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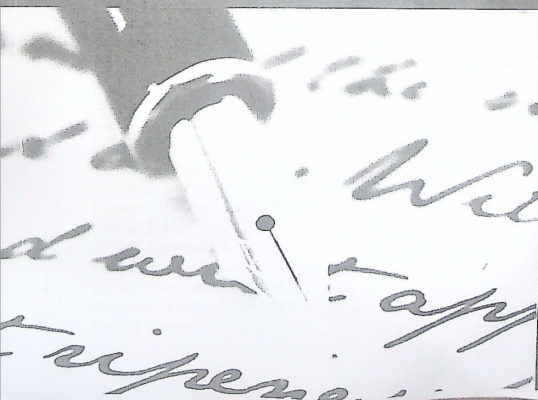
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Dalit and the African-American Narratives: A Fresh Review

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Social scientists like Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano
insist that in this world there has always been an elite section
which is to be differentiated from the rank and file. Pareto
suggests,

According to him, each society can be divided in two strata—
lower and higher. The people belonging to the higher stratum
are at the top and they govern and exploit the people belonging
to the lower stratum.

Nothing has been more provocative of international ill
will than the problems springing from, and directly and
indirectly related to, the phenomena of caste, class and race.
From one point of view, the World War II was fought to decide
the validity of the claims of Hitler's gang that their — racial
background entitled them to recognize Europe and the world
under the leadership of the —superior Nazi Aryans.

If the Dalit is the protagonist of India's boycotted
society, the African American is the protagonist of Black
America. One is robbed and degraded by the White society and
the other by Savarna society. One is brought and sold from their
own home land and the other was called untouchable by birth.

Untouchables are the most exploited and unwanted
ones. Not only economically, they are also culturally and
politically suppressed and oppressed ones. Some scholars
believe that the Aryans, a fair-skinned race which invaded India
had controlled and subjugated the dark-skinned aborigines
placing them at the lower strata of society. They also forced the

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aboriginals to be in the margin of the society and called them untouchables.

Another theory is based on *The Rigveda*, the sacred text of Hindus, humanity is divided into four varnas, namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras. In the social hierarchy, first come the control people from the rest three varnas. Then come Kshatriyas who are rulers and warriors. Vaisyas form the third segment who is land owners and merchants. In the last lap of hierarchy is the servants and others, especially artisans. These were the most oppressed and exploited people.

Some specific professions were identified like butchers, leather workers, launderers and latrine cleaners, who were labeled untouchables.

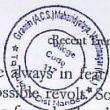
It is important to understand that caste and race are distinct and not mirror images of each other in nature. But economic situation of the lower castes in India often resembles that of blacks in the US.

Moreover, although both the Dalits and the African Americans are distinctive groups that occupy a similar position in their respective societies- the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy.'

But even these hierarchies are different in nature. Here are two different societies-America's first/ developed identity with its urbanization, affluence, industrialization' and India's so-called 'Third world / developing world identity, with its poverty, over-population and a wide gap between rural and urban lives.

Thus, the Dalit, occupying the lowest position in Indian society, is in an absolute position quite below the average African American'.

The Blacks who were captured and brought like cattle also had to take violent armed raids which were carried out against African settlements. Those captured were gathered like animals. Blacks were subjected to a lot of torture.



Whites were always in fear of Blacks being more in number and the possible revolt. So children were separated from mothers, wives from husbands, and their families were destroyed. Owners regularly used to reshuffle slaves for the fear that if they live together for a longer period, they will become united and might start working against Whites.

These Mulattos, due to the resentment instilled by their fathers, grew up to resent the race of their mothers. This was one of the main methods by which Whites were able to spread their prejudice and hatred for the people of African lineage. In the later years, till almost 1900, this racist attitude continued in the American society without any protest.

In the early 20th century, this racism was spread out from just being a social stigma into an economic opportunity. Dwight Eisenhower's actions in Congo were based on American greed that exploited Africa for its natural goods. Once again Americans were stealing from Africa, not just the manpower but all its natural resources. In this process Eisenhower overthrown the Congolese elected president to secure his profit.

As William Chancellor observes:

perhaps the most astonishing aspect of Caucasian racism in Africa was how whites were able to use it to maintain their absolute dominance over the continent and its people. The white man used their off springs as a wedge in order to keep it weak. Africa was conquered for the whites by the blacks.²¹

Although this systematic subjugation of an entire race is so heavily entrenched across the globe, there were also many efforts to curb and end it. One of the main ways Whites were so able to obtain and maintain such control over blacks is that they won the battle for the mind. They worked upon Black psyche.

But for Blacks, this American dream remained allusive and illusive. Blacks had always cherished under their bruises, swollen faces and thick bleeding lips. This racial dilemma remained unresolved for many centuries. This was a typical

confusion of the entire race, they were caught between the American Dream and the American Dilemma. Black literature is a mirror of this predicament of a Negro which is perplexing and entangling him.

The case Hindus outcast them and pushed them beyond the periphery of Hindu religion and culture. The Indian Dalit laments as though in anguish and anger,

What did I do

To be so outcast

This cry echoes in today's Dalit literature which was till date remained a cry in wilderness. For ages together, untouchability has been an Indian dilemma with no possible tracing of its *'raison d'être'*. Emergence of Dalit literature has a great historical significance in India.

In India, the problem was more intense as Dalits were not the outsiders, they were one of the society. But in India Communists gave importance to class issue while Ambedkar to caste issue. Indian peoples' class consciousness is overwhelmed by caste consciousness. Class consciousness in Indian Dalit has always been weak and *'alien'*. Caste consciousness is indigenous and basic social phenomena but also with a class feeling.

Both Dalits and Afro-Americans have protested against religions which perpetuated their enslavement. Even after the abolition of slavery White American has continued to hold the black man in —enslavement— by keeping alive a series of distorted psychological image of *'Blackness'*.

When Dr. Ambedkar says;

The Hindus wanted the Vedas and they sent for Vyasa who was not a caste Hindu. The Hindus wanted an Epic and they sent for Valmiki who was an Untouchable. The Hindus wanted a Constitution, and they sent for me.

But above all, it is difficult to judge which system of socio-political and economic structure is more repressive and which leaders took what stand on the comparison. The most

crucial aspect here is that these structures have existed and continued to do so.

Similarly, while 'equality for all' as an American ideology was articulated in the Declaration of Independence, slavery and subordination of African Americans (then known as negroes) and native Americans was a common practice.²⁷

It can be seen that there are strong similarities between the outcome of the racial discrimination in the United States, and the caste discrimination in India. Both systems resulted in suffering by the minority groups and unfair treatment that has led to current social economic problems.

However, the differences between racial and caste issues is important to note to have a sound understanding, as they are different types of discrimination. Although America has been successful in reducing the effects of racial discrimination, it has not been eradicated completely.

To conclude we can argue that African American and dalit societies and their literatures are very much alike. The reason for this resemblance is that the emotional worlds of the two societies are similar.

There are commonalities in their pain, their rebellion, their hopes and desires. Though their languages are different, the state of mind and the emotions expressed through these literatures are parallel. Besides, the histories of these societies, literatures and movements share a common direction.

Both the literatures are searching for self-identity. The experiences narrated in both literatures are based on inequality and have been drawn from social life. Both the literatures are life-affirming and resulted from their authors' commitment. The language of both literatures is the language of Cultural Revolution which is in search for new cultural values.

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