harsh realities of gender oppression and the need for women's struggle and empowerment.

4.5 Humanitarian Vision in the Selected Texts

The common humanitarian ideology connects the chosen works of literature written by Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Bama. Literature becomes an

effective tool used by these authors to promote equality, kindness, justice, and dignity of humankind for oppressed peoples. The authors draw attention to social injustice and inspire their readers to criticize the discriminatory social system denying human rights and freedom to vulnerable people. The novel *Untouchable* by Anand is an example of his humanitarian attitude towards life; it describes the pain and humiliation suffered by Bakha owing to caste discrimination.

Likewise, Arundhati Roy offers a humanitarian viewpoint based on her opposition to political violence, caste system and social isolation. The characters in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* represent the plight of neglected people and minorities who have to fight to survive and earn respect. She stresses the significance of human empathy and emotions in a polarized society.

Social awareness and collectivism against any kind of oppression is evident from Bama's literary writings. Through her novels *Karukku* and *Sangati*, Bama brings forward the issues of self-respect, dignity, and empowerment among Dalits and especially Dalit women. These books reject casteism, promote equality, and call for societal change. Overall, all the chosen novels show how literature can be a tool of protest as well as humanistic activism.

V. FINDINGS

The research paper shows that the Indian English literary works reflect the true scenario of caste discrimination and social inequality in the present society. The selected literary texts clearly show the sufferings and degradation faced by people belonging to socially backward castes due to the existence of stringent caste system in society.

In addition, the marginal characters are always struggling to gain dignity, freedom, and an identity. Through their voices, there is an indication of rebellion against their oppressors and their longing for equality and recognition within society. The protagonists fight against the social obstacles by educating themselves, recognizing their individuality, and even rebelling against the oppressor.

Another significant point to note from the research study is the role played by literature as a great humanitarian resource in combating exploitation and oppression. The chosen authors speak out against

exploitation and oppression using their literary work. These literary works promote the idea of human qualities irrespective of any class or caste and urge people to empathize with the oppressed classes.

According to the findings, gender serves to further marginalize individuals, more particularly women from the lower strata of society. The female characters have been subjected to oppression both on the basis of their caste as well as their gender. This is because of the phenomenon of double marginalization.

Lastly, the research finds that not only do literary works reflect the social reality, but they also serve as tools for social awakening and change. Literature gives a voice to the marginalized sections of society and thus participates in the discourse related to issues of justice and equality.

5.1 Suggestions and Recommendations

According to the results of the study, there is an urgent need for placing greater emphasis on marginalized voices in Indian English literature. The schools and colleges should take initiative and try to incorporate literary pieces that highlight the issues like caste discrimination, social inequalities, and human concerns into their syllabus. In this way, awareness about social issues will be created among the students. Literature can play a very crucial role in promoting empathy and equality among people.

Moreover, it is recommended that researchers conduct interdisciplinary studies involving literature along with sociology, history, cultural studies, and gender studies in order to understand better the problems of oppression and issues related to identity. The task of academics and researchers is to raise awareness regarding the plight of the marginalized sections through seminars and conferences.

Another suggestion made by critics is the propagation and translation of literature from regions as well as from the Dalits into English and other languages to ensure their voice reaches the broader audience at the national and international level. This will go a long way in identifying their plight and culture.

Moreover, society must actively promote equality, social justice, and humanitarianism through opposition to discrimination and advocacy of social change. Both literature and education have an important role to play in making the world a better place.

5.2 Scope for Further Research

This study paves the way for future research in many ways. For example, future researchers can perform comparative analysis between Indian and other postcolonized literatures focusing on the similarities and dissimilarities that exist in relation to issues of oppression and identity.

Future studies could consider themes including trauma, resistance, subalternity, feminism, and intersectionality in literary works. Research could be conducted regarding the importance of education, language, and culture in the creation of identities among marginal groups.

In addition to this, literary scholars might investigate literature from contemporary times dealing with the issues of caste, gender, and social inequities from a modern-day perspective. Translation and interdisciplinary approaches will also offer further understanding in respect of how literature is connected to society and humanity.

VI. CONCLUSION

This current research focuses on the portrayal of issues such as caste oppression, marginalization, and humanitarian issues in Indian English literature. From this particular research on the chosen literary texts, it is clearly evident that literature serves as an effective tool for depicting real social phenomena and shedding light on the oppression suffered by oppressed groups. The authors describe the plight of marginalized people who have been victims of oppression, discrimination, poverty, and lack of human dignity due to strict social boundaries.

However, the research also reveals that marginalized characters always try hard to gain identity, equality, and self-respect despite the oppression that they are subjected to. Their struggle against discrimination is indicative of their strength and determination as well as the inherent nature of humans to seek liberation and acceptance. In their works, the selected authors stress the need for humanitarian principles like compassion, justice, equality, and empathy and ask us to raise questions about the oppressive systems and empathize with other's suffering.

An important aspect that has been contributed by this study is that of exploring the ways in which literary texts have a voice for the marginalized and subaltern groups. The contribution made by this study to literary

studies includes the linking of literature with social problems like caste discrimination, gender exploitation, and identity crisis.

Finally, it is clear from the findings of the study that Indian English literature is still making an important contribution toward fighting social injustices and bringing about humanitarian consciousness. This is due to the fact that the literary pieces chosen are still socially relevant in the sense that they motivate individuals to question social inequalities in terms of human dignity and equality.

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