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## **CONCLUSION**

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This dissertation shows how caste and class have not only determined the course of things in Indian society but also mutated due to and through historical changes. Postcolonial Indian fiction shows how caste and class have been subject to ideological manipulation by different groups of people: the brahmins who worked their way to the top of the hierarchy by controlling every form of shastric knowledge, the kshatriyas who used force and the brahminical order to maintain and milk the required hierarchy, the colonial rulers who chose to adopt the structure presented by the brahmins and the kshatriyas for their administrative convenience, politicians and political formations, and finally the government and its agencies who still use it as a means of social control and division. Almost all the novels included in this study highlight these issues.

This study shows how caste and class sometimes overlap in the sense that the so called low caste groups also happen to be poor as shown in novels like *Untouchable* and *Sea of Poppies*. They are not allowed by village overlords to pursue occupations not sanctioned by their caste. Class and caste are not exclusive categories but intertwine and overlap at various levels depending upon a controlling power structure. Whether they are viewed as social or economic categories, at no time are they free from ideological influence or even manipulation.

What emerges against the canvas of India's democracy is the growing consciousness amongst people as they form collective identities of different denominations to make their voices heard. The core chapters focus on counters of resistance to different kinds of dominance even as they examine the so-called compliance with orthodox structures of social structuring. Chapter 1 brings out the relationship between class and caste and the inseparability of ideology from the different kinds of stratification from pre-colonial times to the present.

Chapter 2 examines Spatial and Social Mobility in chosen texts, and brings out the predicament of members of the lower castes as they embark upon uncertain journeys as indentured labourers during colonial rule. The people in *Sea of Poppies* hope to be free of caste oppression but find that their pasts pursue them till the end. Even though they contest the idea of dying with the caste you are born into, they find that there are others in the caste ladder who do not permit them to overcome those shackles. The violence

which answers upper caste violence testifies to the limits of human endurance. *The Glass Palace*, on the other hand, shows that unlike caste, class status of a person is alterable – it can be pushed higher and higher with vision, enterprise and hard work. The novel shows that very often, the hopes and aspirations of the poor and the underprivileged remain unfulfilled, and end in disillusionment.

*The Hungry Tide* shows that migration is a part of life as people look for new places—blank spaces on the planet, as it were—to populate and make habitable. In the present day context, that may not be possible due to restrictions of government policy including environmental concerns over issues of human-animal conflict. Unlike the migrants in the other two novels, these people, displaced from their original homeland by war and social strife, had not signed their futures away through an agreement. Their demeanour, given the charged times, was not so abject and submissive either. They were willing to work hard and not rely on the mercy of some superior authority.

The plight of the *girmityas* or indentured labourers is highlighted in two of the novels because it is a case of allowing someone else to have full control of their lives. Because most of them were uneducated, they were not even aware of what they were committing to. In contrast, modern day migration is more about conscious choice and goal oriented movement. At the same time the complexities of the political situation the world over, no longer makes migration a matter of cultural conflict, displacement and assimilation. While identity becomes a key issue in the present day migration scenario, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, migration amongst the poorer sections of society was a means of escape and desperate survival. However, people continue to strive for improvement of their lot, making mobility and migration as both the means and the end of their search as they escape from untenable political and social situations.

Chapter 3 looks at middle class uncertainties and examines the shifting markers of this most versatile class in India. It shows the vulnerability of the middle class to corruption and the intricacies of the political system. The chapter shows how the middle class pioneers change amongst the educated who are willing to apprehend and welcome the values of modernity. The middle class triggers conflict with the consciousness of an older generation. The chapter shows how the educated middle class of the sixties and the

seventies is too preoccupied with family budgets and household problems to have time and energy to question or attempt to subvert the hegemony of the rich and the powerful. Despite being conscious and alert to the political manipulation at that time, the middle class is forced to take a back seat as the rich and the powerful silently overshadow their very existence. The middle class fights and thrives in corruption. However, while the middle class has taken corruption for granted as part of Indian life, it exists at a level that confounds belief. Corruption results when honesty and integrity bring no change to the unhealthy system. Further, corruption looks like a possible way out of middle class hardship. Interestingly, the very route to modernity is somehow implicated in narratives of corruption that do not go away. Further, the financial and other insecurities of the characters are woven with the general insecurities of the minority communities of the city who have to bear the trauma of politically motivated acts of terrorism. In a way, the story of the Indian novel in the mid-century coincides with the march of the middle class and its layered existence.

Chapter 4 deals with the dilemmas of the caste system, mostly for the lower caste people. While in most cases the members of the lowest caste are treated as sub-human, the conduct of the upper classes engaging in such oppression proves their bestiality. Each of the novels does this without much comment. They expose the bestiality of the people harassing or oppressing others in the name of caste. While the low caste people show a certain resilience along with a desire to improve their lot, they receive little protection from the government agencies. Sometimes caste becomes a matter of pure ego for the so-called upper caste *thakurs* and their jealousy cannot overlook anybody who manages to improve his lot in life. Another thing which these novels show is the cruelty of the upper castes as they engage in mindless violence without fear of retribution from the law, simply for entertainment. This is highlighted amidst decent, kind behaviour from some people, especially in the urban areas.

The chapter shows that caste is attached to a power structure with the more powerful oppressing the powerless people in the name of purity, social sanction and might. This is common not only amongst the Hindus but also Christians in South India, who uphold a caste system of sorts. A byword for caste may be discrimination amongst people. For the more powerful, caste remains a whip with which, they can beat the powerless common

people. Sometimes, changes in location and profession help to improve the situation but mostly, the tentacles of the discriminatory caste system follow the individuals wherever they go. Each novel dealing with the evils of the caste system silently testifies to the irrationality of the members of the upper caste who use forceful dominance on the lower castes.

While acts of violence against the lower castes are common in the rural areas, *The Hungry Tide* exposes the discriminatory practices of a communist government where caste and religion should have been off its radar. This novel presents the height of atrocities against the low caste refugees by first inhumanly but resolutely starving to death thousands of settlers in an island that was supposed to be uninhibited, to be followed by a complete massacre by official gunfire. Caste remains a convenient pretext and tool for violence and the major reason behind social conflict in India.

Chapter 5 titled “Mapping Postcolonial Subalternities,” presents the little narratives of subordination, escape, tragedy and romance of the dominated and marginalized castes and classes. Interestingly, the novel in recent times gives space and agency to the subaltern—a combinatorial force of marginalized castes and classes—to tell their story. The chapter shows how the novels present the predicament of the subordinated people from their point of view and in some cases narrativizes the different ways in which they try to hit back. What appears as good business to some may look like callousness and ambition to others. What looks like honour and pride might look like empty vanity to others.

The chapter also examines the impatience of people who have long been marginalised, dominated and taken for granted. Nobody wants to know what the dominated section wants. These groups, illiterate and ignorant, are not even aware of their rights and what to demand from the administration. Violence appears to be a part of the artillery of the inarticulate people. However savage they may appear to the outsiders, they can fight back in the only way they know.

There are other voices which demand prompt action as they recall injustices in the past. While some rewrite their own histories and try to make their demands heard if not

implemented, others are left to present the privileged classes in an ironic perspective. Thus this chapter shows different kinds of consciousness at the subaltern level; some present their version of the truth long ignored or glossed over, others demand action and change while some others are content to look on ironically at the domination of the powerful as they insist on what is right for everybody.

The Indian novel, it can be said by way of conclusion, records how caste and class ideologies in India have worked through different permutations and combinations. Whether the protest novels of Anand or the resistance novels of Mistry and Roy or Ghosh's epic narratives of mobility and migration, the postcolonial Indian novel has been a true signpost of caste-class dynamics. While the Anglophone novel in India has responded variously to colonial rule, freedom struggle, rise of nationalist and Gandhian ideology, the World Wars, Partition, race and religious riots, the Emergency, economic liberalization, natural disasters, urbanization, and industrialization, it is invariably informed by mutant formations that combine caste and class to empower, enable and marginalize people. As the novel increasingly draws from discourses in politics, history, anthropology and ethnography, the novelists increasingly present and indeed demand a more nuanced view of caste and class mutating in and out of history. Caste and class do not go away, but they do not remain the same either in the Indian novel or in the society at large.