

CHAPTER ONE

EXAMINING IDEOLOGY AND CASTE- CLASS DYNAMICS IN POSTCOLONIAL INDIAN FICTION

I *am* suggesting that it was under the British that “caste” became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all “systematizing” India’s diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization. (Dirks 5)

Under colonial rule caste—now systematic, and systematically disembodied—lived on. In this new form it was appropriated and reconstructed by colonial power. What Orientalist knowledge did most successfully in the Indian context was to assert the precolonial authority of a specifically colonial form of power and representation. (14)

The aim of this chapter is to study the role played by ideology in class and caste profiling in Indian fiction written in English. It is seen that class and caste parameters are determined not by resources or by birth alone but influenced by political ideologies. The resurgence of once oppressed classes (because of caste restrictions or poverty) as they claim political space is an important issue in such fiction. While early writers addressed narrow caste discriminations in Indian society, writers are now increasingly focusing on the class (and caste) mobility through the intervention of modernity and democracy in India. Postcolonial Indian fiction cannot ignore issues of caste and class because they were both recognized as essential means of social profiling and control during British colonial rule in India. Before examining the complications of caste and class in Indian society and Postcolonial Indian fiction, it is necessary to situate ideology and caste ideology in India’s most recurring acts of self fashioning that produce social formations such as caste and class. It is necessary to note here that this explication of caste and class is neither sociological nor political, though it is premised on the interpellation of the ideological in the textual, that is, novelistic.

The relationship of ideology and literature is clear but unevenly stated. It is imperative to begin with ideology as seen in the rest of the text. In what is perhaps one of the most perceptive remarks on ideology M H Abrams says:

Human consciousness is constituted by an ideology—that is, the beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive, and by recourse to which they explain, what they take to be reality. An ideology is, in

complex ways, the product of the position and interests of a particular class. In any historical era, the dominant ideology embodies, and serves to legitimize and perpetuate, the interests of the dominant economic and social class. (*Glossary* 241)

What Abrams says has Gramscian echoes. What he refers to, in effect, is what Fredric Jameson calls the “political unconscious” (*Political* 9) of an individual or a class or a community or a nation. The invocation of unconscious is not unintended, as Jameson seeks to offer an overarching view of ideology that includes Freudian and Marxist insights, combining Althusser and Gramsci with Deleuze and Guattari. Jameson of course is interested in retelling the story of the novel by re-ordering it in terms of “narrative as a socially symbolic act” (9). In other words, there are beliefs, Jameson says, that can neither be proved nor justified. However, such beliefs—that women are less adept at driving, or men at babysitting, for instance—continue to prevail in society in spite of the fact that they fail under scrutiny. The fact that they turn out to be illogical does not stop people from citing them, either by mystifying them or by referring them back to the irrational or the unconscious or to a mythic past that cannot be historically verified.

In the context of India, the prevalence of caste is a case of continued reliance of a community on structure of belief that has thrived on fractured and unsubstantiated beliefs. The ideology of caste is about dominating the one who cannot easily speak or resist. That Eagleton speaks about this phenomenon in an attempt to link universality of the ideal, the idea of the beautiful:

Dominion over all inferior powers... belongs to reason; but such dominion, he warns, must never degenerate into simple tyranny. The aesthetic, in other words, marks an historic shift from what we might now, in Gramscian terms, call coercion to hegemony, ruling and informing our sensuous life from within while allowing it to thrive in all its relative autonomy. Within the dense welter of that life, with all its alarmingly amorphous flux, certain objects stand out in a kind of ideality akin to rational perfection and this is the beautiful. (“The Ideology of the Aesthetic” 328)

This search for the beautiful and ideal in society—so aptly called “the ideological sublime” (*The Rhetoric of English India* 84)—prompts the proliferation of narratives of power and hegemony in disguise. Jameson’s reference to the narrative as a socially symbolic act reiterates the Gramscian claims regarding the idea of forced consent (*Selections from Prison Notebooks* 12). The apparatus of coercive power is “constituted for the whole society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed” (12). There are two more issues here: (a) ideological formations are accepted and adopted by people as if they were created by their own communities and interest groups; (b) this is done in such a way that it becomes impossible to think of doing things in any other way than the current way of doing things. Fashion, science and religion are good manifestations of ideology. The result is the universalization of the *current* sense of what is *natural*, and the current understanding of our roles in society. The current sense is developed and legitimized by power groups and instruments. They are hidden and deceptive apparatuses of the ruling elite.

In the Indian situation, the repeated *shastric* invocation of caste rules to maintain social harmony is replicated by way of ideological state apparatuses. Here the assumption is that ideology helps naturalize, historicize and eternalize hegemonic structures that cannot be substantiated through regular scrutiny and presentation. In any analysis of any social formation such as caste, three basic points need to be underlined. First, it should be noted that ideological structures are already always naturalized, that is, brought to the world in accordance with the order of things.

This order of things feeds on scriptural and divine knowledge or disguised economic orders. Second, it should be noted that ideological structures appear to be the logical conclusion to an historical progression. In other words, ideological structures like caste have been repeatedly historicised through manoeuvrings of facts selected and presented in a manner that would suit such historicization. Caste formation and the rule of caste in India have often been justified by citing the history of warrior communities defending the territorial integrity of the country through great sacrifice and valour. Third, ideological structures sustain themselves by circulating histories of a *sui generis* order of civilizational growth and development. Here the assumption is that ideological structures

are not only natural but also eternal: things will be this way—that high castes will occupy higher social positions and low castes will occupy lower social positions—barring regression and total annihilation of natural and universal orders of being.

Critics such as Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, Catherine Belsey and Jerome McGann examine the hollowness or false assumptions and foundations of ideological presuppositions in the context of English culture and society. In the Indian context, caste is perhaps the most pervasive ideological apparatus that has sustained and divided society, and remained the condition and consequence of class formation in India. To put it differently, caste ideology is a self-serving self-fashioning of Indian society. Having said that, there is also the idea that India is not alone in being driven by multiple images of contradictory self-fashioning acts. Perry Anderson's remark in *The Indian Ideology* is instructive:

All countries have fond images of themselves, and big countries, inevitably, have bigger heads than others. Striking in this particular cornucopia of claims, however, is the standing of their authors: names among the most distinguished Indian intellectuals of the age. Nor are any of the works from which these tributes come – respectively, *The Rediscovery of India*, *India after Gandhi*, *The Burden of Democracy*, *The Argumentative Indian*, *The Idea of India*, *Makers of Modern India* – either casual or uncritical about their subject. All are eminently serious studies, required for an understanding of the country. What they indicate, however, is something that they share with the rhetoric of the state itself, from Nehru to Singh, the centrality of four tropes in the official and intellectual imaginary of India. Telegraphically, these can be termed the couplets of: antiquity-continuity; diversity-unity; massivity-democracy; multiconfessionality-secularity. (*The Indian Ideology* 13)

The idea that there is an idea of India that is natural, universal, eternal, and historically founded is grounded in multiple and multi-layered ideologies of state and social formation. The representation of caste and class in Indian fiction is one of the many ways and sites of this layering. It is however not to suggest the texts programmatically carry social and political ideologies per se. What is at work is a method of dialectical production of inclusion and examination. As Eagleton puts it:

The production of certain produced representations of the real into an imaginary object. If it distantiates history, it is not because it transmutes it to fantasy, shifting from one ontological gear to another, but because the significations it works into fiction are already representations of reality rather than reality itself. The text is a tissue of meanings, perceptions and responses which inhere in the first place in that imaginary production of the real which is ideology. (*Criticism and Ideology* 75)

Ideology and ideological criticism foreground the materiality of production in literary texts of institutions and institutional practices such as caste. To the extent that materiality is explained in terms of disguised but explicable hegemonic—political, economic and social interests including, say, patriarchal and Hindu interest—manipulations, the Anglophone Indian novel records and contests the form and content of what has been variously called the Indian ethos, which, in fairness to the term, can as well be called the ideological formulation of India's imaginary and real institutions.

In effect, such recognition of the idea of India calls for a study of the politics behind the revival of caste structures in India during colonial rule as represented in the postcolonial novel. Dirks calls caste the core of Indian tradition and suggests that “it is seen today as the major threat to Indian modernity. If we are to understand India properly, and by implication if we are to understand India's other core symbol—Hinduism—we must understand caste...” (*Castes of Mind* 3). According to him it was colonialism that gave caste its present shape and status. Caste which provides identity to people on a local as well as on a larger country-wide level, is seen to afford status to some people even as it establishes a hierarchy with some people at the bottom. Dirks, who looks at Colonialism as “a cultural project of control,” observes that

Colonial knowledge both enabled conquest and was produced by it; in certain important ways, knowledge was what colonialism was all about. Cultural forms in societies newly classified as “traditional” were reconstructed and transformed by this knowledge, which created new categories and oppositions between colonizers and colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East. (10)

It follows that the colonizers found in India a readymade structure of control and division. “Caste itself was seen as a form of colonial civil society in India, which

provided an ironic, and inferior, anthropological analogue for the colonized world” as Dirks remarks (12). The colonizers used the narrowness of caste divisions to legitimize their rule in India.

The colonizers were not unaware of the limitations of the caste system but found it a convenient means of social stratification. Caste is seen to oppose “both individual action and social mobilization,” and thereby, colonial modernity (Dirks 13). However, Colonial modernity was only a promise held out to the colonized, never a clear cut agenda. That is why

under colonialism, caste was ...made out to be far more—far more pervasive, far more totalizing, and far more uniform—than it had ever been before, at the same time that it was defined as a fundamentally religious social order... Moreover, caste was not a single category or even a single logic of categorization, even for Brahmans, who were the primary beneficiaries of the caste idea. Regional, village, or residential communities, kinship groups, factional parties, chiefly contingents, political affiliations, and so on could both supersede caste as a rubric for identity and reconstitute the ways caste was organized. (13)

Given the challenges of location and kinship groups to the caste order, the British rulers decided to use the existing four-*varna* classification to divide the people into four hierarchical categories with the Brahmin on top. While caste division was related to occupation traditionally, the idea of hierarchy within it is believed to be a colonial construct as Dirks observes, “Hierarchy became a systematic value only under the sign of the colonial modern” (14). This was made possible by the fact that colonial intervention had shaken the innate resilience of traditional Indian society. While caste had been political to some extent, under colonialism it became a part of colonial machinery “in maintaining social order, justifying colonial power, and sustaining a very particular form of indirect rule” (15). It follows that caste remains central to any study of history or fiction under the lens of postcolonialism. If caste is seen as a means of social control promoted by the colonial rulers in India, the ideology behind it can only be seen as an extension of the colonialist agenda.

The British, as Partha Chatterjee observes, had all along been considering the caste system as a social practice or custom that distinguished the Indian society from the

Western society. On the merits and demerits of the caste system, two types of arguments are generally forwarded – the first to reject, and the second to accept, the caste system. The first type of arguments asserts that casteism stands in the way of India becoming a modern nation, and, therefore, this system needs to be ignored, opposed, and finally eliminated. The second type of arguments wants to impress that casteism is a characterization of the Indian society, and that caste hierarchy is an essential part of the Indian social structure, and seeks to harmonize the mutual distinctness of the various parts of the structure. Chatterjee comments that, of these two types of arguments, “the former could be said to represent the pure theory of universal modernity, and the latter, its genealogy running deep into the traditions of Orientalist scholarship, upholds a theory of Oriental exceptionalism”. (*The Nation and Its Fragments* 175) However, there has always been a clash, even today, between the pure theory of universal modernity and the theory of Oriental exceptionalism as regards the caste system.

In response to Dirks’ claim that caste is a colonial creation, Dipankar Gupta observes: “While it is true that identities, including caste identities, change over time, it would be incorrect to go to the extreme of asserting that caste itself is a colonial creation...It is as if the inhabitants of India had no identity worth the name prior to colonialism, and were one large, undifferentiated mass” (*Caste in Question* xi-xii). If one were to accept Dirks’ thesis completely, caste in India would be denied its historicity. Gupta, however, is willing to accept that the British did leave an imprint on the caste system in India:

Yet, in a significant way, colonialism did make a difference. The way British officials understood caste obviously also affected the way caste was practised, and this led to some quite innovative relations between different jatis all over India (Dirks 2001:10). From the earliest moves of the Asiatic society to the legal codification achieved by Henry Maine, the Brahmanical view was privileged as the correct interpretation of Hindu culture and custom. This is what gave Brahmans a larger than legitimate role in the conception of Indian society—a feature that is only recently being challenged from a variety of quarters. (xii)

What Gupta points out is that the British allowed Brahmanical interpretations of caste to influence their own reading and classification of class. Consequently, the Brahmanical social hierarchy with themselves at the top, gained primacy. In contemporary times

assertive caste identities in Indian society are no longer dominated, even influenced, by Brahman notion of hierarchy as Gupta observes: “To reiterate, castes are proud of their identity, regardless of where textual traditions place them on the purity-pollution hierarchy” (xiii). Given that castes have a strong sense of pride in their caste identity, they do not see themselves as either low caste or middle caste or inferior in any sense to some other, despite the tendency to look at some other caste as inferior. As Gupta observes, “that castes have throughout history gone up and down depending upon the exigencies of power and wealth” (xiii). This shows that none of the hierarchies of caste are absolute or binding, either in the past or in the present when more and more castes are challenging the Brahmanical hierarchy.

Khilnani looks upon the ancient system of *jati* and *varna* as an “intricate filigree of social interconnections and division” which “defies any simple account”. According to him:

Two of its characteristics...are particularly direct. The system of *jati* and *varna* deflected responsibility for social outcomes away from human individuals or agencies and diffused it in a metaphysical universe, so making it impossible to assign blame for social wrongs and oppressions to particular individuals or groups. *Jatis* themselves were far from immutable in their social rank, and regularly rose and fell within the *varna* order; but the structure itself showed remarkable resilience. Further, the system didnot concentrate status, wealth and power exclusively in one social group but distributed them to different parts of the social order, with the result that no one social group could impose its will on the whole society. (*The Idea of India* 18-19)

Khilnani observes that although the Westerners named the social order in India as caste, there was a vast difference between the doctrinal claims of the caste order and its actual operations. While *Jatis* conferred group identities, no group was made the sole holder of status, wealth and power. This social order proved to be remarkable in its “fixity and cultural consistency” (20).

Some more changes occurred in the caste-class relationship during the twentieth century due to various reasons. Influence of caste on the Indian society gradually diminished from the early twentieth century mainly due to some political motives imbedded in the

ideology of British colonialism. The colonial authorities with the motive of providing separate legal and political status to the untouchables introduced the term *Depressed Classes* for them and provided a “common identity” to the group as against the upper caste Hindus in the whole country (Pai xxxi). Although this development instilled in them some amount of political and social consciousness, it failed, in general, to generate *class consciousness* among them to fight unitedly against the social ills brought by untouchability. However, this development initiated the process of questioning upper caste hegemony in the society. As a result, the caste system was seen to become somewhat discreet in the urban areas, but there was insignificant or little change in the situation in the rural areas of the country.

Commenting on the caste situation in Bihar which is the background of some of the novels selected for this study, Sahay observes:

Against the hierarchy thesis, Dipankar Gupta argues that overemphasis on any single hierarchy, whether Brahmin or Kshatriya, ignores the fact that there is no caste that is not proud of its legacy, beliefs and practices. It is for this reason, he urges, that castes should first be apprehended in terms of discrete categories..., attentive to what each caste considers to be its intrinsic worth. The discrete character of caste is best reflected in the fact that castes believe in their separate and contradictory origin tales, and adhere to different and heterogeneous ideologies. Caste members perform their caste-specific rituals and worship their castespecific deities. Castes, even the so-called lower castes...refrain from merging their identities. (ibid.: 130), resulting in the formation of multiple hierarchies that more often than not are in conflict with one another. (*Caste in Question* 115)

Further, Sahay observes:

Many of them remain introverted by virtue of the fact that they cannot be bolstered by economic and political power (Gupta 127).

So the hierarchy that actually gets to work its will on others in a caste society is the hierarchy of the economically and politically powerful. This does not mean, however, that other hierarchies are not there, waiting in the wings, as it were, to claim their rightful place in the sun. This shows that class and a power structure are invariably present in the

determination of caste hierarchies, once again pointing to the fluid parameters between caste and class in India.

That notwithstanding, in the rural areas of North India, especially Bihar, each caste is seen to subscribe to its own myths of origin:

Castes in the villages publicly demonstrate their belief in these separate origin tales by worshipping the originators or the main representatives of their castes in the form of deities. The organisation and celebration of the Goverdhan Puja by the Yadavas, the Chitragupta Puja by the Kayasthas, the Raidas Puja by the Chamars, and the Vishwakarma Puja by the Lohars are good examples of this. It also needs to be noted that, apart from worshipping their own caste-specific deities separately and independently, the different castes worship some common Hindu deities together. (119)

This is indicative of the multiple sub-sections within a caste or the caste system. People have found explanations for their positions and occupations within the caste structure which varies from region to region with local colour contributing to the denominations and characteristics.

Moreover, caste is seen to determine the norms of gender in rural India. For a very long period, Hindu women's conduct in India was governed by the *Manusmriti*, a religious text which gained fresh attention during British rule in India. There were prescriptions laid down for different castes and for what women were to do inside the house. Manu's recommendations are significant in the sense that they show that from ancient times caste and gender parameters are closely intertwined. Women's lives were socially determined by the laws of caste which in turn were controlled by religious norms as well as their social structures. It is not just the lower caste women who are placed under patriarchal control but also upper caste women whose purity is essential for the caste in general. Chakravarti in "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State," points out "the central factor for the subordination of the upper caste women: the need for effective sexual control over such women to maintain not only patrilineal succession (a requirement of all patriarchal societies) but also caste purity, the institution unique to Hindu society. The purity of women has a centrality in brahmanical

patriarchy... because the purity of caste is contingent upon it” (*Economic and Political Weekly* 580). It is not just lower caste women but those belonging to the upper castes as well who are subjected to different kinds of gendered control mechanisms.

In the novels taken up in this project it is seen that caste and gender continue to be linked even in the twentieth century. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is a case in point. In the novel *Ammu* a divorcee is hounded out of her home for engaging in an affair with the so called ‘untouchable’ Velutha. The latter in turn is falsely implicated in a case and so severely beaten up by the police that he succumbs to his injuries in the police station. Even in Kerala where the story unfolds caste and gender restrictions continue to affect the lives of people who think of contesting those regulations. While this novel deals with the twentieth century, in Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* the female character Deeti is subject to extreme prescriptions and restrictions because of social expectations from a woman in that rural set up. Both these narratives will be examined in the fourth chapter, ‘Critiquing Caste’.

While caste is mainly a Hindu system of social stratification, in some parts of India even communities following other religions like Christianity and Islam are seen to subscribe to some of its structures. This is pointed out by Arvind Das in *India Invented: A Nation in the Making*:

A peculiarity of the caste system is that not only is it uniquely Indian but it cuts across religious communities with even Indian Muslims, Christians, etc. adopting the system to various extents...that surely has nothing to do with Aryan Hindu Invasions. (155)

This is seen not only in a social hierarchy within these religions based on specific occupations, but in the demarcation of the low caste untouchables in the Christian communities of Kerala. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* looks at this problem of untouchables and untouchability against the background of Christianity on one side and Communism on the other.

To return to Das’ observations on caste, it is seen that he points to the complexities leading to “the development of strata and sub-strata ...in the social hierarchy.” Further,

he mentions the divisions of caste in terms of labour so that members had “ ‘occupational’ names like barber, potter and blacksmith, but...several types of production systems existing simultaneously added dimensions of complexity to the social scene, *jatis* started getting grouped and today what exist are clusters of sub-castes passing off as *jatis*” (*India Invented* 155). As things got more specific and more and more occupation groups laid claims to particular castes in the hierarchy, there was a regrouping of *jatis* under the broader categories of Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. Given this kind of scenario, Das observes: “as jati...continues to have definite economic connotations”, only in a very formalistic sense can “caste” be distinguished from “class” by saying that the former is mainly a “social” and the latter is mainly an “economic” concept (156). He goes on to suggest that caste and class “were...interwoven” during the feudal times as they were both connected “to the social division of labour.” The order of things changed with the advent of capitalism:

Not only were new classes like the bourgeoisie and workers created but capitalism under colonial rule also began a process of separating out a caste system from the class structure. This meant redefining both caste and class in the Indian context and creation of a complex social existence and consciousness based on a mixed class-caste syndrome which was historically inherited and carefully nurtured. (156)

Das goes on to add that the “nurturing of the caste system within the context of class-based economic exploitation meant that the lower orders of the hierarchy started losing such mitigating aspects of feudal patronage...as existed, without gaining optimally from the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity...”(156). Caste continued as a means of social division and became the means of both economic and social exploitation.

The influence of caste weakened in the Indian social structure with the growth of the *market situation* in which, for the first time, *land* became a *commodity* to come within the *cash nexus* (Beteille 7-8). The early part of the twentieth century saw the emergence of educated and mobile groups of people who left their ancestral homes in pursuit of lucrative jobs in the towns. Consequently, they sold off their ancestral property consisting mainly of agricultural land to anyone who could give a suitable price. Many lower caste people became landowners in this way in the rural areas. Consequently, the

Brahmins and the upper caste Zamindars who were the traditional landowners no longer constituted the exclusive elite section of the society, and the social system acquired a much more complex and dynamic character. This indicates that class improvement could be a reason for lessening the rigour and intricacies of the caste system. This kind of exploitation of the lower caste people who are kept below the poverty line by the higher and economically better placed castes is a seminal issue in a number of novels included in this study. Due to the rigidity of the caste system, these people born into a particular caste are forced to take up particular occupations at the cost of not being allowed to pursue occupations connected with other castes which ensure that they cannot hope to improve their economic condition. Anybody trying out a different profession outside the village or in the towns is targeted and has to face violent consequences triggered by members of the upper castes in the village. This is shown in Rohinton Mistry's novels.

It follows that if caste is a major issue in Indian society, class has also been a powerful social determinant in India. In fact the assertion of community and group rights and the use of democracy to affirm collective identities as shown in novels like Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, and Mistry's *Family Matters* and *Such a Long Journey*, are not uncommon in contemporary India. Taking the cue from Sunil Khilnani's *The Idea of India* where he observes that democracy in India has managed to survive poverty and multi-ethnicity apart from other logistic problems, this thesis shows how collective identities are resurgent in contemporary society as reflected in the novels selected for this project. Khilnani mentions that The Congress in its early days took it upon itself to speak for the nation and stressed India's right to collective liberty. He explains that "Liberty was understood not as an individual right but as a nation's collective right to self determination" (26). He observes that the experience of colonialism energised the Indians "to imagine new possibilities of being a nation, of possessing their own state, and of doing so on their own terms in a world of other states" (17). According to him it is a combination of the enduring social order of India combined with humiliation of British rule which made the Indian political leaders think in terms of democracy and the right to self determination.

The idea of democracy gave scope for individuals to think and decide, to be conscious about public affairs and this led to the growth of a middle class which is connected with

the ushering in of modernity in India as it is credited with ensuring that colonial modernity does not just remain a promise on a piece of paper. This leads the way for Sanjay Joshi's reading of modernity in India, in the context of the middle class.

The towns and the cities with their new avenues of livelihood attracted not only the educated section but also the skilled, semi-skilled, and agricultural labourers irrespective of caste and creed. While the educated section constituted the new middle class, the uneducated group formed the lower class. As pointed out by Sanjay Joshi, "The construction of new norms of respectability was critical to the middle class project." He observes:

To distinguish themselves from the nawabs and talukdars, middle-class men deployed ideas of equality and meritocracy derived ultimately from the tradition of the Enlightenment. At the same time, they evidently did not identify with the lower classes...they claimed to represent. To create distinctions between themselves and the lower classes they relied on ideas of hierarchy derived from traditions that had buttressed their respectable status. (*Fractured Modernity* 18)

The middle class relied on a new politics of representation, new constructions of social acceptability and responsibility and new ways to impact urban living. British rule sought to control all aspects of urban living, including people in public welfare schemes like setting up of schools, colleges, libraries and boarding houses, as Joshi observes. People became more conscious about the needs of those less fortunate than them and looked for ways to address them.

At such a stage during the last phase of the British rule, prior to India's independence, *two significant ideologies* emerged that *challenged* the age old Brahminical ideology, based on purity and pollution - the notion that the Brahmins are pure and hence at the topmost stratum of purity and the so-called untouchables being impure are at the bottom. These are the ideologies of Gandhi and Ambedkar mentioned in the Introduction.

Gandhi's ideology propagated in the 1920s dealt with issues related to caste discrimination. Gandhi believed that it was possible to follow the traditional concept of a caste system but cleansed of untouchability, in which the work of the untouchables or

Harijans as Gandhi called them, would be made honourable. However, the Gandhian ideology has been described by many social scientists as a conservative model of social justice as it gave hegemonic power to the upper castes and no scope for the untouchables to develop their true self as human beings and provided only “relative worth”. The Gandhian ideology actually tried to bring about a social change by softening the heart of the upper castes for the Harijans by arousing pity and sympathy. Gandhi’s ideology, in a way, upheld the “theory of Oriental exceptionalism”.

In sharp contrast to Gandhian ideology, Ambedkarite ideology systematically developed a philosophy of protest against caste-based discrimination. He argued that although the untouchables belonged to the same religion as the upper caste Hindus, they were, in practice, never a part of the same society and they formed a separate historically exploited social group, based on a religious philosophy of inequality found in Brahminical ideology or Brahminism (Pai 12-19). Ambedkar’s ideology is clearly reflected in his remark: “Caste is a monster...You cannot have economic reform, unless you kill that monster” (Ambedkar 233). For the amelioration of the depressed classes, Ambedkar put forward a threefold path which formed the essence of his ideology i.e., education, agitation and organization. Ambedkar’s ideology is based on the “pure theory of universal modernity”. These two ideological strands paved the way for the depressed classes to challenge not only upper caste domination but also to improve their class status (not caste status) by pursuing education and taking up new means of livelihood other than their hereditary occupation. Gradually, education and occupation ceased to be dependent upon caste. But, even then, Ambedkar’s ideology did not succeed in guiding the untouchables to raise their voice in unison to challenge upper caste hegemony boldly. Ambedkar’s dream of a casteless Indian society remained unfulfilled.

Ambedkar realized that the practice of social inequality would continue in independent India. While concluding his presentation as Chairman of the drafting committee for the Constitution of independent India, Ambedkar remarked: “We are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life, we will have inequality” (Quoted in Sen 36). Ambedkar’s view has not been invalidated even after seventy years of India’s independence. Ambedkar knew that the caste and the class systems would creep into modern India and would exert influence on political,

social and economic life of the Indians. However, many changes have occurred in these systems, although it is difficult to say that the changes are an improvement.

In independent India, efforts have been made to remedy caste-based problems faced by different sections of the society, by granting them some benefits of *protective discrimination*. The society is further divided on caste, ethnic and economical basis creating Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes, Backward Classes, Dalits etc. Dalits is the new name given to those people who were originally known as Untouchables, and then as Harijans. The members of these sections of the society are granted benefits and concessions in the fields of education and employment. The Constitution of India even mandates that some seats be reserved in the State Assemblies and the Parliament for members of some of these sections in order to enable them to raise their voice in government and present their problems.

There is also scope for upliftment within castes which is called sanskritization by M.N. Srinivas. It refers to

a process by which a 'low' Hindu caste or tribal or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, frequently, 'twice born' caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the community. The concept of Sanskritisation in Indian sociology, as defined by M.N. Srinivas, conceded to the claimant caste by the local community (Srinivas 1966: 6). Srinivas further adds that though all lower or 'non-twice born' castes want to Sanskritise themselves, only some of them, whose economic and political conditions have improved, succeed. To quote him: 'While the sources of mobility lay in the political and economic systems, Sanskritisation provided a traditional idiom for the expression of such mobility (Srinivas 1991: 315). Thus, the concept of Sanskritisation is based on the understanding that in the caste hierarchy, lower or 'non-twice born' castes do not value their own customs, rituals, ideologies and styles of life. That is why they always try to give them up by imitating the customs, rituals, ideology and way of life of a higher 'twice born' caste. (Gupta, 120-21)

The politics of class and caste differences in society and the hegemonic control, even exploitation of one class/caste by a higher more powerful class/caste are shown in studies of novels like *Rich Like Us*, *English*, *August*, *The God of Small Things*, *The Hungry Tide*, *The White Tiger*, in later chapters.

The emergence of the class system had also a significant effect on the caste system. Initially the position in the caste scale was reflected in the class scale – an upper caste person being placed in a higher class and a lower caste person in a lower class. This happened mainly because of the socio-economic disparities that existed among the people of different castes. When a lower caste person climbed to a higher class, he/she could summon courage to challenge or defy the caste restrictions or regulations imposed on him/her. This effectively contributed to lessening the rigour in the prescriptions regarding caste practices and regulations. Moreover, power politics also ensures that caste structures and hierarchies are interrogated and challenged. Further, caste and class structures are no longer exclusive or dominated by a particular ideology.

Class is invariably linked to fundamental changes in the economy and to their effect on social relations as pointed out by Day (*Class*, 6). Max Weber sees a link between class and status. Although he does not agree with Marx, he does acknowledge that ‘property and lack of property are the basic categories of all class situations’ (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 182). The emphasis in Weber’s definition of class falls not on production but on the constraints operating on a person’s ability to earn a high income, to purchase high quality goods and to enjoy enhanced ‘personal life experiences’ (181). In this sense, argues Weber, ‘class situation is ultimately market situation’ (182). Status, by contrast, is defined in terms of honour or prestige; hence it is perfectly possible for a profession to carry a high prestige factor, for example a priest, while at the same time having a low remuneration. In addition, status groups are defined in terms of communities in contrast to classes which Weber claims, rather cryptically, are not communities, merely ‘bases for communal action’ (181). Status groups share the same values and style of life and their strong sense of group membership ensures that contact with other groups is kept to a minimum.

Traditionally the identity of status groups was expressed through ‘the privilege of wearing special costumes, [or] of eating special dishes taboo to others’ (191) and, while certain groups today also distinguish themselves by style of dress, status is more likely to be expressed through a whole range of activities and attitudes, making it synonymous with ‘culture’. Summing up the differences between ‘class’ and ‘status’ groups, Weber writes that the former ‘are stratified according to their relations to production and acquisition of goods’ whereas the latter ‘are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special styles of life’ (193). These ‘styles of life’ give status groups a stronger sense of their own identity in contrast to classes where one of the problems is how to understand class consciousness: how it arises and what forms it takes. Further, the consciousness of belonging to a status group inhibited the development of class consciousness.

In India, traditionally, there were the upper class and the lower class but by the mid-nineteenth century other divisions had set in. Colonial rule saw the emergence of a middle class which later was divided into “lower and upper sections and the latter into skilled, semi-skilled and labouring ones. These intra-class relationships were based on status considerations such as dress, attitudes and behaviour and they contrasted with inter-class relationships based on an opposition of economic interests” as Day points out in a wider context (*Class 9*). The middle class which emerged during colonial rule soon widened its parameters to reach out to people who did not naturally fall into that category by devising counters which could be beneficial to all. Their major contribution was in making people conscious of public as well as private issues and encouraging them to articulate their thoughts and needs.

While discussing the contours of caste and class negotiations one cannot ignore the claims of the subaltern historians who try to rewrite things from the perspective of the subordinate class or caste without making it a simple case of ‘history from below.’ Gyan Prakash cites Ranajit Guha’s argument that “historical narratives had sought to represent the subaltern's consciousness and activity according to schemes that encoded elite dominance” to reaffirm that the project of Subaltern Studies was an “act of rectification” (*The American Historical Review* 1478). The scholars associated with the subaltern project “have sought to uncover the subaltern's myths, cults, ideologies, and

revolts that colonial and nationalist elites sought to appropriate and that conventional historiography has laid waste by the deadly weapon of cause and effect” (1479).

Partha Chatterjee observes:

We see this consciousness as contradictory, fragmented....It is...ambiguous, contradictory and multiform....It is formed and transformed, in the course of a historical process which brings dominant and subordinate classes into relations with each other. (*Subaltern Studies* VI 170)

He further adds:

The autonomous element in common sense erupts precisely at the moments of heightened conflict between classes, and at such moments the crisis of society is expressed in the threat of a rupture of the community into two opposed faiths, two opposed religions, two opposed views of the world. (171)

According to Chatterjee, the subordinated or oppressed classes come into their own under pressure and even discover their autonomy. Drawing upon Gramsci’s articulations on a critical approach to things, Chatterjee holds:

We see subaltern consciousness as contradictory, consisting of two opposed elements—one autonomous and the other borrowed. Similarly, we see the history of religion too as constituted by two opposed tendencies—one the attempt to articulate a universal code for society as a whole, and the other the struggle by the subordinated to resist the dominating implications of the code. (174)

This kind of approach, Chatterjee hopes, will “yield a potentially fruitful way of studying the history of consciousness in the class-divided formations of India” (174).

It is contended that the subaltern emerges with forms of sociality and political community at odds with nation and class, defying the models of rationality and social action that conventional historiography uses. Guha argues that “such models are elitist insofar as they deny the subaltern’s autonomous consciousness and that they are drawn from colonial and liberal-nationalist projects of appropriating the subaltern”(Prakash 1480). Prakash further observes:

It is true that the effort to retrieve the autonomy of the subaltern subject resembled the "history from below" approach developed by social history in the West. But the subalternist search for a humanist subject-agent frequently ended up with the discovery of the failure of subaltern agency: the moment of rebellion always contained within it the moment of failure. The desire to recover the subaltern's autonomy was repeatedly frustrated because subalternity, by definition, signified the impossibility of autonomy: subaltern rebellions only offered fleeting moments of defiance....While these scholars failed to recognize fully that the subalterns' resistance did not simply oppose power but was also constituted by it, their own work showed this to be the case. (1480)

Despite the innate contradictions of subaltern assertiveness or rebellion, their position was possible because of the existence of power groups of dominance. "The desire to recover the subaltern subject became increasingly entangled in the analysis of how subalternity was constituted by dominant discourses" (1480). It may be noted that some of these issues are addressed in the postcolonial novel.

It is seen that class and caste which are not exclusive categories but overlap or intertwine at various levels have throughout been influenced by ideology. Whether they are viewed as social or economic categories, at no time can they be free of 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. Postcolonial Indian fiction focuses on counters of resistance to different kinds of dominance and examines at the same time the so-called compliance with orthodox structures of social structuring. This dissertation examines critically how the postcolonial writers in English deal with the influence of ideology in the determination of caste-class configurations as well as on their convergence in Indian society.