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CASTE AND RACE: A STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY MODERN SOCIETY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE



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ABSTRACT

The problem of race and caste is not new to us. We all know it has a long history of struggle. Although there are many people who believe that these problems no longer exist in today's modern world but the reality is different from what we assume. As per the data by government there is an increase in the crime rate against Dalits and African Americans. The discrimination based on caste and race

still exist in today's society. There were writers who wrote about it in the past. There are few writers who are still raising these issues in their writing though their personal experiences. The present research paper aims to discuss themes of the books of such writers.

KEY WORDS

Caste, Race, Dalits, Discrimination.

RESEARCH PAPER

Race and caste discrimination have a long history of being linked. Despite how different they may appear from official and academic positions, they have often been associated with systemic cruel exploitation and crimes. Mahatma Jotirao Phule, India's foremost social reformer, is credited with drawing similarities between race and caste-based discrimination for the first time. He contrasted the plight of African-Americans in the United States to that of India's Dalits 150 years ago. Phule dedicated his Marathi book *Gulamgiri*, titled in English as Slavery, to the “good people” of the US. Published in 1873, the dedication of Slavery reads: “Dedicated to the good people of United States as a token of admiration for their sublime disinterested and self-sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro slavery; and with an earnest desire, that my countrymen may take noble example as their guide in the emancipation of their sudra Brethern from the trammels of Brahmin thralldom.”

Later Dr. Ambedkar also made comparison between Slavery and Untouchability in his essay titled ‘Which is worse? Slavery or Untouchability?’ He stated in the beginning of that ‘Slavery is very ancient institution in Hinduism’. In the end he concludes that untouchability is worse than slavery.

Dr. Gnaniah observed:

“There are ample grounds to compare and contrast the brief history of Blacks in USA and the age long ancient history of misery of Dalits in India. There are numerous similarities of both these black peoples especially in their suffering and miseries, legal and illegal violence, segregations and ghettos, whippings and punishments, destitution and hunger, brainwashing and punishments, livelihood, employment, education and culture, denial of entry into churches and Temples, untouchability and apartheid, housing and civic facilities, suppression and oppression, above all total exclusion from the social order.”

Just like racism which is a prominent factor in dividing people in western history, the caste system, a deep-rooted factor affects the socio-economics and socio-cultural system of Indian society.

Kaushal Panwar's autobiography *Bawandaroa ke Beech* was released in 2021. Panwar is a social activist as well as an assistant professor in the Sanskrit department at Motilal Nehru College, Delhi University. She grew raised in Rajound, Haryana, in a hamlet called Rajound. Panwar chronicles her struggle since childhood as a member of the Valmiki caste, which is deemed untouchable. It was the lowest caste among the lowest castes. Her parents were day labourers who earned a daily salary. When she was in school, she chose to take Sanskrit as an optional subject, but her instructor opposed her since untouchables were not permitted to learn Sanskrit, and she was smacked by her teacher when she asked questions. Her school had a separate clothing code for Dalit and higher caste kids; the upper caste's school uniform was pink and white, while the Dalit's was blue, making it easy for others to recognize the dalit pupils in the classroom. She was forced to sit in the bottom row of the class and was not permitted to drink from the water pot in her classroom; she had to ask other kids for water if she needed it. When she chose to go to college, her father was always supportive, but because they were poor and couldn't pay the tuition, Panwar began working as a wage labourer with her parents. She was accepted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi for a Ph.D. programme, but she still faces caste prejudice; her dorm roommate used to harass her, and her classmates used to make disparaging remarks about her caste.

Tute Pankho se Parwaz Tak is an autobiography by Sumitra Mehroul published in 2021. Mehroul is Assistant Professor in the Hindi department in Shyam Lal College, Delhi

University. In her book she narrates the challenges she faced being a physically challenged dalit woman. Being dalit and physically handicapped made her feel doubly ostracized. She describes how society treats physically challenged persons, even at home, where she did not receive the type of care expected of someone in her position, and she discovered that many around her were indifferent to her. Since childhood, she has endured several challenges and discrimination. Her parents were uncaring and unloving; once, when she was little, her parents went to see a movie; Mahroul wanted to accompany them and wept a lot, but her parents left her weeping and did not attempt to soothe her. Her peers teased her at school and even shoved her, causing her to fall. She had no friends in school and colleges, everyone had a formal relation with her. There was a girl in her class who used to seat just behind her during exams and she used to copy her answer paper but Mahroul said nothing because she did not wanted to lose her friendship, once she went to the house of her that friend as she invited Mehroul for her brother's marriage but as that girl belonged to upper caste, when the writer went to her house she noticed that her friend is avoiding her, she pretended that she is busy but she was talking and laughing with her cousins, there were lot of relatives at her house, Mahrol realized that her clothes and her look made it clear that she belong to a dalit family and that's why her friend was avoiding her. There are lot of such incidents she narrates in her book.

Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India is a semi autobiography by Sujatha Gidla. It was published in 2017. It is an account of Gidla's family, from the life of her grandparents to her own. Gidla grew up in the untouchable slum of Elwin Peta in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. The story mainly concerns her uncle, K G Satyamurthy, "a principal founder in the early 70 s of a Maoist guerrilla group recently declared by the government to be the single greatest threat to India's society" and his younger sister, Gidla's mother Manjula. Manjula suffered the triple oppression on the basis of class, caste and gender, which is inevitable for dalit women in India. Throughout the novel Satyam labors for a better future for the people of Telangana and Manjula struggles for a decent job that would help to nourish and nurture her three children. Gidla reveals how even the education did not escape the untouchables from discrimination. Manjula had no permanent job and losing jobs was a regular part of her life. She is either rejected on the basis of caste or on basis of looks. She was subject to routine torture by her husband. Satyam also observed lot of discrimination in communist party he confesses that the certain higher officials in the party do not encourage the uplifted voice of comrades who were from lower caste.

Becoming is the memoir of former First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama, Published in 2018. As the title suggests it's a story of how she became a person who she is today. She also narrates the story of her grandparents that who being educated and capable they were denied the opportunities just because of racial discrimination. She narrates her story from her childhood how she learned early in her life the race difference, as a child when she used to go to Euclid parkway she was insulted by a white girl. As she belonged to a middle-class family it was not easy for her parents to afford their college fees so Michelle worked in a book binding plant to save money. She studied in Princeton University where she noticed that black students in her class made up less than 9% and girls were less compared to boys in the university. One of her white roommate's mother complaints about keeping her daughter with black girl so later that girl was shifted to single room. Once her brother, Craig got a new bike one summer and rode it east to Lake Michigan, to the paved pathway along Rainbow Beach. He'd been promptly picked up by a police officer who accused him of stealing it, unwilling to accept that a young black boy would have come across a new bike in an honest way. That time her parents told them that the color of their skin made them vulnerable. It was a thing they'd always have to navigate.

Dreams from My Father: A story of Race and Inheritance is a memoir by ex-president of US Barack Obama, published in 1995. It reflects on his personal experiences with race and racial relations in the United States. Obama's father was a black African and his mother was a white American. From the beginning of his life he faced discrimination due to his mixed race. His parents divorced when he was very small so his father was not there to guide him and his mother was often outside due to her work, he was raised by his maternal grandparents in Hawaii. He not only narrates the racial discrimination faced by him but also narrates the experiences of his family members. Obama's mother had a friendship with a black girl due to which other children used to tease her as "Nigger lover! Dirty. Yankee! Nigger Lover!" and they pushed them down on the ground. When Obama's maternal grandmother complaint about it to the principal and parents of those children, the parents reply was that she must talk to her daughter, white girls don't play with colored in this town. Obama was also teased by his classmates in school as there were only two black students in that class and they also find his name funny. Once Obama's father with his grandfather and other friends were having drink in the bar, a white man came and said loudly to the bartender, that he shouldn't have to drink good liquor "next to a nigger". When Obama visited sister in Kenya, they went for lunch in the outdoor café of the New Stanley Hotel, the waiters there did not respond to them but they cater to an American family who came after them. She tells Obama it always happens with them if she goes to a club of these hotels with her African woman, watchman think that they are prostitutes and same in the big building offices, if you don't work there and you are Africans they will stop you until you tell them your business.

Between the World and Me is Autobiography by Ta-Nehisi Coates, published in 2015. The book won the 2015 National Book Award for Nonfiction and was a finalist for the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction. It is written as a letter to the author's teenage son about the feelings, symbolism, and realities associated with being Black in the United States. Coates recapitulates American history and explains to his son the "racist violence that has been woven into American culture". Coates gives an abridged, autobiographical account of his youth "always on guard" in Baltimore and his fear of the physical harm threatened by both the police and the street. Coates recount the story of death of his friend Prince Jones who was killed by P G Country police, he says that " Prince was not killed by a single officer so much as he was murdered by his country and all the fears that have marked it from birth....The killer was the direct expression of all his country's belief." He tells his son that "In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body- it is heritage". Coates also talks about the recent violence against African Americans- Eric Garner choked to death for selling cigarettes, Renisha McBride was shot for seeking help, John Crawford was shot for browsing in a department store, Tamir Rice, 12 years boy was shot by police for carrying toy gun, Marlene Pinnock, 51 years old grandmother was beaten up by California highway patrol man, Michael Brown was shot by police. Coates tells his son that the police department of his country have been endowed with the authority to destroy his body. He advises his son "that this is your country, that this is your world, that this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it".

Coates' memoir is essential for Americans on a social and political level since it teaches people who aren't aware of the racist crimes that have occurred and makes it more difficult for those who ignore them. If people continue to ignore the unjust treatment of persons of different skin colors, the situation will only become worse.

We observe that in today's contemporary society, individuals are mainly concerned with obtaining material goods; there is a lack of contact among people of different races and castes, and the problem of race and caste cannot be handled unless there is adequate communication among people. There is a need to raise public awareness about these societal concerns.

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