

Resistance to Perpetuation of Cultural Hegemony in Hamid Dalwai's Novel Fuel

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Abstract

Cultural Hegemony is an oppressive ideology used as a tool by those who want gain political power. In the camouflage of nationalism and protection of a particular culture, the minds of the commons are changed. The common lose their mental ability to perceive reality. They consider the ideology of the oppressors to be absolute true and work to implement the ideas of the oppressors. In Indian context the novel *Fuel* reflects the society in true sense by describing the people belonging to different castes and religions and their interdependence. But under the impact of Cultural Hegemony, they indulge in inflicting injustice on each other. The individuals like the narrator, his father and elder natives try to maintain harmony in the society. Following perfectly the constitutional ways is the only perfect solution for harmony in society and it is the only way to resist cultural hegemony.

Keywords: Cultural Hegemony, Oppressive Ideology, Nationalism, Constitutional Ways)

Introduction

India is a multilingual and multiethnic and multicultural country. In the fabric of Indian society all the customs traditions belonging to different cultures are interwoven. At personal level Indians practice their culture to which they belong. All are unified when they work for livelihood. Indian Constitution unifies all of them by giving equal rights and assign equal responsibilities. Indian constitution discourages prominence of any culture whereas plurality is accepted and citizens are united by giving equal rights to follow their culture, customs and traditions. Even people can adopt the religion they like. With diverse cultural background citizens work unitedly for nation building. But certain forces are working in Indian society which are working to disintegrate the unity and hamper the progress the nation. The novel *Fuel* written by Hamid Dalwai is taken for study to discuss how people belonging to different ethnic groups are interdependent. There are mindsets found which want to disrupt the harmony in the society. *The aim of the research paper is to dismantle Cultural Hegemony which disrupts the social order, working effectively in our lives without being aware many of us act accordingly.*

Objectives

- i) To introduce the Hamid Dalwai to the English speaking world as writer with reformative ideas.
- ii) To study the concept of Cultural Hegemony and its application to find out reason behind the mindset working to disrupt the social order

Hypothesis

The ideological concept 'Cultural Hegemony' is used as a tool to gain power and perpetuate injustice in society.

Methodology

Close reading of the text *Fuel* and application of the ideological concept of Cultural Hegemony to interpret the text.

Review of Literature

“Hamid Umar Dalwai was an Indian journalist, social reformer, thinker, activist, author, writer and the founder of *Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal* and *Indian Secular Society*.” (Hamid Dalwai. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamid_Dalwai) He worked for many misconceptions perpetuated in Indian Muslim Society. Most of his books are written in Marathi Language. His novel *Indhan* translated into English as *Fuel* by Dilip Chitre, one of the Indian poets and critic who writes in Marathi and English. His nonfiction such as *Kanosa- Bhartatil Muslim Manacha*, *Islamache Bharatiya Chitra (Islam's Indian Story)*, *Rashtriya Ekatmataaani Bharatiya Musalman (Muslim Politics In Secular India)* discuss the then politics of Muslim leaders at the time of partition. The books are harsh criticism on the leadership of Indian Muslim community. These books are popular among Marathi speaking people but failed to gain currency in all the Muslims of India. *Laat* and *Jamila Jawed* are the two collections of short stories describe the internal shades of Rural Area Muslim society of Maharashtra. One of the objectives of the research paper is to introduce the author to the English speaking world.

Cultural Hegemony as an Oppressive Ideology

“Antonio Francesco Gramsci was an Italian Marxist philosopher, journalist, linguist, writer, and politician. He wrote on philosophy, political theory, sociology, history, and linguistics.” (Antonio Gramsci, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Gramsci) He was staunch follower of Marxism. He opposed Mussolini and Hitler and to encounter fascism he established Italian Communist Party. He was imprisoned by the state authority until his death. “During his imprisonment, Gramsci wrote more than 30 notebooks and 3,000 pages of history and analysis. His *Prison Notebooks* are considered a highly original contribution to 20th-century political

theory.” (ibid) His idea of Cultural Hegemony gained currency worldwide to analyze the political power prevailed in the modern world. Nicki Lisa Cole, a Sociology expert expounds the concept of Cultural Hegemony as “Cultural hegemony refers to domination or rule maintained through ideological or cultural means”. Further in her essay she explains that Antonio Gramsci based his idea of Cultural Hegemony on Karl Marx’s idea of dominant ideology that represents the ruling class. Antonio Gramsci made it clear how this dominant ideology works. First the world view – beliefs, assumptions and values are framed for the benefit of ruling class, then the ruling class works peacefully to legitimate it through social institutions such as schools, churches, courts and media. The desired result is legitimacy of the dominant ideology which Gramsci calls Cultural Hegemony. (Cole, Nicki Lisa)

Discussion

i) Indian Politics after Partition

In the novel *Fuel*, the year of Indian independence i.e. 1947 is used as an important “Key Time Marker” (Chitre, Dilip. xii). The effects of partition of India on social and political life particularly who voluntarily decided to stay in India and those who were far away from border area is at the centre of the novel. Although the freedom struggle was fought unitedly by Hindus and Muslims, the colonizers, on the pretext of demand of *Muslim League* to divide India create Pakistan on the basis of Muslim majority population, divided India “allegedly following the old Roman maxim of **divide and rule**. (Bennett, Frederic M (emphasis added) The idealism which Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India spoke in his speech in the midnight of 1947 that “All of us, to whatever religion we may belong, are equally the children of India with equal rights, privileges and obligations. We cannot encourage communalism

or narrow-mindedness, for no nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or in action.” (<https://thewire.in/history/india-jawaharlal-nehru-tryst-with-destiny>) But unfortunately Indian society gave birth to right wing politics with the sole aim to perpetuate cultural hegemony camouflaged as nationalism. Since independence the minority Muslims faced many communal violence such as –1964 Kolkata riots, 1983 Nellie massacre, 1969 Gujarat riots, , 1970 Bhiwandi Riots, 1987 Hashimpura massacre, 1989 Bhagalpur violence, 1992 Bombay riots, 2002 Gujarat riots, 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, 2020 Delhi riots. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence_against_Muslims_in_independent_India) Today the existence of minority is the outcome of Indian Constitution which gives equal rights and opportunities to all the citizens irrespective of their religion, caste and creed.

The story of the novel enraptures the social life of Konkan coast of Maharashtra of “the early 1960s.” (Chitrep. xii) The aftershocks of partition are evident in the backdrop of the novel as at one place one of the characters in the novel says, “We will drive these Khotsaway to Pakistan.” (Dalwai, Fuel p. 37)

ii) Stratification of Indian Society

The society as depicted by Hamid Dalwai in the novel *Indhan* is the microcosm of India. Muslims known as *Khots* were as the translator Dilip Chitre points out, “rich land owners who used Hindu bonded labour as share-croppers... there were also Hindu *Khots* in Konkan, it is a class label not a caste or community tag.” (pxiii) But the average Indian Muslim at present is a labour leading life in utter poverty. The findings of *Sahher Committee* report is the testimony of the deteriorating financial and educational condition of the Indian Muslims. For every generalization there are exceptions. The Muslim Khots of Konkan area of the early 1960s is exception as portrayed by

Hamid Dalwai in the novel. The bifurcation of Hindus into castes is the firm testimony of perpetuation of Cultural Hegemony. There areas DilipChitre writes in Translator's view, "a tiny minority of Brahmins, the Marathas, the Kulvadis (the share-croppers, bonded labourers, or seasonally employed agricultural labourers), and the Nahavis (the caste of barbers and hairdressers who serve the upper castes and classes but are otherwise included among *dalits or shudraand Mahars*". (Chitrep.xiii emphasis added)The Maharswere former Hindu "untouchables who converted themselves by following the call of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to leave the exploitative and inequitous Hindu Fold and became Buddhists. A few *Mahars* remained Hindus. The other caste mentioned in the novel is Bania or the Vaishya (Chitrep. ibid). The acceptance of caste system and following it as the rule of the society is nothing but the internalization of cultural hegemony which benefits a few to gain dominance insociety and politics.

The characters in the novel belongs to the castes mentioned above. We, Indians blame the British as they adopted the divide and rule policy to exploit India. But a careful observation of Indian society brings to our notice that the caste stratification is already present in our society which acts as fuel to divide and rule policy. Further the presence of Muslims in India after partition provided fertile ground for right wing politicians to work to perpetuate cultural hegemony to gain political power.

iii) Interdependence of People as observed in the Novel *Fuel*

As the novel opens, we see the protagonist, the narrator of the novel, his name has not been mentioned,who represents the novelist, HamidDalwaiis a Muslim *Khot*, visiting his native town after fifteen years. He stays at Mumbai and works as a volunteer in a socialist organization. As we read further we come to know that culturally he is a Muslim but in practice he is an atheist. We

come to know from his conversation with other characters that he wants to reform society. He is working to remove chauvinism and xenophobia from society. He has been suffering from heart disease and visited his town to take rest as his doctor advised. His family members who stay at his native include his old father, elder brother and his sister in law. Another female character who is associated with his family is Sumati, a Brahmin young girl who visits the narrator's house occasionally. "Most of the Brahmins pace off to Pune, or Mumbai with their families." (p. 25) But Sumati is left behind. She is also planning to migrate to Mumbai. She has extramarital relations with the narrator's brother. Kadir Khan is another Muslim villager, runs a grocery shop. Most of his customers are *Maharsand Kulwadis*. There is *NhaviJanardhan*, the barber. All the villagers are his customers. "He used to shave the bigwig landowners on a regular contract. He was even able to perform *circumcision*." (p.11). There is another grocery shop of the *Bania*. "He had ceased up all the people of the town in just a couple of months." (p.11) There was a *Parit*, washer woman who is continuing the custom of washing clothes of Muslim families on contract. (p.15) The *Kulwadis* are mostly are as the translator informs us "the share-croppers, bonded labourers." (p. xii) All these people belong to different castes and religion are interdependent. The same interdependence is found in all parts of India since time immemorial. But the right wing politics became successful up to a larger extent who used the oppressive ideology, Culture Hegemony to disrupt the harmony in the society. The carriers of this ideology wants to instill in the brain of the people to develop otherness for the people of other religion or castes.

iv) Reasons of Rise of Communal Tension

The novelist depicts the division of Indian society on the basis of religious differences as well. Once the narrator visits the house of Sumati, the Brahmin girl. She took him "directly to the

kitchen” (p. 24). The narrator says to Sumati, “This is the first time in my life that I have entered a Brahmin Kitchen.” (p.26) There was a Brahmin boy who was classmate of the narrator in primary school named Gore. The narrator would go to wake up Gore in the morning. Gore never invited the narrator into his house. The reason he told the narrator is, “Sorry, chum. Can’t invite you home. You know I live with other people, not my own family. All of them are ‘Sanghwallahs’.” (p.27) This relation between man and woman belonging to two different cultures is highly infallible fuel for communal tension in Indian society. The incidences like extramarital relations between Brahmin Woman, Sumati and Muslim Man, the narrator’s brother and another Muslim character Kadir who has a mistress belonging to Buddhist community give fertile ground to perpetuate the ideology to gain social and political power. Sumati informs the narrator to caution his brother about the impending communal tension in the town. The reason she tells is her extramarital relations with the narrator’s brother. Her cousin could not endure the relationship between her and a Muslim Man. He poisons the minds the Kulwadis and Marathas against Muslims in the town. Further Kadir Khan’s mistress belongs to Mahar community, now Buddhists. The young Buddhists warn the elders of the Muslim Khots that they will also keep Muslim women as their mistresses in future. The narrator, his father and other elder Hindu men try hard to maintain communal harmony but they fail. Kadir Khan hires goons from outside who attack the procession of Hindu deity. The women were brutally raped. The narrator’s sister in law was sexually assaulted by the goonsss. Consequently Many Muslims of the town were arrested by the police without proper investigation. The harmony of the town was permanently lost.

While returning to Mumbai from his town, the narrator broods about the future of the people of his town. He thinks, “I had

observed the lives of all these people from a close range and their future lives were going to be determined by the same method and manner in which they had lived so far.” (110) The method and the manner the Indian are living is the point the writer brings into light. The common Indians fail to understand the modus operandi i.e. cultural hegemony which is working ideologically in the minds. In the novel, the Kulwadis, the Buddhists, the Mahars, the Marathas and the Muslims fail to see beyond the illusion of ideology of cultural hegemony as an instrument in the hands of a few which is used to gain political power.

Conclusions

There are many who are carrying the responsibility to dismantle the ideology, cultural hegemony. The citizens like the narrator, his father and elder natives of the town want to maintain harmony between people of different religions. The makers of Indian constitution were aware of the ideology, cultural hegemony. There is enough provision to resist the oppressive ideology like cultural hegemony. The Indian Constitution assigns equal rights and responsibilities to all the people of India. It is the duty of every citizen to follow constitutional ways to wipe out oppressive ideologies from our country.

Notes

Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal and Indian Secular Society:In 1970, Hamid Dalwai and A.B. Shah, founded Muslim Satyashodhak Mandal in co-operation with the Indian Secular Society. This organisation provided a forum for secular Muslims for reforming and modernising Muslims in India. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A. B. Shah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._B._Shah))

Muslim League:*The All-India Muslim League (AIML) was a political party established in Dhaka in 1906 when some well-known Muslim politicians met the Viceroy of British*

India, Lord Minto, with the goal of securing Muslim interests on the Indian subcontinent. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-India_Muslim_League) **SahherCommittee** :The Sachar Committee was a seven-member high-level committee established in March 2005 by former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The committee was headed by former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court Rajinder Sachar to study the social, economic and educational condition of Muslims in India. The committee submitted its report in 2006 and the report was available in public domain on 30 November 2006. The 403-page report had suggestions and solutions for the inclusive development of the Muslims in India. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SacharCommittee>)

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BIO-NOTE

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