



Representations Of Caste And Social Inequality In Indian English Literature

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ABSTRACT

This review article seeks to map Indian English literature about the issue of caste and social inequality starting right from Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* through contemporary writers like Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, and Aravind Adiga. Indian English literature, thus, has been a key sphere that has engaged with the erector spines of the Indian caste system that determines sociopolitical scope and images of oppression in India actively. The article covers the aspects of untouchability, inter-caste relations, caste and gender and religion, and caste in the context of modern urbanization. It also tries to explain how the global readership shapes the representation of caste and the conflict between the true representation of caste and the commodification of caste for the international market. Moreover, the article deconstructs the problems of the reductionism of caste and the need to listen to the real Dalits. Thus, the current review confirms the significance and modernity of the caste-based narratives in the discussed literature and their impact on the ongoing social justice and inequality debates in India.

Keywords: Caste representation, Social inequality, Indian English literature, Dalit voices, Intersectionality, Untouchability, Globalization, and caste.

1. Introduction

The caste system has long been one of the most defining and enduring social hierarchies in India, deeply entrenched in its cultural, religious, and societal structures. Originating from the Hindu religious tradition from India, caste categorizes people into different classes by their birth, work, and social class thus culminating into socially defined separation. In the long run, the caste system has become oppressive and discriminative and has led to social inequality towards minority castes including the present-day Dalits (formerly known as "untouchables"). This social stratification has not only dealt with economic and education issues but has also been a root of suffering in human lives as narrated in the literature of different strata of time (Anand 1935, Ambedkar 1936).

This form of literature has now become one of the ways to express and discuss such realities in Indian English literature. Beginning with the phases of early post-colonialism to the recent generations novelists have tried to depict and analyze the caste bias that forms the backbone of Indian society. Thanks to the authors' focus on caste and social inequality, readers have received the opportunity to learn about the main social problems that affect millions of Indians. As noted by Arundhati Roy, literature serves as "a mirror to the world, but also as a hammer to shape it" (Roy, 1997). In this paper, the authors of Indian English Writing have shown how caste practices are represented and at the same time, how literature may be used as a tool for change.

Besides caste, the second axis of social injustice is class, gender, and religion meeting with other forms of oppression. This structure of power is clear in Indian English literature: the oppressors and their outcomes are depicted, as are the suppressed themselves. For example, one can discuss the societal injustice in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* where the main character Bakha's daily experience depicts the ugly side of untouchability (Anand, 1935). In the same manner, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* mocks the relationship between caste and class and how the latter deepens the former in modern India (Adiga, 2008).

2. Historical Context of Caste in Indian Literature

A change has been observed in the portrayal of caste in Indian literature particularly in Indian English literature based on new social and political development in the country. Starting from pre-independent India where the glaring injustice of the caste system was portrayed, at the crossing of freedom unhurried with newly fabricated nationalisms and ideologies, at present state where formations of caste interactions with modernity and globalization are numerous, Indian writers have not ceased to find ways to represent and interpret caste and power difference. This section examines how these representations evolved in three major historical phases: the colonial period, the period after the independence, and the contemporary period.

➤ Pre-Independence Era

Indian English literature started emerging in the early twentieth century in pre-independent India for use as a tool of social awakening, and for those like Mulk Raj Anand and Babu Raoji Ambedkar using their creative talents in both fiction and non-fiction to condemn social evils like the caste system. The period of British Rule & the emergence of the Indian freedom struggle not only allowed writers to demonstrate reality but also provided writers freedom of speech and writing against socially constructed norms/culture such as the Caste system.

Mulk Raj Anand and the Humanization of the Untouchable

Mulk Raj Anand is regarded by many as one of the first writers in the Indian English literary canon and one of the first to take the problem of caste to the world. *Untouchable* (1935) is his powerful work in which the bothered character is depicted to be a young sweeper from the infamous Dalit caste. Thus, realism makes Anand the reader feel pity for Bakha and other Dalits compelled to suffer the daily humiliation of caste prejudice. What makes Anand's portrayal memorable is that it is never condescending and turns Bakha not into a symbol of HOW-a-system-crumbles but a modest individual aspirations-for-dignity-and-freedom-DVD (Anand, 1935). In *Untouchable*, there is no conception of caste oppression simply as a socio-political problem in Indian society; instead, it is portrayed as an individual grief.

B.R. Ambedkar's Call for Annihilation of Caste

While Anand tried to depict caste through fiction, B.R. Ambedkar, a socio-political activist, totally dismantled caste through his work *Annihilation of Caste*, 1936. Originally delivered as an oral address, the text is a bitter condemnation of the Hindu caste system and a radical demand for its total eradication. Caste, Ambedkar went on to say, was a social evil but a moral evil encased in the religious systems of Hindus and thus could not be separated from Indians' spiritual lives (Ambedkar, 1936). His work did not only give direction to movements but also determined the tenor of subsequent literary portrayals of the caste system as a structural sin that needs to be eradicated. Ambedkar's work is still heard in literature today, and many modern Dalit writers quote his ideas when writing about the dismantling of caste domination.

➤ Post-Independence Literature

From the time India gained independence in the year 1947, the representation of caste in Indian English took a great change. The new democratic nation with its principles of equality, justice, and freedom was both a possibility and a problem for Indian writers. On one hand, untouchability and everyone having fixed grades or status were banned constitutionally, and discrimination against castes was banned. On the other hand, there are textual factors, where the caste indeed lost its precise structural significance but remained as the key prism view to perceive the society at large and relevant social relations as well. The writers of this period wanted to know how the constitutional promise of equality coexisted with the caste prejudice.

Caste in the Nehruvian Era

In the initial decades of Indian freedom, literature was at times an embodiment of the Nehruvian idea of India. But, as with so much of India, there was more than met the eye: caste was never far beneath the surface. For example, a novel by Raja Rao named *Kanthapura* (1938) is the novel revolving around the Indian independence movement, but the problem of caste differentiation in rural India is also raised. It highlights how in a village struggling to gain independence caste remains a factor that forms a wedge that prevents unity. The post-independence period put literature in a dilemma on one side it could rejoice in the political freedom of the nation and on the other side it could hate and protest the social oppressions including caste oppression.

Dalit Literature and the Rise of Marginalized Voices

Although the early Indian English writers such as R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao somehow touched on the issue of caste, the writers of the post-Independent Dalit literature have given a new dimension to it. Some of the Dalit writers who write in regional languages but whose works are translated into English offer a firsthand and unadulterated look at the caste system. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Novel A Dalit's Life* (1997) is a good example of this new trend in Dalit literature. Valmiki's autobiography narrates the life of the Dalit in free India how democracy and democracy alone are a mere façade and how the caste system is very much alive in the

country (Valmiki, 1997). Such works point out that even after the constitutional reforms, caste was an unavoidable part of the lives of many Indians.

➤ **Modern Context**

Caste remains an important subject in contemporary Indian English literature, but the depiction of the concept is changing. Modern authors are interested in caste not only as a social and religious phenomenon but as closely connected with class, gender, and economic differentiation. The increasing urbanization and globalization of the Indian society have brought new factors into play in the concerns with caste hierarchy, these being capitalist and neoliberal. But still, caste prevails in the newly formed ways in which it blends the economic and political frame.

Caste in the Globalized World

In analyzing how the issue of caste is explored in modern Indian literature using the setting of globalization, *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga is a classic case. Through the different events in the novel, the author raises issues to do with inequality, especially in a contemporary Indian society that still harbors a culture of discriminating against people based on their castes. Balram Halwai from Adiga is also a member of the lower caste, and he fights caste and class discrimination to succeed in neo capitalist economy. These flights draw a dark picture of India emerging as an economic giant but a social Bastille where caste bias has taken a new avatar; they are simply renamed as low-over-class or low-call-class people (Adiga, 2008). In this manner, modern writers refute the idea that globalization and modernization have erased the caste system. Instead, they provide evidence that caste has evolved with the new age and is still a force to be reckoned with in people's lives.

Intersectionality and New Literary Approaches

Caste is also portrayed by contemporary Indian writers in connection with other systems of stratification such as gender and religion. In the case of post-colonial culture, the caste system is explored as a combination of gender and forbidden themes, as seen in Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). This novel explores the tragic love affair between the upper caste Ammu and the lower caste Velutha that breaks all the barriers. Through Roy's work, it becomes clear that caste is still present in the private and public domains controlling people's interactions (Roy, 1997).

In conclusion, this paper has shown that Indian English literature has explored the theme of caste within broader transformations of Indian politics. Even from the early realistic writings of Mulk Raj Anand, who gave a face to the untouchables, to recent writers like Aravind Adiga, who portray the hierarchical cruel tale of reservation of caste system in a global village, miss out, literature has shown and questioned its society constantly. Given that modernized India increasingly perpetuates caste in various forms and under new conditions, literature serves as the key to understanding these processes.

3. Key Themes in Literature on Caste and Social Inequality

Considering this, Indian English literature has served as a medium of concern and protest against the caste system and related hierarchical inequalities. The following works focus on different aspects of the caste system and the struggles against it with references to untouchability, caste, and changes of status. This section provides a closer look at the most important topics that are often discussed in literary works that address the problem of caste and social inequality.

➤ **Untouchability and Marginalization**

This work also supports the idea that the theme of untouchability, to which the Indian caste system owes, is one of the defining features in Indian English Literary production. Untouchability means the social isolation of members of society outside the varna system, particularly Dalits who are assigned the tasks least desirable and considered polluting. Literary representations have been painting the grim picture of untouchability from time to time, giving voice to the oppressed.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

Of the early Dalit writers, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) can be regarded as a novel that paved the way for the representation of untouchability in Indian English literature. The only character in the novel is Bakha, a sweeper, who is tortured, subjugated, and discriminated against by upper-caste Hindus all through the day. In his novel, Anand transforms Bakha's experiences to reveal prejudices against the Dalits which reduce them to subhuman beings with no place in society. In the novel Bakha, the reader learns how constantly people ensure themselves from the touch of the untouchable: upper caste persons do not even allow Bakha to stand near them or sit in a bus. The depictions of untouchability in the novel are especially pathetic because they portray the eagerness of such individuals as Bakha to conform to the social inferiority assigned to them (Anand, 1935). Thus, despite Bakha's self-respect and volition to improve his condition and be a 'gentleman', the protagonist is an outcast who is deprived of both individual liberty and a chance to change his status in society.

Dalit Autobiographies and *Joothan*

Other valuable sources of information are the Dalit autobiographies, for example, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* published in 1997. In *Joothan*, Valmiki writes his memoir of the life of a Dalit boy from a village in Uttar Pradesh whose family is doomed to perform scavenging work, including collecting leftover food, called *Joothan*, from upper-caste households. The title of the book itself is suggestive of the fact that Dalits live in a state of untouchability that is everlasting. In portraying untouchability, Valmiki does not pull punches and navigates the reader through the brutal physical and psychological realities of the Dalit people in the course of their daily lives (Valmiki, 1997). Whereas Anand's *Untouchable* is a work of fiction, *Joothan* is a first-person narrative that brings to life the experience of caste oppression and underscores the pervasiveness of untouchability in both village and city.

➤ **Inter-caste Relations**

Another important strand in IE literature is the presentation of inter-caste relationships as being filled with conflict and social ostracism. These relationships often manifest as occasions on which individual concerns play out at the junction between the self and social structure.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy unfurls the illicit relationship between Ammu, a Syrian Christian, and Velutha, a Dalit man. The love between them turns into a violent social repression even though they love each other. Roy uses the private sphere to overlay the public sphere and illustrates how caste is maintained by both the family and the state. This is because Ammu and Velutha's relationship spells out the fact that upper-caste communities always harbor fear and hatred of Dalit people. Velutha, though a hardworking man and an independent concrete worker, is just considered an Untouchable; this is why his love affair with Ammu is a sin in the eyes of society (Roy, 1997). By so doing, Roy brings out a rebellion against the deeply rooted Indian caste system and how it slowly but surely dissects human interpersonal relationships with the aim of devastation.

A Fine Balance by Rohinton Mistry

Likewise, in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), inter-caste relationships though not the central theme of the novel are highly influenced by the internal relationships among the characters from different castes. The novel based on Emergency Time shows how the caste plays a role related to class and poverty considering the destiny of the characters. Ishvar and Omprakash Mudra for example are two tailors from lower caste who struggle to fight against social injustice of the society. The caste system is therefore implicit in each of the five protagonists and the novel gently reflects on the difficulties as well as the impossibility of attempting social mobility in a society that is so polarized (Mistry, 1995).

➤ **Economic Inequality and Caste Mobility**

Economic disparity and the realism or otherwise of the Indian caste system is another important subject in Indian literature. How some people or groups can move up or down the caste hierarchy is well explained by the interaction between economic class and caste.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

In his first novel *The White Tiger* (2008), Aravind Adiga gives a very bitter look at contemporary Indian society and its relations between the castes and rich and poor. The protagonist of the book, Halwair, is a man who started working at a tea shop and who in the end successfully opens his own business, but that success cost him his moral values. Through the story of Balram, we learn about a "caste cage" that is built around him; still, despite the fact he is intelligent and dreaming of change, he remains imprisoned. The protagonist of Adiga's novel shows us that in the era of the globalized economy, caste determines who gets to be rich and powerful. It is not a triumph of the upper caste overthrow but a testimony to how people like Balram have to turn into violent corruptants to come out of their misery (Adiga, 2008). By writing *The White Tiger*, Adiga reveals the fact of the new India, where the caste system is still active even in the conditions of economic growth.

➤ **Resistance and Emancipation**

The second major theme of the literature on caste is one of oppression and the other is a portrayal of oppression and a fight for liberation. The caste oppression of the lower-ranked Dalit people is equally portrayed by many writers who encourage either activism against the caste system or boycott and demolition of the system.

B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*

Out of all these texts, the most effective for our case can be considered B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936). Although it is mainly a political science work, Ambedkar's work has influenced literature and social justice movements. Ambedkar in this work is unambiguous about the need to eradicate the caste system, giving the view that it goes against the principles of equality and justice (Ambedkar, 1936). His scathing analysis of Hindu scriptures and his demand for Dalit pride and honor are heard loud and clear in literary productions that address the question of caste rebellion.

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*

Likewise, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* records the subjugation of Dalits but at the same time, it also shows how they struggle. All his life, Valmiki refuses the humiliation of the caste system in education, writing, or action. His memoir is not only of suffering but also of defiance and strength of Dalits and their rejection of their "untouchable" status. Thus, recounting his life story, Valmiki shows that Dalit is not a sign of helplessness and vulnerability but power and rebellion against the caste system (Valmiki, 1997).

➤ Urban vs. Rural Caste Dynamics

Indian literature has presented the difference in the representation of caste in the rural and urban areas of the country and how the nature of casteism and discrimination is the same in both phases or even more rigid in the urban phase.

Manu Joseph's *Serious Men*

Manu Joseph looks at the matters of caste in an urban, modern context in his novel *Serious Men* (2010). The novel's major character and narrator is Ayyan Mani, born and raised in a slum area and presently working as a Dalit clerk in a scientific institute in Mumbai. As a boy who grew up in an urban setting, there is no more explicit oppression based on caste, but Ayyan struggles throughout the story against prejudices and restrictions originating from his caste background. The novel also depicts a very bitter social comment on how caste while not as rigid as in the villages still controls mobility and power relations (Joseph, 2010). The problems that Ayyan faces are the problems of caste in a modern India where merit wins often remain a mere façade for the downtrodden.

Rohinton Mistry's book '*A Fine Balance*'

On the other hand, caste relations in *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry are considerably more concrete and strictly defined in rural environments. Ishvar and Omprakash, the lower castes' tailors, are subservient to upper castes' landlords, and the social structures governing the village are patently exploitative. The process of migration to the city provides them with a certain measure of relief, however, using Mistry one can state that the escape from the caste bonds of rural culture is incomplete; they can experience poverty and prejudice in urban settings which are just as much a direct result of the caste system as the conditions of the village (Mistry, 1995).

These themes in Indian English literature offer a holistic view of how and in what periods and in what social strata caste and social injustice are represented. About the caste system in India these works capture not only the violence and exploitation of untouchable castes but also the subtleties of the economic division based on the caste system, and, thus, besides the depiction of caste in Indian society, these works perform the function of criticism of the caste system which is oppressive to a significant share of Indian population.

4. Major Authors and Their Contributions

Indian English literature has produced many authors who have opened society's eyes to the subject of caste and social injustice. Some of these authors have not only depicted the suffering of minority groups but also the injustices of the dominant culture in recognition of literary works. This section goes further to look at how some of the most prominent writers who have written on caste oppression and social injustice such as Mulk Raj Anand, the Dalit writers Omprakash Valmiki and Baburao Bagul.

➤ Mulk Raj Anand: A Pioneer in Addressing Caste Oppression

It is therefore acknowledged that Mulk Raj Anand was one of the first writers to appropriate the technique of Indian English literature especially in the way he portrayed the caste system. His most famous book *Untouchable* published in 1935 is a classic work that brought the theme of untouchability to the literary sphere. Anand depicted the lower caste Dalit through Binoba or, more correctly, Bakha, a young sweeper who exposed the plight of the downtrodden in India most credibly.

Untouchable, by Anand, was groundbreaking in its attempt to humanize a Dalit character, which wasn't very common in Indian fiction at the time. Not only is Bakha presented as a common underdog in league with the injustice done to him, as well as society, but he is also a man with aspirations, who is sexually appealing and wants to be respected as such. In this respect, Anand's social realism fused with humanism, enables readers to observe caste repression through Bakha's eyes, thus, the protagonist brings the reader close to the stigmatic abuses and indignities of untouchability (Anand, 1935). Unfortunately, Indian filmmakers still treated the theme of caste as taboo in his early and later films through *Untouchable*, Anand brought out the message about equality but the structure of caste within the society of his own country, India was not a progressive one.

There are other films by Anand also, including, '*Coolie*' in 1936 and '*Two Leaves and a Bud*' in 1937 which also carry on working on the same principle of social inequality and exploitation especially of the lower class. His writings continue to be a useful source for the study of caste, class, and colonialism in Indian English literature.

➤ **Arundhati Roy: Caste and Social Inequality in Personal and Familial Relationships**

The other novel that is deserving of all the accolades is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), one of the defining works of Indian English Writing for both its style of telling and its social realism in depicting the prevailing evil system of caste and discrimination. Taking place in the state of Kerala in southern India, individual and family dynamics are connected with public issues like the caste system. Of most importance is love between Ammu, the upper-caste Syrian Christian, and Velutha, the untouchable Dalit.

Roy's portrayal of this relationship reflects the deeply entrenched caste-based prejudices that pervade even intimate, personal spheres. Velutha, though depicted as a skilled and compassionate individual, is ultimately reduced to his caste identity in the eyes of society. The bitter endings of the relations between Ammu and Velutha prove that the caste system controls and perishes human relations if they cross the existing frame (Roy, 1997).

What also deserves special attention is the critical portrayal of the relations between caste and gender in Roy's novel. While Ammu as a woman is not oppressed in the same way that Velutha is, we see, yet again, the two characters being used as tools to maintain both caste oppression and patriarchy. Thus, giving a full picture of Dalit life in India about how caste affects every political and personal relationship in the life of Indians Roy weaves political and personal together.

➤ **Rohinton Mistry: Systemic Inequality in a Changing Society**

A Fine Balance published in 1995 is another significant work of Indian English fiction that tries to trace the problem of caste division. The novel is located in the period of the Emergency in India, 1975-1977. This novel in its dramatic presentation revolves around the lives of four main characters, two of who are from the lowest caste namely Omprakash and Ishvar.

In *A Fine Balance*, Mistry's treatment of caste is notably relevant because the author explores the structural aspect of caste injustice. The characters enact the continuous cycles involving caste, class, and political exploitation subjective, despite changes in their stations in life. Ishvar and Om are employed as tailors, dream of elevating their station in life – and thus move from their village environment to city life, but the cruelties they experience in urban spheres are no different than those they face in the countryside in modern India (Mistry 1995).

However, the unique feature of Mistry's work is that he continues to point out that the caste system remains influential, notwithstanding the modernization and urbanization processes. However, the caste system is still a prevalent and dominant factor that determines one's position in Indian society after all the political revolutions in the country. In describing caste in his intricate way, Mistry points out to the reader the fact that caste remains an important social issue that has persisted into the modern challenging society and is a result of India's failure to adequately combat it despite gaining its independence.

➤ **Aravind Adiga: The Intersection of Economic Inequality and Caste in Contemporary India**

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) is a contemporary commentary on caste and economic stratification in a fast emergent India. The setting of the novel involves a rural poor Indo-Pak village, with the main character Balram Halwai a low-caste man who becomes a successful businessman with the assistance of some means. As the social ladder is supposedly open in the new neoliberal economy, Adiga shows that caste remains a prison that confines people like Balram, however much they try to ascend the economic hierarchy (Adiga, 2008).

Adiga's work is different from other works that discuss caste issues but does this in the context of a neo-liberal economy and the new India's fixation with money and success. Balram's story is a critique of how the caste system has been incorporated into the stratification of economic inequality: the poor are still unfree at the end of the novel, even if they can amass capital. Thus, in *The White Tiger*, Adiga provides a social commentary on the caste system and the corruption and agreements that people have to make to maneuver themselves from the lower classes.

➤ **Dalit Writers: Authentic Voices in the Literary Discourse on Caste**

Although most mainstream Indian English writers have portrayed caste oppression, the first-hand accounts of oppression from Dalit writers like Omprakash Valmiki and Baburao Bagul are invaluable. These writers offer their readers direct experiences of caste discrimination and social marginalization of Dalits in India.

Omprakash Valmiki

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (1997) is a path-breaking auto-biographical text about the life of a Dalit boy in independent India. Valmiki shares his stories of the degradation he endured as a child and the lack of opportunities that originally disallowed him and other untouchables to stay free. Valmiki's writing gives Dalits a chance to speak out loud against the oppression that is common in Indian society, and which often goes unnoticed (Valmiki, 1997). His work is an autobiography and a critique of the system that sustains caste oppression.

Baburao Bagul

Another Dalit writer Baburao Bagul also wrote about the sufferings of the Dalits through his short stories and novels. His works which include; *When I Hid My Caste* (1970) indicate the psychological and social impact of

caste apartheid. Bagul's stories are quite different from the earlier Dalit writing in so far as they are not apologetic for the Dalit's anger, frustration, and resistance. He also targets not only upper caste suppressors but society as a whole for perpetuating the caste system. However, Bagul's contribution to the Dalit literary movement as a rightful protest against caste expriiousness cannot be overemphasized even today.

These major writers—Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Aravind Adiga, and Dalit writers Omprakash Valmiki fighting for change, Baburao Bagul—have made extensive contributions in their writing to providing lighter discourses onto the issues of caste and social inequality in India. They have written from the earliest articulations of untouchability to the latest critiques of caste in the context of globalization. Altogether, these authors demand that the readers face the brutalities of caste suppression and provide multiple perspectives on the prospects of resistance and transformation.

5. Intersectionality: Caste, Class, Gender, and Religion

The representation of caste in Indian English literature is often with its relation to other discriminating factors such as class, gender, or religion. Of special interest in the analysis of how different social aspects interlink, the idea of intersectionality was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Different from the commonly held perception that caste is independent in India, it is a complex phenomenon shaped by gender, religious, and class dynamics. This section examines how the caste question is negotiated in Indian English literature, especially in relation to gender, religion, and modernity.

➤ Caste and Gender: The Intersection of Caste Discrimination and Patriarchy

There is always an additional dimension of caste oppression, which acts hand in hand with gender oppression, most especially for women from the lower castes. The women belong to the hit-castle class, and they suffer double burdens, sexual violation, marginalization, and oppression based on both their religion and their gender. This is a familiar theme in Indian English literature which shows how caste and sexism act in concert to subordinate women from the lower castes further.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

In *The God of Small Things* (1997), self-utmost and successful in presenting an agony of caste and gender in the character Ammu, who is an upper-caste Syrian Christian woman and her illicit affair with a lower-caste Dalit man, Velutha. Of course, Ammu has the socioeconomic status of a woman to compound the caste oppression that she and Velutha both suffer. As a woman, Ammu's mobility is limited and she can only interact with a man from a lower caste; thus, she rebels against caste as well as gender oppression (Roy, 1997). The given story shows how caste and gender work together to reinforce the lower order of social class and then abandon her at the end demonstrated how both the caste system and women's rights are bent and subdued in Indian society.

Thus the lovers Ammu and Velutha's interaction is an allegory of caste as well as gender oppression in the novel by Roy. That Velutha is a lower caste man not only ostracizes him but also condemns Ammu's affair with him as doubly sinful in the eyes of the law. The caste system therefore helps in regulating women's sexuality, through punishing those who try to engage in intimacy with upper castes.

Bama's *Sangati*

Gender and caste duo forms a major theme in another novel *Sangati* by Bama published in 1994. The text is modeled in Tamil but is available in English as well; it is an important part of the caste and gender debate. A major theme in the novel is the sexual exploitation of Dalit women in a rural area by upper caste men as well as violence within the confining social structures of their community. Bama shows how the Dalit women are oppressed twice, for they are Dalit and women in a patriarchal society. Their fight is not only against the caste system but also against gendered violence which is otherwise silently encouraged by a legal system that seeks to protect upper-caste male dominance (Bama, 1994).

➤ Caste and Religion: The Role of Religion in Reinforcing Caste Hierarchies

Caste-system ontology is linked closely with religion particularly Hinduism as it is on the principle that the caste system is one sanctioned by the divine. Religious aspects of caste have been well discussed by writers of Indian English literature as religion becomes the tool to justify caste discrimination and exclusion of the lower castes.

B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*

Perhaps the most forceful criticism of the religious sanction of untouchability is to be found in B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936). Even though it is not a novel, Ambedkar's work has played a major role in shaping the Indian English literary response to caste and religion. Ambedkar, a Dalit leader and democrat, strongly condemns Hinduism for having a caste system in India. He opines that casteism permeates the Hindu religion right from scriptures like *Manusmriti* which justifies the phenomena of the Varna System in which society is divided into strict castes. Ambedkar demanded the abolition of religion as a basis for caste, and, as is well known, he converted to Buddhism to free himself from the Hindu caste system (Ambedkar, 1936).

Ambedkar's work has provoked many writers to write on caste and religion in their fiction. Nevertheless, Gellner's critiques of the religious defense of caste remain critical to the rationale of relating caste in the contemporary socio-religious anonymous Indian society.

Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

Religion and caste are not far from one another in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995), especially while depicting the experiences of the two lower-caste characters, Ishvar and Omprakash. Despite the fact most of the characters are of Hindu origin, Mistry also presents caste conflict as a barrier that transcends religion. It is a bitter portrayal of lower caste Hindus by the upper caste Hindus for the representation of upper caste Hindus: The novel does express the discontent of lowly born Hindus over the high-born Hindus but what is also depicted is the corrupted religious leaders who teach equality before God but themselves are not ready for it and do not treat low cast Hindus equally (Mistry, 1995).

In Mistry's work, religion is a comfort and a weapon. At the same time, religion is also portrayed as laying down the foundations of caste supremacy, but there are also instances of religious reconciliation as the lower caste characters unite with other marginalized characters due to the common oppression of oppression by the caste system.

➤ **Caste and Modernity: The Evolution of Caste in Urban and Globalized Contexts**

The second type of change argue that caste continues to rise even as India has gradually metamorphosed into a modern and urban country. Some people think that urbanization erases caste differences while many literary pieces indicate that caste remains an important factor in structuring social interactions, in the contemporary urban context as well as in the context of economic liberalization. Faculty examine how caste bias continues, and how it adapts to new forms of discrimination based on class and economic status.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) is a good example of how caste functions in a modern globalized India. The invention of the primary character; Balram Halwai, is 'the darkness of -the lower caste-' who wanted to change his fate and move to the city and become a driver and ultimately an entrepreneur. On the one hand the novel can be read as a critique of the capitalist dream of the West, on the other hand it does not let the reader forget about the potential of the caste system in India. Concomitant with the improvement in his economic status, Balram struggles to transcend the caste system and his journey to the position of a successful entrepreneur involves dubious actions that demonstrate the negative impact of economic discrimination and the caste system (Adiga, 2008).

Adiga's novel is a response to the idea that caste system has been done away with by modernity and globalization. What it implies is that caste has simply been hidden under the veneer of class and economic status. However, in the concrete jungles of India's emerging urban centers, caste remains a major factor in prescribing your social and economic status even if this is not as explicit as in the villages.

Serious Men by Manu Joseph

In *Serious Men* (2010), Manu Joseph describes the ways of how caste discrimination functions in the contemporary Indian metropolis. Ayyan Mani, the protagonist of the novel, is a Dalit, a lower-born clerk working in a renowned scientific organization in Mumbai. Caste is less visibly apparent in the city than it is in the villages but Ayyan's caste influence remains very much part of his life. Joseph's novel is a stinging portrayal of how caste persists in today's professional hierarchies, leaving persons like the bright but humble Ayyan only to do backbreaking work (Joseph, 2010).

In *Serious Men* caste oppression is a little more hidden but definitely no less sinister. Finally, Ayyan hacks the system to enable his son to get a better future, but the novel cannot support this manufacturing since it is still set in a reality where caste determines opportunities and power in a society. In Ayyan's narrative, Joseph condemns the myth of the new India which has supposedly risen above this ancient tradition but whose society is still run by it.

➤ **Caste in Globalized and Digital Spaces**

As India progresses in its process of globalization, caste has reasserted itself in cyberspace and virtual reality. There is a growing body of literature that attempts to understand how caste works in the context of digital, social media, technology, and other forms of online existence. On the one hand, marginalized communities use digital technology to share stories of their quotidian lives and fight caste oppression; on the other, they experience caste-based discrimination through cyber victimization, in education, and employment. Subsequent literary productions will probably pay more attention to how caste morphs in these new globalized environments.

The comparatively recent phenomenon of the construction of masculinity by the intersection of caste, gender, religion, and modernity together shows how caste pervades Indian society. These intersections can be easily understood using Indian English literature as it gives a nuanced and complex portrayal of how the caste is enmeshed with other forms of social oppression. With the help of the works of Arundhati Roy and Bama,

Rohinton Mistry, Aravind Adiga, and Manu Joseph, readers receive further insight into the aspects of caste prejudice and the fight for justice presented in the contemporary period of the world's development.

6. Caste in Contemporary Indian English Literature

This paper aims to analyse the changes in the portrayal of caste and social inequality in Indian English literature in the last few decades mainly due to social, political and technological transformations in India. Whereas earlier writers mainly concentrated on caste as a rigid and oppressive system within the context of a backward agrarian society, the contemporary writers write about caste in more nuanced, urban, and globalization contexts. From the influence of accommodating a global readership to the emergence of digital platforms, as well as a heightened understanding of Intersectionality, caste is being represented differently in literature. This section examines these changes in representation, the effects of the global gaze and the possibilities of caste in the digital age.

➤ Shifts in Representation: Evolving Depictions of Caste and Social Inequality

Over time, one has noted a move from portrayals that immediately associates caste with its country and traditional forms to portrayals of the relic of the now-modified Indian caste system with forms molded to the contemporary urban and global landscape. Previous pieces of literature for example Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) were more or less preoccupied with the gross physical discrimination concrete in systemized untouchable castes and societies. But, the current writers have taken the caste representation to the next level, asking how caste plays itself out in the present day institutions, global economy, and cities.

Urban Caste Relations

The representation of caste in urban India is one of the significant trends in recent Indian writing in English. For example, in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), through a Balram Halwai, who changes the rural village to Bangalore, it tries to show how caste disparity influences mobility even today's enhanced Indian society. Despite the implications that Rose comes to represent the urban city as the place where dreams can be realized, Adiga exposes the working operations of the caste system that bind Balram's mobility in the city in the wake of materialism and power, only if he is willing to commit fraudulent means (Adiga, 2008).

In Manu Joseph's *Serious Men* (2010), caste oppression finds its way into a liberal, cosmopolitan world when the first-generation low-caste clerk, Ayyan Mani fights prejudice at an elite scientific center. The novel carries a message about how institutions such as universities and research centers perpetuate the caste system in a less obvious manner by reproducing the logic of Brahminical patriarchy at the core of these institutions, even while professing to be progressive modern constructions (Joseph, 2010).

Intersectionality in Contemporary Narratives

Another major change in the portrayal of caste is the concern with intersectionality especially how caste and gender, caste and class, and caste and religion intersect. Modern authors can describe how people feel they are on the periphery of society because of their caste and other aspects of their personality. For instance, Dalit Feminist writings like Bama's *Sangati* (1994), depict the distinct modes of subjugation that Dalit women have to endure due to the twin structures of Caste and Pattermarchy. As with many other accounts of violence and prejudice, Bama convincingly shows that being Dalit not only brings oppression rooted in caste but is also embedded in gender, therefore, it is multifaceted (Bama, 1994).

This shift toward intersectionality is the emergence of the understanding that many contemporary writers consider that caste prejudices cannot be discussed separately from the other forms of oppression. Therefore, in modern Indian English writing, the picture of caste is fuller and polymorphic, which in turn contains the various shades of oppression of structurally weaker sections by the superior castes.

➤ Global Perspectives: The Influence of Global Readership on Caste Representation

As Indian English literature has gained international recognition the representation of caste and social inequality has been shaped by the global reader's expectation and sensitiveness. Any writer who hopes to reach readers all over the world wrestles with the question of how to engage specific aspects of the Indian caste system while also presenting elements of the work that will be comprehensible to readers who might not know anything about the caste system in India.

Caste for a Global Audience

Literary fairs like the Booker Prize have placed novels like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) on the international map and made the question of caste global. These novels bring the experience of caste oppression to the global experience of power relations and struggles. Despite this being novels that are set in the Indian society these novels have themes of suffering and hope, oppression, and freedom that are standard to any society in the world (Roy, 1997; Adiga, 2008).

However, the phenomenon of globalization of Indian English literature has raised questions regarding the cultural inscription of casteism for consumption by Western readers. This is why, some critics always cite instances of textual representations of caste in literature arguing that the interpretations provided are

contracts and distort the Indian social life and culture to mechanisms that appeal to the foreign sensibility thus erasing the caste realities. For example, in *The White Tiger*, their discussions regarding Balram's promotion through immoral ways have been criticized for painting a picture of an Indian lower class that operates in an eroticization of poverty, something that would interest the Western imagination of the Third World (Adiga, 2008). In a way, such works do give global audiences some information on caste problems, but people also wonder if such renditions are even accurate when shaped for a foreign audience.

Global Perspectives: The Influence of Global Readership on Caste Representation

Nevertheless, some of the contemporary literatures implicitly relate caste to two processes of globalization and migration associating caste with the global labor market and diasporic subjectivity. Writers like Meena Kandasamy, in her novel *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017), address the question of how caste violence and patriarchy complicate transnational feminists' preoccupations. Kandasamy's work caters to a global feminist audience, but at the same time retains a vigorous anti-casteism that is situated within India, making her work local and global (Kandasamy, 2017).

Moreover, with the increasing visibility of Indian authors in the global literary arena there is a more nuanced discussion of caste as an international human rights concern that links caste discrimination with other forms of racism or ethnic prejudice in the world. Some writers are now framing caste within the larger context of injustice and oppression, and are arguing that caste violence and discrimination in India is not different from other struggles for justice anywhere in the world.

➤ The Digital Age: Caste and Social Inequality in Technology-Driven Narratives

With the use of technology as well as the emergence of the new media in contemporary India there is a new view on the portrayal of caste and social inequality in the literature. With India getting more and more interconnected through technological devices, caste has emerged in new forms in cyberspace, and writers are now starting to discuss how technology strengthens and disrupts caste systems.

Caste in Digital Spaces

One of the most important emerging trends in modern discourses about caste is the analysis of how caste discrimination is manifested in digital environments, including social networks, discussion forums, and educational programs. On the one hand, the digital space allows the voiceless people to subvert the existing power structures and gain access to new forms of knowledge, yet the Tamil Dalit case shows how strongly caste prejudice is present in digital platforms.

For instance, Dalit activists and writers employ Twitter and YouTube to alert people to caste violence and discrimination. At the same time, literature is gradually reproducing the phenomenon of digital activism: characters and stories are resolved around the question of how caste oppression can be addressed in group communities. But, digital platforms are also places of casteist harassment, cyberbullying, and Caste-exclusion indicating that technology is not an innocent tool in the struggle against Caste power.

Technology-Driven Narratives

In literature, caste intersects with technology in such texts as *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) by Arundhati Roy, wherein technology and the merchandising of modernity unravel the brutal face of caste violence and erasure. Roy's novel argues the point that technology may bring society progress but it does not eliminate social prejudices of caste and class systems. That is, as Ramakrishnan (2017) has noted, technology tends to reproduce or worsen existing structures of inequality: while social media provides a platform for lower-caste Indian citizens to call out GST officials for corruption, it also ensures that such officials continue to harass members of the Dalit community, as Tikam Singh was.

A recent example can be observed in speculative and dystopian novels through which authors attempt to depict how caste could probably transform itself in technologically advanced societies. Although not as popular in Indian English writing as yet, this kind of writing can provide the basis for understanding how the caste system could evolve with new technologies of power like artificial intelligence, surveillance, and biometric identification systems, as more of a reiteration or as a subversion of the existing power relations.

Digital Literature and Caste

Technology has also impacted the actual creation of literature and consumption of literature as works of art. Newspaper columns, blogs, and social networks, self-publishing enlarge the spectrum where opportunities are united and a Dalit writer and other members of the oppressed castes share their work directly with readers without any interference from the publishing houses or representatives. Therefore, the modern discourses on caste have become more pluralistic exploring more various cases and people's stances.

This paper seeks to show that caste in contemporary Indian English literature is not a static reality but rather a dynamic social reality in a changing world that is modernizing, globalizing, and digitizing. Whereas earlier works are concerned with structural and direct forms of caste prejudice or with protest novels, the recent novels pay attention to those individual, structural, intersectional, and global phenomena. By influencing readers from all across the world on these issues it has modified the dynamics of portraying caste in more universal terms of human rights and equality. Additionally, advancement in the use of information technology has meant

that avenues for reaffirming or subverting caste demarcations are available and they are gradually becoming a subject of interest in literary works. Collectively, these changes indicate a new landscape of how caste is being written about and understood in contemporary Indian English literature.

7. Critiques and Challenges

Its portrayal of caste and social injustice in Indian English literature is quite often the focal point of those critics' attention. On the one hand, literature has opened the awareness of caste oppression and on the second hand, there are challenges surrounding the work of literature in giving the totality of caste. These challenges manifest in several ways: from the dangers of stereotyping and reductionism, commodification, and the representation of Dalit identity in Indian English literature. This section discusses these criticisms and the difficulties writers continue to face while dealing with caste in writing.

➤ **Over-simplification of Caste: Challenges in Representing the Complexities of Caste and Social Inequality**

One of the major concerns pointed towards the writing of Indian English generals on caste is that the complexities of the oppression of the caste system are rarely represented well. It is extremely naive not to see that caste structures, and caste itself for that matter, are complex entities not reducible to religion region language gender class, or any single parameter. Several critics have opined caste as simply the 'upper-caste', 'upper-caste hegemonic-villains', and the 'lower-caste Simple, voiceless victims' as critics thus missing the real dynamics of caste structure in diverse scenarios.

Simplification in Mainstream Literature

For instance, analytical novels such as *The White Tiger* written by Aravind Adiga in 2008 giving a thrilling dare about the caste system & mobility bring into question saying that, the lower caste experience suffers reductionism where caste becomes the question of personal aspiration versus oppression of the society. The protagonist of Adiga's novel, Balram Halwai, rises out of his caste through criminality but this is depicted as the exception rather than exploring how structures of caste function (Saldanha, 2011). Critics are right to say that such representations might oversimplify the oppression of castes, create a fantasy theme of escape from caste, and therefore underestimate the opportunities that castes continue to provide.

Likewise, some of the works lack the regional and cultural representation of caste systems in India. The caste system is not the same across the length and breadth of India, in the north and the south, in the cities and the villages, and in the religious and economic aspects of the caste system. When the caste is portrayed as a universal and uniform system, such literature can oversimplify these fine differences, which are otherwise present.

Caste as Symbolic Device

Sometimes, it is just taken as a metaphor for other assorted issues like poverty and oppression, without further regard to how caste works as a system of hierarchy, power, and identity. For example, although Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) provides a moving depiction of lower-caste characters, critics have claimed that to them caste in the novel is not a living social force with its dialectics (Bharucha, 2002). Although the problems of caste disparity portrayed in this manner may not necessarily be an exaggeration or a distortion of the real issue of the caste system, they can merely serve as a rhetorical symbol of social oppression rather than capturing the concrete reality of caste.

➤ **Authenticity vs. Commercialization: The Tension Between Authentic Representations and Commercial Narratives**

The second major criticism of representations of caste in Indian English literature is the conflict between the real and the commodified. When Indian English literature has come into the international limelight there has been a desire for textualizations about issues of social concern such as caste. However the commodification of the caste stories for global consumption waters down the actuality of the stories being told.

Commercialization and the Global Market

Present-day writers like Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Adiga in *The White Tiger* (2008) are examples of writers whose novels have received commendations across the globe and for purchase booker prizes. However, these works have raised awareness of caste around the world; at the same time, they have engendered discussions on the commercialization of caste stories. Critics would attest that in the bid to globalize the caste system, writers may exoticize caste in a way they think the world wants to see; a 'Third World' tragedy of poverty and suffering (Nair, 2011). Hence in such cases, caste is depicted as something fixed and represented as stereotyping India as a country of backward caste system, instead of revealing the evolving faces of caste today in India.

This commercialization can also psychologically transform lower-caste characters into substantial poverty porn personalities where the profit-making attempts overshadow the attempts to look into the other side of

the story, where the poor, especially the lower-caste Indians, fight to earn their living and resist oppression. Thus, popular novels such as *The White Tiger* for all its intentions of distilling the problem of caste and economic equity, tend to amass more energy in looking at the avenue to move away from this undemocratic status quo, thereby the race for success from the lower caste people overlooks the clear hindrances that cast people continue to encounter (Loomba, 2011).

Balancing Authenticity with Accessibility

Caste is an annoying problem: writers have to maintain historical accurate representation of the castes but at the same time they have to make their work easily understandable for readers who are in the global context and lack understanding of the caste system in India. It can lead to sometimes rather simplistic and generalizing discourses about caste relations that are perhaps tailored to fit the tastes of the international audience. Authenticity, in this context, means the portrayal of caste as it exists and how people within that system experience it; accessibility means how easily such stories can be interpreted by someone who is not immersed in Indian society.

For example, Meena Kandasamy, *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), whose themes necessarily counter the consumption of caste stories, employs no traditional narrative to represent them but instead provokes the spectator with performative politics of caste, violence, and protestation. Kandasamy does not remove the caste question for global readability and sees it as a complex and ongoing process rather than a black-and-white issue (Kandasamy, 2014). However, such works may not easily go global since they do not fit the easily consumable 'caste narratives.'

➤ Representation of Dalit Voices: Giving Voice to the Marginalized or Perpetuating Stereotypes?

The most crucial concern that arises about the caste issue in Indian English literature is to what extent the literature speaks for the Dalit. Dalit literature refers to works of literature that are produced by persons belonging to the Dalit community; thus the issues of oppression and revolt documented in these works are firsthand. But when the caste stories are being penned down by the upper caste or the privileged writers, there is always the danger of either reinforcing the stereotype or speaking on behalf of the Dalits rather than letting them speak for themselves.

Dalit Literature and Authentic Voice

For any topic under the sun and in the society, there needs and have been voices from within the annals of societies, cultures, and communities in translation literature. For caste operation, two bahvioredial literary contributions by Dalit writers; Omprakash Valmiki and Bama. Valmiki's autobiographical novel *Joothan* published in 1997 is the best source of the life of a Dalit in rural India; a graphic depiction of the existence of Dalits victimized and marginalized. Like many other first-hand experiences, this social reality gives Valmiki's narrative a raw truth and uncompromised realism that is often absent in caste litanies written by upper-caste writers who tend to romanticize and exoticize the process (Valmiki, 1997).

Likewise, Bama's *Sangati* published in 1994 is a post-colonial feminist Dalit narrative that raises a question of double victimization of womanhood for Dalit women. Bearing the strategies of the post-colonial Indian woman Dalit subordination, her narratives question the existing patriarchal caste power structures of the Dalit cultural communities and mainstream India (Bama, 1994). This shows that these works are contributing to the Dalit voice's fight against both casteism and sexism.

Perpetuating Stereotypes

But when the caste stories are told by upper-caste writers, then there is a possibility that the readers are merely fed with more stereotypical images of the Dalit lives and the dichotomy of victimization. For example, though Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) is recognized as a seminal work on untouchability, there are other theories available. Now in this case, one can read Bakha, the protagonist – as portrayed by Anand – as overly passive or as a mere victim. They further claim that, from this position of the outside, Anand completely fails to grasp the subtleties of Dalit fighting back, of the collective power of the oppressed; this Bakha is simply a passive victim, never allowed to have an inner life that might include the germ of rebellion (Anand, 1935; Limbale, 2004).

The task, thus, is to make sure that the lower-caste Dalit voices do not get erased or taken over by the upper-caste writers. There is no reason why non-Dalit authors cannot write about caste, but there is a burden of not perpetuating the stereotype and of representing caste in its entirety. It also means recognizing agency, survival, and assertion of Dalit characters over domination instead of depicting them merely as subjugated.

The controversy regarding the depiction of Caste in Indian English literature also reminds the writers and readers to represent and demand true and rich images of the Caste system and social justice. For the writers, it becomes an extremely delicate proposition to write about caste without reducing it to simplistic terms while at the same time not falling into the trap of exoticizing the caste for international audiences. However, the representation of Dalits in literature has also remained important to avoid the enshrinement of stereotyping effect but give the true picture of the caste system in India. By paying heed to these concerns, Indian English

writings can and must maintain their function in essaying caste-based tyranny in Indian culture and enhancing the vernacular's capacity to teach people about prejudice.

8. Conclusion

Given the rigorous portrayal of caste and the social inequality system in Indian English literature, the social stratification issue in India can be best understood. While Mulk Raj Anand introduced the world to the phenomenon of untouchability, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, and Aravind Adiga have broadened the range of caste concerns up to the problems of modernity, globalization, and intersectionality. An important shift in presenting caste dimensions has occurred in the decades where casteism from oppression content depicting rural realities to subjugate complex portrayals of caste in both urbanized and globalized world as well as digital sphere aspects. This change has come with the understanding of how caste relation in India as a social determinant of health overlays with Gender, Class, and Religious determinants, which make the narratives diverse and more nuanced.

However, there is a hitch in the portrayal of caste in Indian English literature. It is challenging to write about caste without either oversimplification, exoticization, or effectively reducing the stories of caste-oppressed people to a product for the global market. The conflict between the realistic and the popular has remained apparent and is now especially important as Indian English prose starts being translated worldwide. It is necessary to provide high judicial evidence of Dalit narratives so that stereotypical narratives do not emerge and a possibility to give the victims the right to narrate their stories. Even with the above-said issues, Indian English literature is essential and strong protest literature that brings awareness and changes people's perception towards caste and social injustice. It gives narratives that are not just reproductions of existent hegemonic caste structures but actively subversive text that provides a critique of the systems that perpetuate the existing caste hierarchy in Indian society. As the people of India develop further the casts and prejudices in the literature will also transform and as such the subject of inequality and injustice will remain a core part of the discourse in India.

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