

Negotiating Justice: Reading Select Postcolonial Indian Writings in English Literature

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Abstract

Postcolonial Indian literature has become an important platform for discussing justice, equality, identity, and human rights. Although India gained political independence in 1947, many social problems such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, communal violence, and economic exploitation continued to affect people's lives. Indian writers in English have used literature to expose these realities and to question the structures that create injustice.

The present paper examines socio-cultural and legal discourses of justice in selected postcolonial Indian writings in English. The study focuses on Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. These texts explore issues such as caste oppression, gender discrimination, communal conflict, identity crisis, social exclusion, and unequal access to justice.

The paper argues that justice is not merely a legal concept but also a social and cultural process. Through the theoretical perspectives of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Bill Ashcroft, and Alka Singh, the study demonstrates how literature becomes a powerful medium for representing marginalized voices and questioning unequal power structures. The selected texts reveal that justice must include dignity, equality, inclusion, and recognition of human rights.

This research work has been carried out under the supervision of Dr. Alka Singh, Assistant Professor of English (Selection Grade), Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University, Lucknow.

KEYWORDS: Justice, Postcolonial Literature, Human Rights, Equality, Law and Literature, Indian English Literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Justice is not just a matter of laws, courts, and legal systems. It is also reflected in the way people are treated in their everyday lives. Literature helps us understand the struggles of those who face discrimination, exclusion, and inequality because of caste, gender, class, or social status. By giving voice to the marginalized and the unheard, literature reminds us that dignity, equality, respect, and human freedom are essential for building a fair, inclusive, and humane society"

"(Author's Reflection)"

Justice has remained one of the most significant concerns in postcolonial Indian literature. After independence, India adopted democratic principles and constitutional values that promised equality and

justice for all citizens. However, social realities often remained different from these ideals. Caste discrimination, gender inequality, communal violence, poverty, and social exclusion continued to affect the lives of ordinary people.

As a result, Indian writers began to use literature as a means of exposing injustice and highlighting the struggles of marginalized communities. Literature became a powerful tool for examining the relationship between law, society, culture, and human experience.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* presents the painful experiences of Bakha, a young sweeper who faces humiliation because of his caste. Anand writes, "Posh, posh, sweeper coming!" (Anand 38). This statement clearly reflects the deep-rooted caste prejudice that exists in society.

Similarly, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* examines social restrictions through the concept of the "Love Laws." Roy writes that these laws decide "who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy 33). This quotation reveals how social structures regulate personal relationships and limit individual freedom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonial scholars have extensively discussed issues of identity, power, and justice. Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, explains how colonial powers created stereotypical images of colonized societies. According to Said, representation itself became a tool of domination.

Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* introduces concepts such as hybridity and cultural negotiation. Bhabha argues that postcolonial identities emerge through interaction, adaptation, and resistance.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" focuses on marginalized groups whose voices remain unheard. Her concept of the subaltern is particularly relevant for understanding caste oppression, gender discrimination, and social exclusion.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, in *The Empire Writes Back*, emphasize the role of literature in resisting colonial authority and constructing alternative narratives.

The present study also draws significantly upon the scholarly contributions of Alka Singh. In *Exploring Human Rights in the New Literatures in English: Select Propositions*, Singh argues that literature functions as a powerful medium for understanding human dignity, inclusion, and equality. Similarly, *Women: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion* highlights the challenges faced by women in social and cultural structures.

In her article *Communicating Ideal Social Institution: A Reading of Francis Bacon's Of Judicature*, Singh discusses the relationship between justice, morality, and legal institutions. Her study emphasizes the importance of integrity and fairness in maintaining public trust in legal systems.

Similarly, *Law as a Socio-Cultural Construct: Readings from the Mahabharata* demonstrates that law cannot be separated from cultural values and ethical principles. Through the concept of Dharma, Singh presents justice as a social and moral responsibility.

Her article *Academics and Communication: Professional Behavioural Strands* further highlights the role of communication, ethics, and social responsibility in shaping human understanding and social awareness. According to R. P. Singh, contemporary Indian English fiction reflects the complexities of modern Indian society and provides a critical understanding of social and cultural realities. This perspective is useful for examining justice and exclusion in postcolonial Indian writings.

These studies collectively strengthen the present research by showing that justice is not confined to courts and legal systems but is closely connected with culture, morality, ethics, and human rights.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a postcolonial approach supported by human rights discourse and law-and-literature studies. Postcolonial theory examines the social and cultural consequences of colonialism and investigates how power continues to operate within postcolonial societies.

Spivak's concept of the subaltern helps explain the marginalization of oppressed communities. Bhabha's theory of hybridity explains the complexities of identity formation. Alka Singh's emphasis on human rights and socio-cultural justice provides an important framework for understanding literature as a medium of social awareness.

The combination of these perspectives helps analyze how justice is represented and negotiated within literary texts.

4. CASTE AND JUSTICE IN UNTOUCHABLE AND THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Caste discrimination remains one of the most serious social issues represented in Indian literature. In *Untouchable*, Bakha experiences humiliation because of his social position.

Anand writes, "Posh, posh, sweeper coming!" (Anand 38). This statement demonstrates how caste prejudice becomes normalized within society.

Bakha's suffering reveals that legal equality alone cannot remove centuries of social discrimination. The novel exposes a social system that denies dignity and respect to individuals because of their birth.

Similarly, Roy's *The God of Small Things* presents caste as a powerful force controlling personal relationships. Roy writes that the "Love Laws" decide "who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy 33).

The relationship between Ammu and Velutha becomes a symbol of resistance against caste restrictions. However, society punishes them for crossing social boundaries. Through this narrative, Roy exposes the cruelty of caste based social structures.

Both novels suggest that true justice requires not only legal reform but also social transformation

5. GENDER AND JUSTICE IN THAT LONG SILENCE

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* explores the condition of women within a patriarchal society. The novel focuses on Jaya's struggle to express herself in a social environment that expects silence and obedience.

Deshpande writes, "A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated" (Deshpande 147).

This quotation reflects the limitations imposed upon women by traditional social expectations.

The novel demonstrates how gender injustice operates through cultural norms rather than formal laws alone. Jaya's silence symbolizes the broader silencing of women's voices in society.

Deshpande argues that justice must include women's freedom, dignity, and equal participation in social life.

6. COMMUNALISM AND JUSTICE IN TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* examines the human cost of Partition. The novel portrays the violence and suffering experienced by ordinary people during one of the most traumatic events in Indian history.

Singh writes, "The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed" (Singh 1).

This statement highlights the brutality of communal violence and the failure of institutions to protect innocent lives.

The novel demonstrates how political conflicts often destroy human relationships and social harmony. Through its realistic portrayal of Partition, the text raises important questions about justice, responsibility, and reconciliation.

7. NATION, IDENTITY, AND JUSTICE IN MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* connects personal identity with national history. The protagonist Saleem Sinai represents the complexities of postcolonial India.

Rushdie writes, "To understand me, you'll have to swallow a world" (Rushdie 4).

This statement suggests that individual identity cannot be separated from historical and political realities. The novel critiques state power, political corruption, and the misuse of authority. It demonstrates that justice requires democratic accountability and respect for individual rights.

8. GLOBALIZATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* explores migration, globalization, and economic inequality.

Desai writes, "Could fulfillment ever be felt as deeply as loss?" (Desai 324).

This quotation captures the emotional impact of displacement and exclusion.

The novel reveals how globalization often creates new forms of inequality despite promises of progress and opportunity. Through the experiences of its characters, Desai highlights the continuing struggles of marginalized individuals in a changing world.

9. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The selected texts collectively demonstrate that justice is much broader than legal institutions. They reveal the limitations of laws when social attitudes remain discriminatory.

The novels expose various forms of injustice, including caste oppression, gender discrimination, communal violence, political corruption, and economic inequality. At the same time, they provide alternative visions of dignity, equality, and inclusion.

The works of Alka Singh further support the argument that justice must be understood through social, cultural, ethical, and human rights perspectives. Her studies demonstrate that law, literature, and society are closely interconnected.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that justice in postcolonial Indian literature is not a fixed legal concept but a continuous process of negotiation between law, culture, society, and human experience.

The selected texts reveal how caste, gender, religion, and economic status continue to influence access to equality and dignity. They expose the gap between constitutional ideals and social realities while giving voice to marginalized communities.

Through their literary representations, postcolonial writers challenge injustice and encourage readers to imagine a more inclusive and humane society. Literature therefore functions not only as artistic expression but also as an important instrument of social awareness, resistance, and transformation.

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