

Portrayal of Class, Caste and Gender in the Contemporary Novels Set in the Society

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Abstract: *The three evils of the society can be said to be the Class, Caste and Gender politics. These three have existed in the past and continue to do so in the future. This paper looks at how these terms are used by the contemporary writers through their novels.*

Keywords: Portrayal, Class, Caste, Gender, Oppression

In the recent year's class, caste and gender have become an important factor in shaping Indian politics and society. The reflection of which can be seen in the in the modern Indian literature with a number of writers writing on this aspect. The class, caste and gender oppression is not something new to the Indian subcontinent. It has been in existence since the Vedic age and continues to do so even in the present age. The modern Indian writers through their works try to sensitise and familiarize this oppression to bring an end to it. For instance, the example of "Siddhi" Jatra in Holenarsipura, had the Dalit's of the village undergo gruelling tortures of being hung in the air with a pole in the name of religion or they having to go through self-mutilation through the process of caning/wiping themselves with barbered ropes and so on. The educated students who tried to opposed this ritual practices, were shunned by the entire village with most of them being upper class and even their own families joined in too.

Here, the ones caste and class becomes the basis of othering and hence it becomes oppressive in nature. We can visualise a food chain here. The ones on the higher up the chain devours the ones lower that chain. Similarly, upper castes are seen to always be on the top of the pyramids and the lower castes have been positioned on the base. But somehow, we tend to forget that, the base is required to support the top. Without the base, how can the top stay on the top? Through oppression.

Gender is not far from it either. The gender is quite complicated when put in the context. The women are most often seen as the second sex when compared to the males. But, in terms of caste, a man belonging to the lower caste, is second when the woman is from upper caste. But, more than often, the women are oppressed on the basis of their physical nature. The women are said to have a feminine body, that puts them in the position of a lesser being, the less strong and less intelligent than their male counter parts. At times, the women have go through double or triple oppression based on their gender, caste and class.

There are various means through which caste, class and gender oppression is done. Lack of education is seen as the main reason for the oppression. The lower caste people are denied education and at times, the lower class people cannot afford education. But at the same time these people have gone through generations of oppression, so much so that, they deny education even if, the education is given for free. For instance, in Bama's *Sanagti*, the nuns visit the village where the narrator lives in, and they offer free education, but the women refuse to go for it. The reason they say is that, the

women are not used to step out the house and hence they take a step back. Also, they face ostracism associated with women going for education in rural India.

In *Magan's insolence*, a poem by Sitanshu Yashaschandra, we see how the people around him try to put him down when Magan tries to broaden his world through knowledge. They say, whatever he has done so far is enough and try to distract him from his main goal. And in *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand, we see how Bakha has been exploited. He is denied means through which he can uplift himself. He wishes to go up the ladder, but, not only the people of the community, but his own family tries to put him down.

In the contemporary society, various laws and means have been legislated to help in reducing this class, caste and gender difference. The government introduce reservation system. When the people from backward caste could get seat under reservation quota, but in reality, we see how it is not really used by the real needy ones.

The caste system was originally based on one's nature of work 2000 years ago. But as time passed, this structure became more rigid and during colonial times, and now this system has become stringent in the recent time. In *Samskara*, a novel by U R Ananthmurthy, Chandri is denied certain rights due to her caste. Though Chandri is all that, Praneshacharya's wife is not, Chandri is seen as the lower caste women and will remain to do so. There is no agency for the lower caste people to move upward in the social strata. They are denied education, given low wages, and without empowerment one cannot succeed.

Though class and caste is not exactly similar, but both of them go through similar discrimination. A class is an economic status of a person. The person can be an upper caste, and live in poverty. For example, in Rentala Nageshwara Rao's *Tiladaanam*, Subrahmanya Shastri is educated, and is well versed in his Vedas. But due to the economic reasons, his family has a hard time at even providing milk for a new born child. And this is due to unemployment. Well educated people do not find jobs easily. And the economic poverty continues. The difference between the class system becomes oppressive and people try ways to get out of one way or the other. And in more extreme cases, one way is through this is by turning to Naxalism. We see Subrahmanya Shastri's son joining a Naxalite groups in order to bring a better future to his wife and son.

In Thangjam Ibopishak Singhs, *I want to be killed by an Indianbullet*, the rebel groups, mocks the poet at the idea of being an Indian. The rebels tend to suggest that the century has failed them in many ways, and the class inclusion is the result, as to why they have taken up arms against the country.

The gender oppression in the contemporary society is seen to be quite rampant. Starting from unequal pay for the same work, to the denial of rights. This is not seen so much in the urban cities, but in rural places the legislatures have made no changes.

For example, in *Rudali*, by Mahasweta Devi, we see Sanichari being given a sum of Fifty rupees for the entire days' work, whereas men were paid more. The gender oppression, is not just carried out on one level. There are various levels of gender oppressions. Women are oppressed on the basis of their class, their caste, and also on their gender. In Bama's *Kurukku*, the narrator is discriminated on basis of her caste, class and gender. As a child she becomes aware of the caste system that is prevalent in the society. When she gets a job and becomes a teacher, she becomes aware of the gender politics, and as a nun, her caste and class becomes the reason for discrimination. And also her language plays an important role. When, she from Tamil Nadu goes to Kerala as a Nun, she gets discriminated even there.

In Mahasweta Devi's short story, *Drapadi*, Dopadi is discriminated and oppressed by the police for being a woman, for belonging to a tribal community and for being of a lower caste. Here, Dopadi goes under triple oppression.

The gender discrimination is not just limited to the female gender. In Karclaley's short story, *Abyss*, we see the trauma and the oppression nature the transgender go through. Sudhaka, tries all that he can to be accepted by the society. He changed his name. Changes his city, but he still gets s labelled as a transgender. Is oppressed by his peers and the society doesn't accept him.

These are a few ways as seen in the various contemporary novels as to how, class, caste and gender are oppressed in the society. At this point, as W B Yeats has said in the poem *SecondComings*, "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity", truly shows how this society has become.

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