

Social Inequality: A Multidimensional Study of Some Selective Works

Suman Acharjee

*Teacher at Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Eklavya Campus, Tripura, India
PhD Scholar at NIT, Agartala, Tripura, India.*

Abstract: *This paper focuses on the concept of social inequality from the point of view of critical analysis of some poems, fiction and non-fictional prose. It brings into light the prevalent caste system in the society and tries to find its root. Not only this, the aim of this paper is to highlight the condition of the women in the society from the point of view of feminism. Through the critical analysis of the literary writings, this paper draws one's attention to the process of horizon making by representing the fact behind all binary oppositions like male/female; civilized/uncivilized etc. To reach at the above mentioned goal, this paper takes into account the writings of Jotirao Phule's "Caste Laws"(essays), Prem Chand's "Deliverance"(fiction), Hira Bansode's "Bosom Friend", Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" (prose monologue), and Amitav Ghosh's "Count Down" (non-fiction) etc. It tries to find out the location of the subaltern group in the society. It shows the helpless condition of this group who remains detached from the main current of the society and remains as a silent group. Jotirao Phule's essay "Caste Laws" discusses the social inequality from the point of view of mythical and historical context. This work puts into question the binary opposition of Devas/Daityas as it has been depicted in the Hindu mythologies and also tries to forward a solution of this caste problem. On the other hand, Hira Bansode's "Bosom Friend" brings into light the demarcative attitude of the educated people in this modern era. Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" focuses on the conservative attitude of the society towards girl. And Premchand's fiction "Deliverance" focuses on the caste system and the hypocrisy of Brahmanism representing the happenings in the life of Dukhi, a character in the story. Thus this paper analyses social inequality as it has been depicted in various literary writings from different perspectives.*

Keywords: *casteism, feminism, subalternism.*

I. Introduction:

It is very difficult to define casteism. Casteism in India can be easily defined as the restriction of people's status in social life according to their caste of birth and it has got a lot of criticism and it is correct too. But the mode of criticism somehow differs in their way of representation. Most of the times caste system in India has been wrongly associated with the varnashrama as it has been mentioned in Veda. Actually Vedic system wants spiritual development of human beings through dharma and dharma doesn't have any relation with casteism. The four varnas mentioned in Veda such as Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra have been categorised according to the nature of work. Varna system looks for collaborative activity to maintain the balance of society. It never says that varna system is a hereditary one. But it is correct that some Brahmins at a particular time have represented the truth in such a way so that they can earn material benefit out of this. But Veda looks for spiritual upliftment, not for material development. Thus that distorted representation of varnashrama somehow represented as casteism in India. And as a result of it so many writings find their existence in the syllabi of different educational institutions which have been described below:

II. Casteism in Jyotirao Phule's Caste Laws and Premchand's Deliverance:

Jyotirao's Phule's work *Caste Laws* which is extract from the preface to the book *Slavery* deals with the subject of caste. According to Phule, the caste system is a form of slavery and he demeaned Brahmins as the cause factor of casteism and to prove his point he approached the Hindu mythologies with a deconstructive mode. The subtitle of the book *Is the Civilized British Govt under the Cloak of Brahmanism* indicates at the caste system during the reign of Britishers. And this subtitle brings into light Phule's attitude too who sees the Brahmins as the main cause of caste system and lights on the British Government under whose rule this system also flourished. He also focused on the education system in India too. According to him, education system in India has been used to over-educate a particular section of society so that 'other' people remain at the mercy of others. Phule's *Caste Laws* may be divided into three parts. In the first part, we find the Brahmins in their historical context where they have been represented as the descendents of Aryans who displaced and subjugated the original inhabitants of India. They hated the aborigines as they offered stiff resistance to their domination and also designated by various terms like Chandala, Sudra and Mahar etc. Through the deconstructive study of

Hindu mythologies, Phule points out that in these mythologies aborigines of this land have been designated wrongly as 'Rakshas' and 'Daityas'. According to Phule, these terms have been used intentionally by Brahmins so that all negative identities can be imposed on aborigines of the land and all positive identities can be used for Brahmin rule. He condemns Parasurama for killing so many Kshatriyas and also demeans his status as a God. According to him the cunningness of the Brahmins is very evident in the institution of caste. This caste system denied all privileges to Sudras and Ati-Sudras and put Brahmins as the Supreme Being. The proliferation of Western ideas and civilization has certainly weakened the Brahmin dominance. Phule has provided some solution to destroy this caste system. According to him, in the civil services sudras should have to give a proper chance. The monopoly of Brahmins should be lessened just through a fair representation of other castes in the civil service. Jotirao Phule also commented that there should be schools in every village for the sudras manned by Sudra teachers.

From the above mentioned essay of Jotirao Phule an ironical situation comes in front of us. What we can understand from his essay is that he wanted a reversed attitude to the binary opposition of Brahmins/Non-Brahmins. Thus his solution to stop caste system actually gives birth to another caste system with a binary opposition of Non- Brahmins/Brahmins. All the solutions provided by Jotirao Phule in his essay *Caste Laws* bring into light a revenge taking attitude of Phule towards Brahmins. He wanted separate schools, separate teachers and a separate system in society to minimize Brahmanical influence. And in doing so, he wanted a rigid barrier between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins and the result of it may be somehow devastating. While condemning Brahmins as the manipulator of the terms like Rakshas or Daityas, he forget the example of Ravana in the *Ramayana* who by birth was a Brahmin but his wrong doings placed him in the region of Rakshas. Thus this essay gives birth to another caste system just by reversing the polarity of binary opposition of Brahmins/Non-Brahmins as Non-Brahmins/Brahmins.

Prem Chand's fiction *Deliverance* describes Dhuki's life story and shows the evil side of Brahmanical domination. It is no doubt that a particular group of Brahmins at a particular period of time used varnashrama in a very distorted way to get material benefit out of this and Pandit Ghashiram is a perfect example of this group. But it does not mean that spiritual scriptures also have been created to do the same purpose as it has been described by Jyotirao Phule in his *Caste Laws*. Jyotirao Phule puts the binary opposition of Devas/Daityas in question. But it can't be put into question so easily if anyone goes through spiritual scriptures deeply. Actually the doings of a particular person determines one's space of belonging i.e. good works done by human beings put them into the region of Devas and negative works give birth to the image of Rakshas. Veda also says that one's person's work determines one's varna not one's heredity. So from that perspective Premchand's fiction *Deliverance* represents the distorted image of varnashrama as it has been created by a particular group of Brahmins and later it influenced all other sections in the society too.

III. Deep Rooted Influence of Casteism in Hira Bansode's Bossom Friend:

Hira Bansode's *Bosom Friend* represents that image of above mentioned superiority in this modern era also. Her poem *Bosom Friend* forms a part of a collection of poems called *Phiyad* (1984). From the title it is easy to understand that it is about a good friend. That friend was invited by the poet for dinner. As it is evident from the poem that she belongs to a higher caste family and that's why, the poet says-
*But you came with a mind large as the sky to
My pocket size house.(4-5)*

The meaning of the above mentioned line is that the poet's friend seems to have broken through the caste and traditional barriers and that's why she has expressed her gratitude in this manner. But her belief towards her friend's magnanimous attitude shatters later on when her friend comments-
*You still don't know how to serve food
Truly, you folk will never improve.(15-16)*

In the previous mentioned line the poet commented on her friend's attitude and compared it with the 'sky' as the 'sky' is the symbol of 'hope' and 'freedom'. But later the poet has expressed her shattered mind in a very beautiful manner-

*I was sad, then dumb.
But the next moment I came back to life.
A stone dropped in the water stirs up
things on the bottom.(26-29)*

All of a sudden the poet came back to reality as the reality was like 'stone' and it hit at the unconscious mind of the poet. So it is very clear that the influence of that caste system is very deep which reaches at the unconscious mind of the poet and the same is the case about the poet's friend about which the poet says-
*Dear Friend-you have not discarded your tradition
Its roots go deep in your mind. (44-45)*

That is the truth which has been mentioned in the above mentioned lines. Actually distorted image of varnashrama had been taught at a particular time of Indian history and that teaching remained intact in the mind of the people and it gives birth to hatred from the side of the Non-Brahmins and Brahmins. That is how casteism has been represented in literature.

IV. Feminist Perspective in Jamaica Kincaid's Girl:

Feminism as a mode of criticism also represents the unequal condition of the women in this male dominated society. According to feminists, this society is male dominated and in this patriarchal set up the rights of women are somehow neglecting. Feminism as a concept deconstructs the male-dominated society and tries to represent its image as a separate one. Gynocriticism deconstructs the writings written by men and women and tries to find out the location of the women in this patriarchal set up. Rigid feminism questions language also and criticises the representation of women in different writings. The main aim of feminism is to focus on the pathetic condition of the women in the male-dominated society and according to feminists-

Women's oppression was achieved by a combination of physical violence and cultural pressure. All aspects of society and culture functioned according to a sexual politics that encouraged women to internalize their own inferiority until it became psychologically rooted. Literature was a tool of political ideology because it recreated sexual inequalities and cemented the patriarchal values of society. (p.326)

Jamaica Kincaid in her poem *Girl* represents that aspect of feminism. This poem deals with the ideological concept of making women in the society. Here in this poem, one can find a conversation between mother and daughter. It represents a mother's attitude towards her girl. She wants to see her daughter as a skilled housewife and well-mannered lady and that's why, she says-

*Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them
on the stone heap, wash the color clothes on Tuesday
and put them on the clothesline to dry;(1-2)*

The above mentioned quotation represents the image of household works done by women. The whole poem deals with 'do's and don'ts' from the point of view of women in the society. In this poem mother tells her daughter how to prepare food and to grow vegetables. She also advises her how to control the family. Only for two times the girl interrupted her mother but her mother never stopped from her argument and warned her from becoming a slut. Thus the poet represented the image of women in her poem. After reading this poem it is easy to say that the oppressive advice of the mother curves the spontaneity of the girl. But the ironical situation is that it represents the image of women in a contradictory situation. Here a woman is giving advice to create another woman out of a girl who will surrender unconditionally to the patriarchal set up of the society. Thus Jamaica's Kincaid's poem 'Girl' represents the submissive attitude of the women in the society. The mother herself has been a victim of such a society and obsessed with training the girl to measure up to the 'requirements' of a male dominated ethos. But in our effort to find a proper place for women in the society, we should not forget the value of work done by the women in the society. The representation of domestic work should not be equalized with oppression otherwise the whole representation will be a distorted one. Each and every person should perform their work willingly and not a single work should be imposed on others without one's will. From that perspective mother's advice towards girl is fine and justifiable but her tone of representation and categorization is unjustifiable which can be understood from the following line –

*On Sunday's try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are bent on becoming;
Don't sing benna in Sunday school;
You musn't speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions; (11-13)*

Mother's authoritative tone of 'do's and don'ts' represents the psychological domination of patriarchal set up. That type of oppressive patriarchal set up should be changed without distorting household and domestic works.

V. Subalternist Perspective in Countdown:

Amitav Ghosh in his *Countdown* represents the picture of the world in the post-national world. It represents the discrepancy among different countries. In this global phenomenon each and every country is dependent upon each other and that's why a friendly relationship should be maintained. But it can be traced is that behind the mask of friendly relationship, a sense of contrast is there. Each and every country is competing with the neighbouring country financially, politically, militarily and so on. Amitav Ghosh's non-fictional work *Countdown* tries to find out the reason behind this sense of enmity. This non-fictional work describes the incident of nuclear tests on 11th May, 1998 and analyses the response of the different groups especially politician, elites and intellectuals regarding the five nuclear tests critically. The Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in March in 1998 and the Pokhran tests followed two months later. The Pokhran tests occasioned great outpourings of joy on the part of the B.J.P. The party members organized these tests as festivals and they handed out celebratory sweetmeats. The site of test has been represented as a pilgrimage and it has been stated that the

dust from the site will be delivered around the country so that the whole nation could partake in the glow of the blasts. Amitav Ghosh used the phrase 'shrine of strength' to make us understand the value of the site in front of the B.J.P. members' eyes. Then the sense of joy followed by Pokhran tests faded quickly. The reason behind this was that Pakistan had tested nuclear devices of its own in response to the Pokhran tests. From this incident, a sense of enmity between India and Pakistan had come in front of the world.

This non-fictional work questions the concept of 'nation' in post-national world. It represents that nationalist representations are highly unstable and fragile constructions which cannot ever produce the unity. Now in this post-national phenomenon, the national discourse which has been created during the colonial period creates contrast among neighbouring countries. Nationalist discourse in the colonial period created by reversing the polarity of binary oppositions of 'Anglo-European white/other' as 'other/Anglo-European white' and this sense of superiority continues its existence in this era also. India's five nuclear tests and in response to these tests Pakistan's nuclear tests brings into light the vagueness of nationalist discourse. These tests do not draw the public's attention to the condition of the people living there. The people who live there get affected by these tests politically, economically and more important physically. But the myth of getting worldwide recognition through these tests, which had been spread by politicians and media, blinds people to the practical problem. It was not for the first time the nuclear devices were tested in India. Manohar Joshi, a citizen of Pokhran informed Amitav Ghosh that a nuclear device was first tested in this district in 1974 when he was twelve. At that time Prime minister was Indira Gandhi. Manohar Joshi informed –

In the years after 1974, there was so much illness here that people didn't have money to buy pills...(p.3)

He also stated that people began to get cancer and different skin diseases after the test. According to him, if these things had happened anywhere else in the country in Bihar or Kashmir, people would rise up and stop it. The above mentioned fact indicates that there are 'subaltern' group in a particular nation. There is no one to pay heed to their appeals.

VI. Conclusion:

Thus this paper focuses on different aspects of social inequality prevalent in the society. Jyotirao Phule's *Caste Laws* represents the influence of Brahmin and the varnashrama as the main cause of casteism in India but this explains that it is not a proper explanation of the casteism in India. This paper criticizes the solution provided by the Jyotirao Phule to maintain the balance of the caste system in the society. And through the representation of Premchand's *Deliverance* it shows the cruel aspect of Brahmanism at a particular period of time. Jamaica Kincaid's *Girl* represents the aspect of psychological domination from feminist point of view. Subaltern perspective in Amitav Ghosh's non-fictional work *Countdown* brings into light a glimpse of the voiceless people in this post-national phenomenon. Last of all it can be stated that a thoughtful outlook is needed to solve the problem of inequality in the society and just by reversing the polarity of binary opposition; solution of this problem can't be found.

References:

- [1] The Individual and Society Department of English. (Pearson New Delhi 2010).
- [2] Ghosh Amitav. *CountDown* (Penguin, New Delhi 2010).
- [3] Waugh Patricia, *Literary Theory and Criticism* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2006).