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MARGINALIZATION AS REFLECTED IN UNTOUCHABLE AND THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Abstract :

Marginalization is an approach used to study literature, giving emphasis to the voice of marginalized people in the society. Marginalized people are socially, politically, economically and legally deprived of their 'rights' as human beings in every sphere of life and society. Untouchables and females are considered as marginal entity in the society. Regarding this fact present research paper tries to focus on marginalization in Indian Writing in English. For this purpose the research paper focuses on two novels: ***Untouchable*** and ***The God of Small Things*** by Mulkraj Anand and Arundhati Roy respectively. Mulkraj Anand deals with the trials and tribulations of untouchables and downtrodden very skillfully while Arundhati Roy, as a Booker Prize winner novelist highlights the pitiful conditions of marginalized in her novel. Bakha, Sohini, Velutha are the representatives of marginalized in the caste-ridden society. Both the novels are representation of caste-system deeply rooted in India and so called upper class.

Keywords - Marginalization, caste system, male dominated society, Indian writing in English

Introduction

Literature is the best medium of expression of human feelings, emotions, sufferings and joys. In fact literature is the representation of life and life is nothing but the real picture of society. There is a great impact of society on writers in which they are living. In every society, there are various sections to which people belong. There are some sections of society that are regarded as Marginalized. Marginalized are those people deprived of socio-economic opportunities for their sustenance and they are victims of social, cultural, and political exclusion. The downtrodden, the poor people are regarded as marginalized.

One of the important objectives of Indian English Writers of fiction has been the creative interpretation of Indian society and its culture and the 'formulation and projection of the Indian image'. (Shahane) The Indian society is classified into various classes such as upper class, the non-upper-class and the depressed classes. Among these classes exist many castes, sub-castes, which follow numerous practices and usages; surprisingly each of them is unique. The influence of upper caste is felt in the socio-religious and cultural lives of the marginalized sections of society.

Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted is analytical. The researcher used theoretical, descriptive, and interpretative methods. The researcher analyzed the novels on the basis of thorough reading.

Marginality

Subaltern theme has become important in the present scenario of literature. The word 'subaltern' is German word which means 'inferior rank' or 'secondary importance'. The study of 'subaltern' refers to Antonio Gramsci, Ranjit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorthy Spivak. Julian Wolfreys defines the concept of subaltern, thus: "It contains the groups that are marginalized, oppressed and exploited on the cultural, political, social and religious grounds". (Wolfrey) Thus subaltern literature includes various themes such as oppression, marginalization, gender discrimination, subjugation of lower and working classes, disregarded women, neglected sections of society, deprived classes etc. women and downtrodden, both are regarded as marginalized social groups. Both male and female writers have highlighted the predicament of women and backward classes in conservative and tradition bound societies where both are treated as inferior and subjugated groups in hierarchical social structure.

Nuruddin Farah and Buchi Emecheta, for instance, have chronicled the women's experiences in the African diaspora. Novelists like Shashi Deshpande (*The Dark Holds No Terror, If I Die Today, and That Long Silence*) and Githa Hariharan (*The Thousand Faces of Night, The Art of Dying*) have focused on the women marginalization in the orthodox and highly stratified Indian society. Rohinton Mistry has depicted the struggle of Indian untouchables for survival in a hostile and caste -ridden society in '*A Fine Balance'*. Tasleema Nasreen's *Lajja* condemns the oppression of nurtured by the patriarchal ideology.

Marginality is generally used to describe and analyze socio-cultural, political and economical sphere, where disadvantaged people struggle to gain access (societal and spatial) to resources, and full participation in social life.(Anderson and Larsen, 1998) Mullay describes marginalization as 'the need for recognizing that social problems are indeed connected with larger structures in society, causing various forms of oppression amongst individuals resulting in marginalization. (Mullay, 2007)

The main objective of this paper is to show how the protagonists are influenced positively and negatively by society. It also deals with the analysis of how they are dehumanized at the hands of the upper-caste people at various levels. The novelists have depicted very sensitive issues of untouchables and marginalized sections of pre and post-independence India. Caste plays a very important role in Indian society. The so-called upper class people have condemned untouchables

as the dirt of society. Such caste discrimination is a very shameful drawback of Indian society. It is the self experience and keen observation of society, the encounter with reality that makes them aware of this social evil of untouchability. The novelists have depicted the truthful conditions of the protagonists and their sufferings at the hands of upper caste people. The main characters of the writers are from the marginalized class of society. Mulkraj Anand's Bakha is an untouchable who is a toilet-cleaner or bhangi while Arundhati Roy's Velutha belongs to an untouchable caste called the Paravan. Bakha is a strong young man of eighteen years. He has attraction for western dress. Actually he has to do very disgusting work of cleaning toilets of upper class people but he himself likes to live in clean surroundings and decent manner. These untouchables live in very inhuman conditions which are imposed on them by the upper class. They are not allowed to live near Hindus. In the words of Rama Kundu, "Roy tries to sensitize this society to the cruelty of some of its traditions by artistically challenging certain common age - old complacently held out dehumanizing social taboos. She also shows how the women and untouchables are both treated as impersonal and subjugative objects (not decisive subjects) in this social structure: how things are decided for both by the patriarchal ideology of an ancient culture which also cultivates the hierarchal snobbery and violence of the 'Touchables' towards the 'Untouchables'.

In **The God of Small Things** Roy depicts the house of Velutha, the paravan as it

> '… was dark and clean. It smelled of fish curry and wood smoke. Heat cleaved to things like a low fever… Velutha and Vellya Paapen's bedding was rolled up and propped against the wall….a grown man could stand up straight in the centre of the room, but not along its sides'. (TGST, p. 208)

Mulk Raj Anand also depicts the realistic picture of the outcastes' colony. Anand describes;

> The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together into rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane , once with the crystal clear water, now soiled by the dirt and the filth of the public latrines situated about it , the Adour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffalos heaped up to be made into fuel cakes. (Untouchable, p.1)

The above description shows how untouchables have to live in unhealthy and inhuman surroundings. Many incidents of the novel highlight the lives of marginalized. The water incident of the novel **Untouchable** is very heart rendering. The untouchables were not allowed to touch the

well and draw water from it. They have to depend on the bounty of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitchers. Such humiliation is common for them as they are untouchables. Bakha, after finishing his job of toilet cleaning, returns home. He is thirsty but there is no water in home. Sohini goes for bringing water to the well but she has to wait a lot to have her turn and other outcastes also wait but they cannot touch the well but have to wait for a class Hindu to give them water. Anand writes;

> She had come as fast as she could to the well, full of fear and anxiety that she would have to wait her turn since she could see from a distance that there was already a crowd. She didn't feel disappointed so much as depressed to realize that she would be the eleventh to receive water. She had sensed the feeling in her brother's soul. He was tired. He was thirsty…there was no sign of anyone that way that could be a possible benefactor. (Untouchable, p.15)

Arundhati Roy describes the helplessness of Vellyan Paapen, the father of Velutha. He has to crawl backwards and he takes the social disabilities that are imposed on the marginalized section by worn-out tradition. Arundhati Roy says,

> 'By the time he understood his part in History's Plans, it was too late. To retrace his steps he had swept his footprints away himself .crawling backwards with a broom. (TGST, p.200)

Arundhati Roy depicts the pitiful conditions of the downtrodden and how they were treated as secondary. There was a time when:

> Paravans where expected to crawl backwards with a broom sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidently stepping into a paravan's footprint…They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breeth away from those whom they addressed. (TGST, p.73-74)

In this context M.K. Naik brings out the significance of color consciousness:

> The dark complexion is specially significant in the Indian context, where the color of the skin is often regarded as an index to one's caste-status. Velutha is a paravan by caste, the lowest in the caste hierarchy and actually an untouchable. [(1)]

Though the world has known both patriarchal and matriarchal societies but it is common knowledge that now matriarchal societies have become almost extinct. Centuries of experience have made it obvious that patriarchal societies promote the male at the expense of the female. Consequently women have been denied economic, social, and cultural equality the world over.

Mammachi has been ill treated by her husband in the

past. She has experienced helplessness as a woman. In spite of this she does not hesitate to punish Ammu & Velutha, her attitude towards Velutha is such as one would have towards an animal, she is surprised at Ammus being able to love him,

> "how could she stand the small? They have a particular smell these paravans," (TGST, p.257)

The God of Small Things deals with the tribulations of women as daughter and a wife in patriarchal society. Women have become victims of gender oppression. Ammu's own mother has no sympathy for her own daughter. As Simon-De-Beauvoir put it;

> women lack concrete means for organizing themselves in to a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no post, no history, no religion of their own, and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat… they live dispersed among the males, attach through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain main- fathers or husbands- more firmly than they are to other women[(2)].

Above mentioned situation is reflected in the novel in some women characters.

In ***Untouchable*** Sohini is humiliated by Gulaboo, the washer woman. Being jealous of Sohini, she abuses her;

> 'Think of it! Think of it! Bitch! Prostitute! Wanton! And your mother hardly dead… Ari, bitch! Do you take me for a buffon? What are you laughing at, slut? Arent you ashamed of showing your teeth to me in the presence of men, prostitute? (Untouchable, pp. 28-29)

Such treatment with marginalized people was very common in the early decades of 20th century India.

M. K. Naik observes that the evil of untouchability is the result of years of suppression of a class on religious grounds;

> The caste Hindu is armed with the feeling of 6000 years of a social and a class superiority, a feeling which refuses to accept the fact that the Untouchable is a human being, but insists on treating him like a sub human creature, to be ignored or bullied or exploited as the occasion demands.[(3)]

Temple incident reinforces the fact how Hindu society is hypocrite. The so called custodian of religion or priest (Pandit Kalinath) does not like Bakha's touching of steps of a temple but at the same time he wants to seduce beautiful Sohini. He raises an alarm of;

> 'Polluted, Polluted, Polluted!' shouted the Brahmin below… get of the steps, scavenger! Of with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. (Untouchable, p. 53)

Moreover these marginalized characters are called either by their caste or by vulgar words. In one of the incidents Bakha receives both abuses and pancakes thrown at him by a housewife from the house-top, Anand seems to get the better hold to lay bare the real inhumanity to which the untouchables are subjected; they are treated as sub human species between humans and dogs.

> 'Vay, eater of your masters, she shouted, 'may the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence … You sweepers have lifted your heads to the shy now a days. (Untouchable, pp. 80-81)

At last she throws the bread to Bakha from the top of her house like someone throws breads to dogs from distance. She says

> Vay Bakhiya, take this. Here is your bread coming down and she flung it at him. (Untouchable, p. 83)

In both novels, the novelists ironically depict the conversion of untouchables into Christianity which has not proved fruitful in changing their life pattern.

> When the British arrived in Malabar, a number of paravans, pelays, pulays (among whom Kelan, Veluthas grandfather was one) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourage of untouchability. They came to be known as Rice-Christians because they were given some food & money by British. But there too, they suffered humiliation and caste distinction. They came to realize their predicament when they, "were made to have separate churches with separate services and separate priests" (TGST, p.75)

In **Untouchable** Bakha also experiences the same. The upper caste people often take advantage of their ignorance and exploit the marginalized. The upper caste people regarded untouchability as pollution, contamination, or defilement and always thought of ways to get rid of it .In both the novels one can easily understand the subjugation imposed by the upper caste people upon the lower caste people. They are not allowed to enter or touch things, people, or house of the upper castes. But it is very ironical that when these so called upper caste people need untouchables for hard work, they forget the caste barriers and extract hard work from these marginalized sections of society.

Roy in **The God of Small Things**, brings out the condition of the downtrodden through Mammachi when she narrates how the untouchables are treated during her days to Rahel:

> "Papachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints (TGST, pp. 73-74)

So that Brahmins and Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidently stepping into a Paravans footprints. The degradation and humiliation inflicted on the unfortunate sections of society is focused through the repeated refrain of Bakha: Posh, posh, sweeper coming'.

Bakha is slapped as he belongs to a lower caste by a man. Bakha's powers or place in society is determined only by his being a subaltern or Dalit. Temple incident reinforces the fact how Hindu society is hypocrite. Velutha like Bakha experiences the fact of not touching the upper castes and not to enter their houses in ***The God of Small Things*** by Roy.

While taking into consideration ***The God of Small Things***, we come across marginalized sections in the form of female character Ammu. Ammu's relation with Velutha brings catastrophe on both of them. Being a woman she is deprived of higher education. Pappachi insisted that a college education is: 'an unnecessary expense for a girl'.

Untouchable and ***The God of Small Things*** focus on the very important issue of untouchables or marginalized. Caste system is deeply rooted in the society. The words of Leo Tolstoy are relevant in the present society as quoted by V. R.Krishna Iyer,

> "The abolition of slavery has gone on for a long time, Rome abolished slavery, America abolished it, and we did too, but only the words were abolished, not the things. (4)

Mulk Raj Anand is a commited writer. He focused on the sufferings, misery and exploitation of poor, marginalized class. Through his art he has done valuable service of humanity. Anand paved the path of social reform. Prof.K.R.S.Iyengar sums up the novel:

> Untouchable strikes us as the picture of the place of society, and the certain persons not easily to be forgotten; a picture that is also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy. As a novelist addressing himself to the task of exposing certain evils, Anand has been as effective as Dickens himself. (5)

Arundhati Roy is deeply connected with India's social problems. She has depicted all the problems faced by common man. She has tried to focus on the burning problems the society. The novel is a forceful plea for the upliftment of the downtrodden, marginalized class.

In this context Ranga Rao says,

"Roy's book is the only one I can think of among Indian novels in English which can be comprehensively described as a protest novel. It is all about atrocities against minorities, small things: children and youth, women and untouchables". (6)

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