

## **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDIAN FICTIONAL FIGURES BAKHA AND ADI: REVEALING THE PARADIGM SHIFT IN MARGINALIZING MYTHS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Marginalization is a global threat existing among human societies in various structures pertaining to misanthropic hierarchies. In Indian social context, the citizens are classified and governed by castes. The caste systems prevail down the centuries in the traditional soil of the nation. The article attempts to portray the existence of caste hierarchy and its cruel consequences as recorded by two Indian English fictionists belonging to different ages. The study attempts to compare the characters Bakha and Adi from two Indian English novels, *Untouchable* and *Serious Men* respectively. Though Mulk Raj Anand and Manu Joseph belong to two different literary periods, both are unique in representing the anguish and pain endured by the subjugated lower caste people in Indian society. The fictional settings provided by the chosen writers to their respective outcaste characters chronologically explain the paradigmatic shift in social consciousness about caste. The notions and practices of caste system during the beginning decades of twentieth century is completely different from that of the twenty-first. Yet the mental trauma and humiliations faced by the lower caste remain the same over the century in the guise of professional hierarchy. The research paper differentiates the circumstances from the selected novels to demonstrate the paradigm shift in the collective unconscious of Indian society.

**KEYWORDS:** Marginalizing Myths, Misanthropic, Paradigm Shift

### **INTRODUCTION**

Caste system is a cultural setup within a selected human society. The culture of any human community is composed of myths and traditional practices that are hereditarily passed down to the new generations. The modern cultural studies reveal a fact that the myths are formed and propagated among people through a psychological state known as 'collective unconscious'. According to many psycho analytical findings the collective unconscious consists of primordial images and archetypes.

The existence of the collective unconscious means that individual consciousness is anything but a *tabula rasa* and is not immune to predetermining influences. On the contrary, it is in the highest degree influenced by inherited presuppositions, quite apart from the unavoidable influences exerted upon it by the environment. The collective unconscious comprises in itself the psychic life of our ancestors right back to the earliest beginnings. It is the matrix of all conscious psychic occurrences, and hence it exerts an influence that compromises the freedom of consciousness in the highest degree, since it is continually striving to lead all conscious processes back into the old paths. (Jung 112)

The research paper incorporates the psychological idea of collective unconscious to demonstrate the drastic change that has occurred in the mindset of Indian citizens with regard to the caste system in the nation. Over a century of political and educational reforms taken to eradicate caste subjugations, it is deep rooted in the minds of common people.

The reservations quotas in educational institutions and government offices are much disputed today as the opinions about those policies are gradually changing. The novel *Serious Men* by Manu Joseph throws light upon such modern reformative thoughts.

The Indian English writers have recorded caste based cruelties in their novels even during pre-independent era. Mulk Raj Anand has recorded the cruel ill treatment of lower caste workers in his novel *Untouchable*. Today the physical exploitation of the lower caste is made impossible by judiciary laws but they are being dominated in indirect ways. This anthropogenic classification of fellow human beings as higher and lower castes is considered anti-social in present context. But the Varnas and Jathi systems are predicted to be in practice since pre-modern times and the existing caste structure is said to be originated during Islamic rule in thirteenth century. During the British Raj governance in Indian states the western officials have fueled the caste distinctions to implement the 'Divide and Rule' policy. Such continuous and chronological development of the caste system has made it as an unalterable steady fast rule in the minds of every citizen.

The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate, from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. (Anand 1)

The beginning paragraph of the book insists on the state of untouchables in the nation during the pre independent era. The writer showcases the double domination of the lower caste men and women who are exploited by both the foreigners and the native upper caste. They are segregated from the rest of the village in separate colonies.

A little later he slowed down, and quite automatically he began to shout: '*Posh*, Keep away, *posh*, sweeper coming, *posh*, *posh*, sweeper coming, *posh*, *posh*, Sweeper coming!'(Anand 44)

'Polluted, polluted, polluted'. A shout rang through the air.

A similar incident he had heard about rose to his mind in a flash. A young rustic had teased a friend's sister as she was coming home through the fields after collecting fuel. Her brother had gone straight to the fields with an axe in his hand and murdered the fellow... This man, a Brahmin, he lies and accuses me of polluting him... (Anand 54)

Through the passages quoted from the novel, the readers can understand the condition of a young lower caste boy. All the freedom and feelings are subjugated from the young mind and the whole new generation is condemned to carry dirt all through their life. Such cruel means of caste oppression prevailed during the pre-independent period. The young girls belonging to lower caste had no security or support. They were vulnerable to many sexual abuses.

Such was the condition of the lower caste during previous century. The cultural practices and marginalizing caste myths governed the ill treatment of lower class people. The marginalized are made to feel happy for leading a mean life under the feudal lords of native villages.

Manu Joseph is a budding Indian English novelist who has won The Hindu Literary Prize and the PEN/Open Book Award for his debut novel *Serious Men*. The emerging writer was born in Kottayam, Kerala, and grew up in Chennai. He is a graduate of Loyola College, Chennai and has also studied in Madras Christian College. He has worked as an editor and as a columnist before starting up his writing career. His journalistic experience has provided him wide knowledge about the Indian society and political power games. *Serious Men* is a serious, intelligent novel with a modern

vision about the traditional nation.

Adi is the son of Ayyan Mani, a clerical officer in the Institute for Theory and Research, Mumbai. Ayyan Mani is a Dalit, turned Buddhist following Ambedkar, he has a deep-seated anger against the Brahmins who run the Institute. He posts invented anti-Brahmin "thoughts of the day". The lower caste clerk tries his best to improve his life style and to prove his son a child prodigy by some means.

Ayyan was tempted to write another invented quote. That would be risky. He usually inserted only one phoney quote every week or so. That way his subversive abuse of the Brahmins would not attract too much attention. But that morning he could not resist the temptation. He pretended to look into a piece of paper and wrote a fresh thought:

Reservations for the low castes in colleges is a very unfair system. To compensate, let us offer the Brahmins the right to be treated as animals for 3,000 years and at the end of it let's give them a 15 percent reservation \_ Vallumpuri John (Joseph 98). The satiric quote from the novel reveals a new wave of thought in the minds of the public about the reservation system. A peon from the research institute under the head of upper caste Brahmins revolts against the reservation system for the low caste in colleges as an injustice to the community as it could not compensate the prolonged slavery and shame experienced by them under the superior caste clans. Hence the protagonist demands a funny revival in the society where all the Brahmins have to be humiliated and enslaved for three thousand years. This particular expression of hatred from the deep heart of a victim of the caste system proves that the perceptions of the people about traditional hierarchy and falsified history are changing.

Thoma wonders whether he is in love with her. Strangely, he has not thought of it before. And the question terrifies him because the fate of love in Madras is neatly divided into four kinds of suicide. Lovers who know that their parents will never let them marry go to a cheap hotel room, get into wedding clothes and eat rat poison. If it is only the girl's parents will consume the same rat poison. If it is only the girl's parents who object to the marriage, she is most likely to immolate herself. Men who are spurned by girls almost always hang themselves from a ceiling fan. Men very rarely set fire to themselves for a girl. (Joseph 248)

Ayyan was not certain if the Brahmins who contemplated the universe were aware of it yet, but the security guards and the peons and the sweepers knew that the Big man was screwing the basement item... (Joseph 175) The first passages from the novel prove that the inter caste marriages are insecure and sinful. Even in twenty-first century the parents go against their children who want to marry someone, whom they feel suitable for themselves. The following is an ironic statement about the serious men in the institute. The protagonist mocks at the upper class men to be celestial creatures who engage themselves in mean activities on earth.

The circumstances faced by the little boy, Adi are absolutely different from the social environment encountered by Bakha a century ago in the same nation. The attitude of people towards the caste system has altered much. The twenty first century Indian society weighed the citizens not by their caste rather by their profession and educational qualification. In such instances the clashes are not among two different castes but between two repelling groups of thoughts. One still wanted to cling on to the traditional caste system and untouchable practices while the second rational modernists wanted to get rid of those archaic methods which are no more useful to the society's progression.

By studying the evolution of thoughts about the caste and class clashes in these two novels, the native readers would feel the paradigm shift that has taken place in the marginalizing process. The myths are encoded into minds of the

public by media and other social factors such as festive gathering and other academic meetings. “Hence the structural principles of literature are as closely related to mythology and comparative religion as those of painting are to geometry”. ( Frye, 134,135). As rightly stated by Northrop Frye, cultural myths govern the minds of every human within any social setup. Hence the marginalizing attitude too changes along with the paradigmatic shifts taking place in the social environs of any nation.

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