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The Portrayal of Gandhi, Marx, and Ambedkar in the Select works of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy and Narendra Jadhav

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Abstract

For ages, the social body in India has been divided into four distinct and well-defined castes, namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras. It was set very rigidly and imperviously. The demarcation between a caste and another caste is so deep-rooted that it cannot be rooted out. In course of time, this stratification became rigid and the people of the lowest castes were lowered to the position of serfs. Into such a society, were born the stalwarts of Indian literature, Mulk Raj Anand, who became a writer in 1935, Arundhati-Roy, came out with her debut novel *The God of Small Things* in 1997, and Narendra Jadhav, came into the limelight with *Outcaste: A Memoir* in 1993. All the three great writers have contributed their mite to fight for the castles society.

Keywords: portrayal, caste, deep rooted, society etc

For ages, the social body in India has been divided into four distinct and well-defined castes, namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras. Every nation naturally splits itself at its dawn for organized existence into such divisions. This division based on the caste hierarchy is quite peculiar to India alone. It was set very rigidly and imperviously. The demarcation between a caste and another caste is so deep-rooted that it cannot be rooted out. First, it was divided into classes, and later the classes were demarked as castes with the Brahmins reigning supreme. In course of time, this stratification became rigid and the people of the lowest castes were lowered to the position of serfs.

Arundhati Roy says: “The origins of caste will continue to be debated by anthropologists for years to come, but its organizing principles, based on a

hierarchical, sliding scale of entitlements and duties, of purity and pollution, and how they were, and still are, policed and enforced, are not all that hard to understand. The top of the caste pyramid is considered pure and has plenty of entitlements. The bottom is considered polluted and has no entitlements but plenty of duties without rights.” (Roy,23)

Into such a society, were born the stalwarts of Indian literature, Mulk Raj Anand, who became a writer in 1935, Arundhati-Roy, came out with her debut novel in 1997, and Narendra Jadhav, and came into the limelight with *Outcaste: A memoir* in 1993. Mulk Raj Anand, a non-Dalit was from Peshawar in Punjab a part of North India where untouchability was prevalent. Arundhati Roy is also a non-Dalit from Kerala, a state which is said to have the highest literacy rate in India and yet a staunch practitioner of caste prejudice; and Jadhav, from Maharashtra, a state that produced a good number of revolutionary and reformist Dalit scholars. Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy are non-Dalits who have thrown the spotlight on the evil of untouchability. Narendra Jadhav, a Mahar, is one of the Dalit communities in Maharashtra. Jadhav had a success story and in itself is a message to the Dalit community.

The protagonist of *Untouchable*, Bakha is a scavenger boy who is the victim of the age-old Hindu tradition which keeps Dalits aloof from the rest of the society. To make a scavenger boy, a Dalit, the protagonist of a novel, as early as the 1930s when Mulk Raj Anand started writing his novel, *Untouchable* was, indeed, a bold stroke on part of the author. Although *The God of Small Things* tells the story of the Ipe family and their adjustments to the postcolonial situation in Kerala, it highlights Velutha’s sad and unfortunate experiences against the hierarchical structure in a caste-ridden society. Damu, the protagonist of *The Outcaste* is one of the few

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assertive, independent Dalit characters in Indian writing in English.

Bakha attended Gandhi's meeting, and Velutha, for some help, went to KNM Pillai, a Marxist, and Damu went to Ambedkar's meeting. Gandhism, Marxism, and Ambedkarism can be seen in these three works. Each protagonist draws inspiration for his enlightenment from a particular individual. For instance, Bakha draws his inspiration from no less a person than Gandhiji. New ideas enlighten Bakha and the reader sees a new Bakha who thinks of emancipating himself from the filthy occupation that he carries now. And Velutha, the male protagonist of *The God of Small Things* comes under the influence of Pillai, the local communist leader and he gets social awareness through communism although it is of little avail because of his birth as a paravan. Pillai betrays Velutha in the hour of his dire need of Pillai's support. In the third novel *Outcaste: A Memoir* Damodar, an illiterate, who struggles for his survival, gets his inspiration from Dr. Ambedkar, the champion of the Dalit community, the downtrodden, the oppressed, and the suppressed. The enlightening speeches of Baba Saheb have enlightened Damu to a great extent and the first important lesson he has learned from the doctor is the paramount importance of education and Damu, despite his poverty, has succeeded in educating his children.

Dalits as a concept and as an issue have been treated differently throughout history. Some prominent *isms* which tried to attach themselves are Marxism, Gandhianism, and Ambedkarism. Indian Marxism has always seen a Dalit problem in terms of land and agrarian relationships. It defines Dalit as a landless laborer. But land and economic reasoning are just not enough to arrive at a holistic understanding of the Dalit problem. The second approach, the Gandhian approach looks at the Dalit problem as a problem of value structure.

The privilege of being one in the crowd before the Mahatma is a great experience for Bakha. He is thrilled to hear Gandhi says that he would like to be born as an outcast and that he does scavenging as a labor of love. Bakha's struggle to concentrate on Gandhi's words, the fluctuating response to the parts that he grasp, and the multiple reactions of the crowd including some negative criticism of Gandhi and his outlook confused Bakha. Two types of criticism can be

seen here, one involving partial disagreement with Gandhi's views, and the other a cynical rejection of Gandhi as a humbug. On one hand, Anand says, 'he (Gandhi) was a saint, he was an *avatar* (incarnation) of gods Vishnu and Krishna...he has the *shakti* (power) to change the whole world. (Anand 128&129). On the other hand, Anand says, "Gandhi is a humbug, he is a fool. He is a hypocrite. In one breath he says he wants to abolish untouchability, in the other he asserts that he is an orthodox Hindu"(Anand141).

Gandhi deeply sympathized with the plight of the Dalits but his concern for their uplift was inadequate. At the Second Round Table Conference, Gandhi impugned the leaders of the Muslims, Sikh, Untouchable and Christian communities, ridiculing their claims to self-representation while he eventually came around to accepting the communal scheme of representation for Sikhs and Muslims, Gandhi was particularly opposed to Ambedkar, who made a case for "separate electorates" for the depressed classes. For Ambedkar, the whole issue of Dalits was a matter of securing the political rights for them whereas, for Gandhi, it was a matter of religion.

In a letter of Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of state for India, on March 1932, Gandhi said, "For Me, the question of these classes is predominantly moral and religious. The political aspects, important though it is, dwindles into insignificance compared to the moral and religious issues" (Roy,361).

In 1921 in his Gujarati journal *Navajivan* Gandhi wrote: "I believe that if Hindu society has been able to stand, it is because it is founded on the caste system... To destroy the caste system and adopt the Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation which is the soul of the caste system." (Ambedkar,26)

Ambedkar's response to this was "The *Outcaste* is a byproduct of the caste system. There will be outcaste as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system"(CWMG 59).

Though Gandhi was an admirer of the caste system, he believed that there should be no hierarchy

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between castes; that all castes should be considered equal, and that the avarna castes, the Ati-Shudras, should be brought into the Varna System. It is surprising how Gandhi didn't know that untouchability is the off-spring of caste system.

Velutha is rejected by the communist party even though comrade Pillai says that Velutha is a good, intelligent party worker, though he is card holding member of the party. Pillai is a hypocrite to the hilt. He is the symbol of all political parties led by upper-caste leaders who deceive Dalits by pretending that they are working for the welfare and uplift of the Dalits. Pillai's speech betrays how dangerous he is. There is an unbridgeable gulf between what he says and what he does: "people of the world... be courageous, dare to fight, defy difficulties and advance upon ... you must demand what is rightfully yours." (Roy, 120) He asks his comrades to fight but when the time comes he doesn't support the comrade who is struggling.

The goal of Marxism is the creation of a society that is exploitation-free and classless. Marxists in India waged struggles on workers' issues, but they paid no attention to the caste system and untouchability. Hence, Marxists failed to earn the trust of the Dalits.

Though the entire story of Outcaste: A Memoir is woven around the life story of Damu Jadhav and his determination to provide good education to his children, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, messiah of millions of Dalits in India occupies a central role as an undying source of inspiration behind Damu's aspirations. Damu is inspired by the philosophy espoused by Babasaheb Ambedkar and he also participated in Ambedkarite Movement. The slogan of 'Educate, Organise and Agitate' given by Babasaheb Ambedkar to his millions of untouchable brothers reverberates in the story.

Social customs that have their long roots steeped in hoary tradition are not easy to be eradicated root and branch overnight. They have gone deep into the marrow of the Hindu way of thinking. It is so impervious to reason that it is too difficult to bring about any perceptible change towards progress. But change being the law of nature, must prevail at one time or other in human history and create a new chapter for mankind. Tagore observes that If one goes deep into the bowels of history, one discovers strange facts about how time in its uninterrupted course, brings strange truths to light. History records, long before the birth of Christ, that the Jews were an enslaved race who suffered excruciating

misery at the hands of their Egyptian masters. The Jews were slaves for centuries under the Egyptian Kings and suffered hardships of every description. It was at the divine intervention through the agents of Moses this enslaved race of Jews was liberated from their slavery. History is an eloquent witness that whenever mankind finds itself in dire crisis, some agency mysteriously appears on the scene and rescues the suffering mankind from its hardships. Moses delivering the Jews from Egyptian slavery is one such example.

Teleological causes have always been at work and operate mysteriously towards the release of mankind from any cataclysmic upheaval. Any great or historic change that will have lasting effects calls for a man of almost superhuman capabilities to bring about an inevitable change in the course of human progress.

For instance, during the period of religious reformation in Europe (during the early 16th century) there was religious unrest in the minds of most Christians especially of Roman Catholic Denomination since Roman Catholicism at that time had suffered from many undesirable elements. One such grievous flaw was the sale of Indulgences. It was at that time a German theologian by the name of Martin Luther (1483-1546) rebelled against the pope – for the sale of Indulgences and that resulted in the birth of a new set of Christianity namely Protestantism. It was during the 1960s that a dynamic leader of the American Blacks by the name Martin Luther King Junior (1929-1968) successfully fought for the rights of the American Blacks and he died a martyr. Here, in the Indian context, doctor Ambedkar occupies no less a historic glorious place than any of the great leaders already mentioned. Dr. Ambedkar created a new consciousness in his community of Dalits and successfully fought for their human rights. He may justly be described as the Messiah or the Savior of the Dalit community.

Dr. Ambedkar is chiefly known to the outside world only as of the maker of the constitution of India, which, perhaps, is the longest one in the world. But the dynamic role that Dr. Ambedkar has played in creating a high vibrant consciousness among the people of the downtrodden, oppressed, and suppressed classes popularly known as the Dalit community with his three magical words, 'Educate, Unite and Agitate.' He has awakened the whole community from its age-long sleep into a community that successfully fought for its human

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rights and human dignity. In brief, he etched out the destiny of that class. The members of that community, to use the telling phrase of the great Russian novelist Gogol 'the dead souls' is quite applicable to these unfortunate people – the Dalits.

Ambedkarism is preferable to Marxism because Babasaheb Ambedkar's life and works were dedicated to the well-being of those whom the society had boycotted. He thought about religion, economy, literature, politics, society, law, and freedom in terms of the interests of the untouchables. While Ambedkar held that there was neither caste discrimination nor untouchability in communism, he considered Indian Marxism to be incomplete because it did not think about ending caste. The destruction of untouchability was, for him, the paramount concern. Hence he said: "If Lenin had been born in Hindustan, he would have first destroyed caste discrimination and untouchability completely, and he would not even have imagined a revolution without this." And he added, "If Tilak had been born in a boycotted caste, instead of roaring, "Swaraj is my birthright", he would have said, "Annihilation of untouchability is my supreme duty." (Limbale,63)

Not only Arundhati Roy but many Dalit writers criticize Marxism. They demonstrated opposition towards Marxism. Because the Marxist ideology of revolution is based only on economic disparity, Ambedkarite ideology is founded on the phenomenon of untouchability underlying social inequality. Marxists in India waged struggles on workers' issues, but they paid no attention to the caste system and untouchability.

The focal point of Ambedkarism is the common man. The focus of Marxism also rests on the exploited, suffering common person. The essence of the thoughts of Babasaheb Ambedkar Karl Marx and Gautama Buddha is the same as the liberation of a human being from exploitation. Given this similarity, it seems that there should be a blending of the thoughts of Marx and Ambedkar. Marxists say Dalits are poor therefore they are untouchable but the truth is that they are untouchables, therefore, they are poor. Otherwise, every poor person in India would be untouchable.

To escape the tyranny of untouchability or the exploitation of the caste system, conversion of religion is one of the possible solutions to a certain extent. Babasaheb Ambedkar converted himself to Buddhism

on 14th October 1956, inspired by his action; a large number of Dalits gave up Hinduism and rejected its gods and goddesses. Barbara Joshi says Ambedkar joined 5, 00,000 of his followers in a Buddhist conversion ceremony.

A new consciousness was awakened in the Dalit community: 'we have become Buddhists, therefore, we will no longer perform the mean tasks imposed on us by the Hindu religion'. "This historical event marked the beginning of a new liberation struggle. Dalits found a new cultural dimension in Buddhism, and it had an energizing impact on the development of Dalit Literature. There is no place for the caste system in Buddhism, which supports egalitarianism and rejects inequality". (Limbale,41) Babasaheb embraced Buddhism because Buddha rejected casteism and admitted everyone into his way.

Of all the theories and all isms and all movements, the ideology of Ambedkar is the only solution to change the lives of Dalits. "The single most consciously designed, consistently worked out, thoroughly debated and the well-publicized case of the Dalit-subaltern collective emergence in religio-cultural subjectivity in modern India is, of course, the movement led by Ambedkar in 1956." (*Subadra, Joan*, 208).

Ambedkar was a prolific writer and has produced a good number of volumes to enlighten the people and establish casteless society but his works unlike Gandhi, Nehru, and Vivekananda cannot be seen more in libraries and bookshops. Reading Ambedkar and following his ideology is the best solution to annihilate the caste system. Of all his volumes, 'Annihilation of Caste' is the most radical text which can be prescribed as a textbook for university students but it has not become popular. Arundhati Roy rightly observed and she writes. "I never encountered the notion of caste in a single school textbook. Reading Ambedkar alerted me to a gaping hole in our pedagogical universe. Reading him also made it clear why that hole exists, and it will continue to exist until Indian society undergoes a radical revolutionary change." (Roy 17)

Whatever be the religious belief of caste Hindus, there seems to be a big paradox behind the whole system. All religions including the Hindu religion believe that all men are the children of God, then, how come the particular community called 'Dalits' is a big question to be answered.

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