

THE LITERARY REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL INJUSTICES IN WORLD LITERATURE

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Abstract

Social injustice is an omnipresent phenomenon that exerts its influence on individuals and communities on a global scale. The concept comprises a range of discriminatory practices, disparities, and structures of oppression that are deeply ingrained in our economic, social, and political contexts. Literature serves as a reflective medium that offers insights into both present-day society and the enduring aspects of the human psyche. Through fictional characters, literature can provide the traditional, historical, and cultural milieu of a specific era or epoch, outlining the life and society of the time and their relation to societal behaviours.

This research paper aims to explore the depiction of social injustice in world literature. It examines various literary works from different cultures and time periods to analyze how authors have represented and critiqued social inequalities and injustices. By analyzing a diverse range of texts, this study seeks to shed light on the multifaceted nature of social injustice and its impact on individuals and communities.

Keywords: Social injustice, Literature, Discrimination, Culture, Human psychology

Introduction

Life in the midst of society will not be free from problems. Injustice is one of the world's major issues. Injustice can be classified as political injustice, economic injustice, or social injustice. Dogra state that “The social injustice is a phenomenon which has occurred in society for long time ago. The social injustice issue happens in social life such on society.”

Literature reflects both the changing face of modern civilization and the enduring aspects of the human psyche. It also provides the historical, traditional, cultural context of a

certain era through fictitious characters and outlining the life and society of that time and their importance to the societal practises. Furthermore, it facilitates the examination of contemporary societal conditions, social hierarchies, and the progression of cultural conventions. This approach facilitates comprehension of social justice by the application of an alternative paradigm that establishes connections with the surrounding context. The following novels exemplify how literature has depicted societal injustices across the world.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: Mulk Raj Anand is a staunch advocate for the poor and powerless. He has consistently demonstrated an understanding of the imperative to assist in elevating the untouchables, peasants, slaves, hipsters, and other marginalised individuals within society, with a view to fostering their human dignity and cultivating their self-consciousness. This commitment arises from the recognition of the deplorable conditions of destitution, indifference, and hopelessness in which they find themselves entrenched. Anand's first literary work, "*Untouchable*" (1935), serves as a poignant revelation of the quotidian existence experienced by an individual belonging to the untouchable caste in India.

The main protagonist of the novel is Bakha, a young kid employed as a sweeper. He is an adolescent individual of eighteen years, shares the same social status as his father, Lakha, who works as a sweeper responsible for cleaning latrines. Both of them are considered outcasts within the societal framework. The protagonist embodies the dual role of both a nonconformist and a sufferer. He expresses his opposition and harbours feelings of resentment towards the indifference displayed by individuals belonging to the caste Hindu community. Simultaneously, being an adherent of tradition, he exhibits idealistic tendencies and is unwilling to entertain the notion of opposing societal norms and the authoritative figures inside religious establishments.

The primary emphasis of the work lies in focusing attention towards the prevailing societal ideas, habits, traditions, and social injustices within Hindu society during the 1930s. Specifically, it highlights the detrimental impact of the caste and class system, which plagued the community at that era. The novel can be characterised as socially sensitive and rooted on sociological perspectives. This elucidates the sorrows and hardships endured by the untouchables and outcastes, such as scavengers, grass cutters, leather workers, barbers, washer men, water carriers, and others, as a result of the actions perpetrated by upper caste

Hindus. The statement expresses a firm objection to the perpetration of social injustice against individuals belonging to the untouchable caste.

Anand adeptly employs unyielding realism as he portrays the events of a single day in the life of Bakha. In addition to Bakha, there exist other characters that experience adversity as a result of their lower caste status. The individuals in question experience persistent suffering without any entitlement to voice their grievances or articulate their emotional states. Bakha serves as a pervasive archetype, embodying the systemic exploitation, injustice, oppression, and humiliation that has afflicted the entirety of the outcaste population. The agony and humiliation experienced by the individual in issue extend beyond his personal circumstances, encompassing the collective suffering of all marginalised and socially excluded individuals.

Charles Dickens *Oliver Twist*: Charles Dickens is widely recognised as one of the prominent figures in the English literary canon. According to numerous critics, he is widely regarded as a writer belonging to the “realist” literary tradition. The author's literary works predominantly portray the authentic circumstances of his immediate environment. *Oliver Twist* is a literary work authored by Charles Dickens, initially published under the title “*Oliver Twist: the Parish Boy's Progress*.” The work was serialised in Bentley's Miscellany over a span of twenty-four consecutive months, commencing in 1837 and concluding in 1839. The novel in consideration is widely regarded by numerous critics as a significant and accomplished work by Charles Dickens. In a nutshell the novel centres on the narrative of Oliver Twist, a juvenile orphan who originates from a workhouse environment. Baby Oliver's mother tragically passed away shortly after giving birth, and the identity of his father remains unknown.

During his formative years, Oliver, who was still in his youth, resided within the confines of a workhouse, where he was employed as a labourer in an industrial setting. Following a series of unfavourable encounters with the beadle within the confines of the workhouse, the protagonist made the conscious decision to embark on an escape. Following his escape from the oppressive and gloomy workhouse of his birth, Oliver inadvertently found himself navigating the harsh and impoverished environs of London. In a twist of fate, he was involuntarily coerced into joining a criminal syndicate specialising in the art of pick pocketing, under the tutelage of the notorious Fagin. Following a series of challenges and

obstacles, the young protagonist, Oliver, ultimately achieved a state of contentment in the subsequent phase of his existence. In this literary work, Charles Dickens offers a critique of the prevalent hypocrisies that characterised the societal landscape of the Nineteenth Century. These hypocrisies encompassed various aspects, such as the pervasive issue of poverty, the exploitation of child labour, and the alarming practise of using minors in criminal activities.

Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things*: Jodi Picoult, an American author, was born on May 19, 1966, in Long Island, New York. Picoult authored her first novel, "*Song of the Humpback Whale*" (1992), during her tenure as a student in the creative writing programme at Princeton University, from which she successfully earned her bachelor's degree. The novel *Small Great Things* is around the experiences of Ruth Jefferson, an African-American nurse. She had spent the past twenty years as a labour and delivery nurse at Mercy-West Heaven Hospital.

Ruth possesses a modest-sized family, which encompasses her son, Edison, who is currently pursuing higher education at the collegiate level. Her spouse perished during a military operation in Afghanistan. Within Ruth's maternal family, there existed a hierarchical structure wherein her elder sister, Adisa, maintained a position of seniority. Additionally, Ruth's mother, despite reaching an old age, continued to engage in employment as a domestic worker inside the households of Caucasian individuals. Ruth endeavours to maintain a sense of normalcy for her family, particularly her adolescent son, amidst the public's frenzy around Kennedy's advice, thereby experiencing internal conflict. Throughout the progression of the trial, Ruth and Kennedy are compelled to establish a mutual sense of trust and acknowledge the potential fallibility of the beliefs they have internalised regarding individuals, as well as their own identities.

Victor Marie Hugo's *Les Miserables*: Victor Marie Hugo's birth took place on the 26th of February in the year 1802. He is a multitalented individual proficient in the arts of poetry, novel writing, and playwriting, particularly in the French language. He emerges as one of the most prominent and well regarded French writers in popular literature. He gained significant recognition for his authorship of the literary work titled *Les Miserables*. The work also explores the theme of socioeconomic inequality within the French Government prior to the French Revolution, presenting it in a manner that is accessible and comprehensible to readers.

Les Miserables recounts the story of Jean Valjean, who was liberated from prison and, owing to the benevolence of Father Myriel, underwent a profound transformation. Through his affiliation with Myriel and his evident benevolence and magnanimity towards others, he acquired a new identity and proceeded to establish a thriving and profitable existence for himself by revitalizing the jet-work business in Montreuil-sur-Mer. An employee, who was unbeknownst to him, was terminated by the headmistress due to having an illegitimate child. Fantine went between various occupations before ultimately assuming the profession of a prostitute. Fantine, a prostitute, was in a state of severe illness and unfortunately passed away without the opportunity to see her kid again, despite Valjean's pledge to retrieve the child.

Subsequently, Cosette was rescued from the malevolent Thenardiers, whom Fantine had entrusted with the responsibility of caring for the kid. The ordeal commenced with a decade of concealment, constantly shifting locations, and skillfully evading the relentless pursuit of Javert. Valjean and Cosette spent seven or eight joyful years in a convent, where Valjean worked alongside the gardener and Cosette attended the girls' school. At some point, Cosette encountered Marius. Marius, a college student, was raised by his grandfather after the old man disowned his son-in-law for endorsing Napoleon. Subsequently, Cosette and Marius developed a deep affection for each other.

In Paris, a faction of workers and college students were becoming increasingly inclined to rebel due to issues such as politics, employment, and different unpleasant situations. Marius participated in a rebellion, driven by the desire for death as he believed he could never be with Cosette. Valjean joined the uprising due to his perception of losing Cosette's affection and his deep-seated animosity towards Marius; however he aimed to safeguard Marius for the sake of Cosette. Upon the successful breach of the barriers, Valjean provided assistance to Marius and together they made their escape via the urban sewer system. Marius was in a state of unconsciousness and lacked awareness of the identity of his rescuer. Upon regaining his health, he adamantly insisted on marrying Cosette once more, prompting the grandpa to finally acquiesce. The previous injuries were partially resolved. Since Javert was deceased, it appears that Cosette, Valjean, Marius, and his grandfather might now unite as a contented family. Cosette and Marius entered into matrimony; however, Valjean disclosed his true identity to Marius, resulting in Marius gradually excluding him from any contact with Cosette. In this novel, the author conveys the moral message that individuals must comprehend and exhibit courage in the face of societal norms.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*: Adichie is widely regarded as one of the foremost novelists in Nigeria. She is a highly acclaimed author, explores the persistent issues faced by Nigerians in current circumstances. Adichie, in her capacity as a novelist, described her fiction as embodying social realism. She states that "I'm a human being, I live in the world, I'm sort of very politically aware and I have political positions, and surely my fiction reflects that." (Aspen Institute, 2014) *Americanah* exhibits certain parallels with the author's personal encounters in the United States, particularly in terms of comprehending the concept of "race" in the country. Adichie further asserts that:

"It didn't take me very long to realize that in America black was not necessarily a good thing, and that black came with many negative assumptions. And so I didn't want to be black. I'm not black. I'm Nigerian. I'm Igbo. I'm not black. Race was not an identity I was willing to take." (Aspen Institute, 2014)

Ifemelu and Obinze are a young Nigerian couple who have grown up in a post-colonial, global environment, and their stories are introduced in *Americanah*. Ifemelu's education at Nsukka University was disrupted by the frequent strikes at her university. After much convincing from her aunt Uju in the United States, she decides to leave Nigeria for the United States in search of a more prestigious education. For Ifemelu, moving to the United States was a game-changer. When she finally relocates to the United States, she is thrust into an alien environment. She has to deal with issues ranging from financial hardships to intolerance, all of which contribute to a profound sense of isolation. She understands that she is a part of a marginalized group just because of the colour of her skin. The tale recounts the trials that immigrant women from Africa must endure.

Americanah provides a thorough examination and critique of racial dynamics and prejudice in the United States, England, and Nigeria, through Adichie's incisive and ironic insights. In Nigeria, Ifemelu does not identify herself as black. However, the ethnic stratification of Nigerian society persists, with individuals of lighter complexion or mixed heritage being regarded as more aesthetically pleasing. Consequently, individuals resort to cosmetic practices to achieve skin lightening. Ifemelu and Obinze, however, discover that racism is a significantly more pervasive element of life in America and England.

When Ifemelu is forced to acclimate to America's unique ethnic relations, she learns about race for the first time and decides to identify as black. Adichie presents a variety of racial scenarios, such as the idea that White Curt cannot date Ifemelu, or patients who do not want black Auntie Uju as their doctor. Those who saw her “would think they were doing her a favor by seeing her.” (Americanah 174) The novel's race investigation focuses on exposing racism. Furthermore, Ifemelu's connections provide a snapshot of black individuals who are confronted with the process of cultural shift and identity creation. Ifemelu exposes the ridiculousness of the concept, which has no meaning other than what is socially assigned to it. According to Ifemelu in another of her blogs:

“But race is not biology; race is sociology. Race is not genotype; race is phenotype. Race matters because of racism. And racism is absurd because it’s about how you look. Not about the blood you have. It’s about the shade of your skin and the shape of your nose and the kink of your hair.” (Americanah 337)

The narrative also depicts a specific conflict between individuals of African descent from Africa and those from the African American community. Prior to her arrival in America, Ifemelu had not before contemplated the concept of race. The issue had not previously arisen in Nigeria. Nigeria is a nation where racial tensions are very minimal. Despite the notable advancements in economic development, American culture and society have encountered challenges in fostering a comprehensive sense of equality that transcends racial boundaries. Through the portrayal of multiple scenarios, Adichie effectively illustrates the challenges faced by Ifemelu as she navigates the process of establishing her identity and sense of belonging in the United States.

In addition to her relocation from Nigeria to the United States, Ifemelu also engages in domestic travel within the United States. She is unable to locate a safe and stable environment in which she may establish a sense of belonging and comfort. In the novel *Americanah*, Adichie undertakes a comprehensive examination of several dimensions of racism. One crucial aspect is the sense of displacement experienced by immigrants. The experience of consistently encountering one's racial identity can be mentally and physically draining, yet it is occasionally inevitable.

Conclusion

Literature offers a wide range of opportunities for comprehending human behaviour, emotions, and cognition, as well as the inherent universality associated with these aspects. In addition to serving as a medium for artistic expression, literature plays a crucial role in the preservation of cultural beliefs, conventions, and morality.

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