

Impact of Gandhian Philosophy on Subaltern Voices in Indian English Novels.

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Abstract: Gandhian philosophy has philanthropic base which focuses on brotherhood and upliftment of downtrodden. Gandhiji's fervor for subaltern influenced the great Indian writers. The reflection of the class and caste subaltern can be studied in subaltern novels in pre and post-colonial Indian English novels. Gandhian views on untouchability, equality and progress for all influenced Indian writers who portrayed these issues through the struggle of subaltern characters of their novels. Gandhian philosophy has close resemblance to Marxist philosophy centralizing on upliftment of downtrodden, peasants and marginalized figures in society. The Gandhian whirlwind of humanistic concepts paved the way for Indian writers to bring into light the darker side of Indian society by representing exclusion of subalterns and their exploitation with a great demand of creating awareness against these social practices and hegemony.

Keywords: Gandhian philosophy, subaltern, exploitation, periphery.

Introduction:

Gandhian philosophy is the set of religious and humanistic ideas which are adopted and developed by the great leader of humanity, Mahatma Gandhi. His philosophy mainly focused on following term. Sarvodaya, the term means 'universal uplift' or progress of all. This idea is derived by Gandhi from the influence political economy expressed by John Ruskin in his 'Unto This Last'. It aims at the creation of a social order based on the principle of love and brought about by the means of non-violence or love. Satyagraha is the method of non-violent action that expresses the force of purest soul against injustice, oppression and exploitations.

Gandhian philosophy is centralized around the upliftment of downtrodden and the principle of equality. His liberal thoughts on humanity and kindness towards sufferers are reflected in his writing. He vehemently condemned practice of untouchability and urged Hindu to accept untouchables as their equals to defeat the British. Gandhiji's concern for downtrodden created a sensitivity in Indian writers to pen down the stark realities about these groups through their writings. He heart saddened by the word untouchability for his fellows who were more lovable for him so he had given a very meaningful lofty word for them as Harijan- son of the God. In order to remove the badge untouchability he used to call himself as Harijan and many times to wipe the valley of caste he resides amidst the untouchables to create a sense of brotherhood in them. He organized Harijan Sevak Sangh' to eradicate the untouchability and with his every act, he tried to inculcate on Indians that they are equal and like to us. This zeal for creating

The Subaltern Theory:

The notion of Subaltern is originally derived from British Military, signifying the lower or subordinating rank of soldiers in military. The Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning of noun Subaltern as 'an officer in the British Army below the rank of captain, especially a

second lieutenant,' the adjective is used to indicate 'of lower class'. Etymological meaning of subaltern is 'having inferior position, subordinate'. It is originated from Italian word 'subalterno', from French word *subaltern*, from Latin word *subalternus* as sub (under)+ alternus (other). Subaltern is generally considered as subordinate class, lower in hierarchy. Gramsci used this euphemistic word for the working class, non-proletariat, non-capitalists, peasants and common people who are non-hegemonic in economic and social perspectives. More specifically he used the term to represent the unrecognized class excluded from the social hegemony. Though the term has military sense, it created controversy in defining the terminology in different fields like history, philosophy, anthropology and literature. The term subaltern was originally used by Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci in his *Notes on Italian History (Quaderni in Italian)* which was later published in the form of a book known as *Prison Notebooks* published in 1971.

Literature is used by the Indian writers as a strong equipment to bring into light the hapless, vulnerable conditions of the subaltern and to articulate their voiceless sufferings since many centuries. They projected all types of oppressions through their novels such as domestic, social, economic and political. The literary crusade undertaken by Indian social novelists against the stigmatic identity attributed to untouchables by the elites reflected inhumanity of Hinduism rigorously through their novels. The Indian masters like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy played a crucial role in bringing controversial issues of Indian society in front of the world.

The suppression of this disregarded class brought influentially to the surface of Indian English literature with deliberate selection of subaltern themes in their work specifically by Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry and women writers like Arundhati Roy, Mahasweta Devi, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai. Mulk Raj Anand, the ardent spokesman of subaltern, belongs to 'The Big Three' of Indian English writings known as the true champion of subaltern who dared to create the literary circle centralizing on subaltern's exploitation and injustice in the name of religion and caste system which has great influence on Indian perception. Anand protested against caste system in *Untouchable* by portraying experiences of *Bakha*, a sweeper boy as the protagonist. Anand explains the purpose of *Untouchable* as, *Untouchable* is a representation of not only the humiliating experiences of eighteen years old untouchable *Bakha* but the collective assertion of subaltern's inner hue and cry against castism.

Anand portrays caste subalternity in his *Untouchable* and on the other side class subalternity in his novel *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937). The novel *Coolie* is a social protest against class distinction on the basis of economy, sordid oppression in industrial world, wage slavery and curse of money power. M.K. Naik calls *Coolie* as a pathetic odyssey of *Munoo*. The novel touches the painful and poignant experiences of humanity engrossed in a merciless spoiled system. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Anand again deals with ruthless exploitation and inhuman treatment given by British planters of tea estate in Assam to the thousands of Indian peasants turning them into laborers.

“Mulk Raj Anand was the true champion of the underdogs; he was the first person to realize in the literary circle the victimization of the subalterns in the society. Mulk Raj Anand’s novels indicate the injustice and inequality that are rampant in the society. The greatest contribution of Mulk Raj Anand to the Indian fiction is his realism which has paved way for social change.” (Shibu 3)

R.K. Narayan's novels reflect the keen awareness about the social oppression in Indian society. His novels handle the issue of subaltern especially the miserable women. He describes Savitri in *A Dark Room* (1930) as an oppressed and marginalized figure deprived of her subjectivity in the patriarchal system. *The Man Eater of Malgudi* can be studied as the portrayal of subaltern groups who are subordinated and exploited in the name of tradition. It throws light on the evils like widowhood, dowry, sati system and castism. The figure of Rangi is shown a temple prostitute exploited sexually by the society. She is deprived of self-consciousness and her individuality is confined in her dharma of temple dancer. R. K. Narayan always discovers the cruel reality of subalterns but he tries to mask this reality under artistic expression and imaginary plot. *The Financial Expert* depicts British’s colonial mentality to exploit the Indians. The practice of literary depiction of marginalized group set by Mulk Raj Anand is continued by Bhabani Bhattacharya, Arun Joshi, Sulman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Bama, Arundhati Roy and Arvind Adiga. Bhabani Bhattacharya, a social realist influenced by Gandhian philosophy, shows fictional theory and practice in resemblance with Anand. Bhabani Bhattacharya exposes three types of hunger, Hunger for food, body and soul by depicting the havoc wrought by the famine among poor. The theme of hunger and exploitation of subaltern class is again reflected in his *He Who Ride a Tiger* (1952). The post-colonial writer and activist Arundhati Roy became the voice of oppressed. Her *The God of Small Things* (1997) deftly brings out the reality of gender and caste subalternity from historical point of view. The novel deals with illusion of caste conversion and the subaltern approach of society towards the downtrodden in India.

Amitav Ghosh was influenced by Subaltern Studies he tries to find and render the history of subaltern fused in the history of elites and dominants in India by unfolding the individual’s history from the point of the subalterns. In his first novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986) most of characters belongs to the lower strata as a subaltern group. It highlights the exploitation and struggle of existence of these subalterns. Ghosh In his *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) has given agency to the subalterns, *Mangala* and *Lakhan*, who in spite of being subaltern helps Roland Ross in his discovery of Malaria. The miserable condition of refugees in *The Hungry Tide* is based on the Morichjhapi massacre. When the refugees came from Bangladesh, they resettled in Sundarbans but they imposed to vacate the place under police force. The massacre depicts the oppression of subalterns by their oppressive government. His *Sea of Poppies* has also captured the colonized India and Britisher as oppressor. Om Prakash Valmiki’s memoir *Joothan* (2003) has become the saga of subaltern Dalit’s consciousness dealing with suffering of Dalit’s. The autobiography *Joothan* criticizes deeply rooted caste system prevalent in modern India.

Conclusion: Gandhian philosophy about untouchability, upliftment of all, equality and humanism are reflected in Indian novels of subaltern voices. The writers became the part of crusade against the caste segregation in Indian society. The fervor of Gandhiji for downtrodden and wretched is carried through the Indian English novels.

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