



TREATMENT GIVEN TO SUBALTERN CHARACTERS IN INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Many novels depicting characters of low castes in Indian have been nominated and even awarded prestigious international awards . The matter of fact is that they were given maximum score for depicting low caste characters in their novel . The question is whether they present true , realistic ,authentic picture of Dalit life. Are India novels depicting Indian dalits become stereotyped ? Do they reflect Ambedkarism ? If not why ? How can Indian novels proceed without quoting Dr.Ambedkar's contribution ? What message these novels have for readers ? Do they present any optimistic view of life for millions of outcastes ? The fact is that only wearer knows where the shoe pinches. These and many questions need to be addressed . The paper intends to touch some of them.

Key words : untouchability , Ambedkarism , hypothesis, archipelagos.

INTRODUCTION

Visible and invisible untouchability in Indian Society is a stigma. The selfish arrangement of Varna system turned into watertight compartment , rooted deeply in the blood and mind of people and did not spare the literature too. The Indian novels based on stories of untouchables attracted international community and also bagged awards and international reputation for novelists. The novelists whoever bagged international prizes for their novels scored maximum score due the depiction of lower caste characters in their novels. Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand in 1935 , The Children of God by Shanta Rameshwar Rao, The Gods of Small Things by Arundhati Roy , Outcast –Life and Triumphs of an Untouchable Family in India by Dr.Narendra Jadhav , The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh are some of the land mark novels reflecting life of untouchables .It is the task of the novelist

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to present thought processes ,aspirations, customs and traditions in his work faithfully and realistically. But it needs to verify how sincerely and truthfully Indian novelists have presented the untouchable characters in their novels. The prima-faci reading reveals the fact that the novels written out of mere sympathy do not reflect the real zeal and spark of Amdekarism . Undoubtedly novels written in India on untouchables and their life must be justified with the parameters of Ambedkarism or it seems to be just a farce. The stuff of these novels is pain ,sufferings ,humiliation ,poverty ,injustice of the community which has been kept at the lowest strata for several centuries . It is the mercy shown to them that they are at least discussed less or more in Indian novels. But the close scrutiny reveals that the masters of words made their life stereotype and closed them in watertight compartment of mindless age old caste system. Dr.Ambedkar fought with their destiny and liberated them from their bondage of slavery . Now the question is who will make them free from the slavery permanently cemented by the literature .Who will challenge the Indian orientalism ?

There is also a question whether the voice of subalterns echoed in Indian novels is original, authentic and sincere. There is a space to argue that the life of subalterns reflected through the Indian novels is stereotype and failed to cross the boundaries .It presents dismal picture of their life . It moves round and round and provides no solution . Dr.Ambedkar says “What instructs me ,amuses me.” In the light of this statement the Indian novels dealing with subalterns failed to instruct .

The claim made in this research paper also need to be proved with the help of relevant evidences. It is also expected the novels dealing with subalterns should be evaluated with the new parameters of Ambedkarism . There are many things which can not be covered by old parameters . Using old tools of analysis for new impulses will not match the time. It will be too early to claim that the untouchability has disappeared . It has not disappeared ,it has changed its shape. It is available everywhere more or less .And this is the reason, Indian novels dealing with subalterns’ life need to be re-examined . The topic suits for the doctoral thesis . A small paper may not give justice to the topic , but it definitely can pave a way for it. The paper does not intend to provide any solution . The problem discussed here will lead to the conclusion .

The subaltern characters in Indian novels have been waiting for rationale treatment which can be justified. The conclusions of the novels has been waiting passionately for its end with optimistic note. The inhumane treatment given to subaltern characters and their tragic end has been used as readymade recipe. It definitely guarantees literary values but at the cost of social values. It has created a mysterious atmosphere around subaltern literature in India. Most of the writers contributing to subaltern literature in India are not subalterns. This makes difference in sense and sensibilities. This restricts the characters to cross the boundaries of

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tradition. Again their free play is controlled by writer and in the last the expected product comes out. It is the same wine in a new bottle. These novels ends with a defeat of untouchable characters . It underlines that the problems related to untouchables and untouchability still exist . It is indirectly suggested through the novels that anybody whosoever from untouchable's community dares to rebel ,will meet the same tragic end .It indirectly threatens that nobody should dare to cross the structured boundaries. And if it the hypothesis of Indian novels dealing with untouchables, who is responsible for such hypothesis ?

The real problem is that who will make such novelist aware of their authorial responsibility. The theme they paint is also against the background of their own caste .It also makes their pen soft like cotton and the edges of writing becomes blunt. Some writers at least succeeded in exposing fault lines of our fragmented society . Novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Dr.Narendra Jadhav, Amitav Ghosh opened the doors of subaltern writing. They created storms but in cups. The real test begins when they are tested on the parameters of Ambedkarism. It seems that the issue of untouchability has not been handled properly . It only creates sympathy but suggest no way out to escape from this cobweb. It makes some dust fly but changes nothing. It creates some ripples but fail to organize a storm.

The another important issue needs to be mentioned here that novels are written on untouchables and untouchability but the characters are not shown accepting Buddhism or discussing Ambedkarism. There is no such compulsion for Indian novelists. But the novelists at least in India must realize this fact that Dr.Ambedkar and untouchables ,Ambedkarism and issue of untouchability are inseparable and can not be separated . The success he achieved for his people can not be compared with anybody . The place he has among his people can not be equaled by anybody. And therefore any novel which has concerns for dalits in India ,will be evaluated in the light of Dr.Ambedkar's philosophy. But when such effort attempted , the novels and novelists are exposed . The hollowness of the novels becomes visible. The absence of Ambedkarism can be witnessed. There is a spaces to think as if it is done purposefully.

Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand was published in 1935. This the period when Dr.Ambedkar was at the peak of his popularity . It is not that Mulk Raj Anand was not aware of Dr. Ambedkar's contribution to the upliftment of untouchables. Dr.Ambedkar's role for the eradication of untouchability is recognized by the international community. But is not acknowledged by the Indian novelists. Mulk Raj Anand brings Gandhi's image at the background of the novel and not of Dr.Ambedkar. Bakha is shown under the influence of Gandhian philosophy and not under Dr.Ambedkar's. This defiantly tempts to raise many



questions. The novel would have been more authentic if could have Dr. Ambedkar's image at the background.

Shanta Rameshwar Rao's *Children of God* was published in 1976. The central characters in the novels are dalits and novelist presents a picture of caste oppressed society through a woman narrator whose son was beaten and burnt to death for entering a temple.

Arundhati Roy came in to the realm of literature in the year 1997 when her debut novel, "The God of Small Things" Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize winning novel deals with the ravages of caste system in South Indian state, Kerala. Roy presents both the miserable plight of untouchables and also the struggle of a woman trying to have fulfillment in life in a patriarchal society. Velutha, the God of Small Things, transgresses the established norms of society by having an affair with a woman of high caste. The ultimate outcome of this love affair is the tragic death of an "Untouchable" by the "Touchable Boots" of the state police, an event that makes a travesty of the idea of God. God is no more in control of "small things" rather the small things have an ultimate power over God, turning him to "The God of loss"

Amitav Ghosh published *The Hungry Tide* in 2004. In this novel he sketches the life of Dalit refugees from Bangladesh who are ejected from the caste in Sundarban Forest, a region of archipelagos full up with hunger and calamity. The novel is set in the Sundarban region of rural Bengal which registers a response to the social and political concern of the marginal sections of the Indian society. It dramatically performs the impact of religious intolerance and environmental conservation projects upon the communities of subaltern humans.

Dr. Narendra Jadhav's *Outcast –Life and Triumphs of an Untouchable Family in India* is a different stuff in comparison. In the novel Jadhav tells the inspiring story of his family struggle for equality and justice in India. It is an authentic document which brings his parents' world to light. There is sincere expression of hunger, humiliations, fear and brutal abuses. He shows his father Damu's rebel against oppressive caste system. It is the story of survival and victory over destiny what Ambedkarism expects.

To conclude, it appears that orthodoxy and heterodoxy still prevail in our society. People from various platform talk about Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy but attempting or translating it in practical life is still in dreams. The novels discussing issues of untouchables excluding Dr. Ambedkar is nothing but the hypocrisy. It is the responsibility of the novelists to write not only beautifully but logically and sensibly also. They should generate inspiring novels to break caste system in India. They encourage successful stories with maximum optimism. They boost ideals, images, role models in their novels. They should not use novels as tool to

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threaten new generation showing tragic ends of dalit characters. They should show that orthodox ,caste believers ,people doing atrocities are prosecuted . They should ensure readers that these social criminals are punished by the law in this country .Then only these novels will be the real prize winner novels.

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