CHAPTER - II
TREATMENT OF THE POOR

In every society, there are some sections of people deprived of socio-economic opportunities for their sustenance and they are victims of social, cultural, and political exclusion. They are the marginalized and in our country, the marginalized communities are the rural poor, the downtrodden, and those who belong to the scheduled castes. Mullay describes marginalization as

‘the need for recognizing that social problems are indeed connected with larger structures in society, causing various forms of oppression amongst individuals resulting in marginalization’ (262).

Iris Marion Young, in her Justice and the Politics of Differences, opines that marginalization is one of the various forms of oppression and she considers it ‘... the most dangerous form of oppression’ (53). Marginalization is the direct outcome of social values and it ‘occurs when specific groups of people are excluded from socially meaningful and socially recognized activities’ (53).

The novels deal with those sections of the people deprived of their status and they choose literature as the medium for expressing their views since literature is an expression of a society. It is a social institution, using language as its medium, which is a social creation. Literature represents life and life is a social reality. A writer, who is a member of a society, is possessed of specific social status and he receives some degree of social recognition and reward. De Bonald considers ‘literature is an expression of society’ (95). This is true that a writer inevitably expresses his experience and total
conception of life. It is also important that he should be a representative of his age and society.

While using novel as a social document, one should be very careful, because one should have a clear idea about the tone of the author. For example, Chaucer’s portrait of the wife of Bath enables us to know much about the marriage system in the fourteenth century. Shakespeare, for example, could please his audience and give them not only what they wanted, but also what they needed. His The Merry Wives of Windsor and the plays of Ben Jonson throw light on the Elizabethan middle class. Any piece of literary work telling us something of the society of that time cannot be treated as a social document, as Raymond Williams in his essay Reading and Criticism, observes:

Arts, an intimate relation to society that the consideration of artistic matters quickly leads to consideration of social and moral questions, and that in one important sense the arts can only be fully understood when they are examined within the context of the society in which they were produced (99-100).

Literature is an embodiment of the treasury of cultural knowledge. The study of literature is one of the best ways of ‘understanding the nuances of a society’ (Amirthanayagam 433). Paul Varghese maintains in his observation that: there is no better yardstick to measure the culture of a nation than her literature, which is ‘an expression of society’ (110).

One of the important objectives of Indian English writers of fiction has been the creative interpretation of Indian society and its culture and the ‘formulation and projection of the Indian image’ (Shahane 11). The Indian society is broadly classified
into three main communities, namely, the upper-caste, the non-upper-caste and the depressed classes. Among them, there existed many castes and sub-castes, which followed numerous practices and usages; surprisingly each of them is unique. The influence of upper-castes is greatly felt in the socio-religious and cultural lives of the marginalized sections over the years.

The tradition-bound, Indian society is ‘submerged’, in numerous religious practices, superstitious beliefs and in the worship of many Gods and Goddesses, evident by the existence of numerous temples, big and small, all over India.

The depressed classes all over India are either segregated or ignored and treated as a separate community by both upper-caste and non-upper-caste people. They have their own social practices and usages, which speak of their seemingly separate cultural identity but broadly treated as Hindus. When compared to other two sections of society, the marginalized people are economically very poor. When the non-upper-castes feel that they are being exploited by the upper-castes, the depressed class people are the worst hit at the hands of both upper-castes and the non-upper-castes in their day-to-day lives.

The people, who work the hardest to produce riches, suffer the most and fare the worst. This is the irony of our civilization. The society looks down upon and treats them shabbily. They are the ‘marginalized’ or ‘working classes’ throughout the world. They are all included, in the terms of Arundhati Roy as ‘small things’ but generally, known as ‘untouchable’ or ‘pariah’. As it sounds bitter, Mahatma Gandhi named them as ‘Harijans’ (children of God) while the Census authorities during the British rule referred to them as ‘exterior classes’ and now the ‘depressed’ or ‘dalits’ (Amitabh 103). The reasons that gave birth to the institution of untouchability and the date of its appearance seem to be very ambiguous.
The novels of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, and Perumal Murugan’s *Seasons of the Palm*, have been taken up for study with a view to bringing out an analytical study of the place of marginalized and their social conditions.

The main objective of this analysis is to bring out how the protagonists of these writers are influenced positively and negatively by society. It also deals with the analysis of how they are dehumanized at the hands of the upper-caste people at various levels.

Despite laws passed in India over fifty years ago to abolish the practice of discrimination through the established three thousand -year-old Hindu caste system, and despite efforts to dismantle the cultural traditions, leading to disparate social treatment, inequalities in areas such as education still exist.

It would be appropriate to have a look at the untouchables and their conditions in various societies the protagonists live in, and the miseries and the inhuman treatment imposed on them by the upper caste people.

The novelists have artistically depicted the very sensitive issue of untouchables and marginalized sections of both pre and post-independent India. Mulk Raj Anand writes about the sweepers of Bulandshahar, now in Utter Pradesh, Arundhati Roy deals with the *paravans* of Kerala, Perumal Murugan writes about the *chakkili* caste, Neela Padmanaban and Yuma Vasuki, the plight of the marginalized sections of Tamil Nadu.

Indian society, since time immemorial is a caste-based group where the upper caste people exploit the lower caste people. Caste plays a very significant role in every aspect of Indian life. It has powerfully impressed Indian society.
In this caste hierarchy, untouchable castes are at the lowest level. Earlier Hindu society has condemned untouchables as the dirt of society. Hindu society did not consider untouchables as human beings at all. This inhuman discrimination is the shameful drawback of Indian society.

From the moment a Hindu child is born in India, his or her opportunities for social and religious freedom are shaped through the influence of the caste system, despite the laws passed fifty years ago to abolish such discriminatory practices. Stemming from its three thousand-year-old origins, the caste system is one of the world’s longest surviving forms of social stratification. People are divided by birth according to one of the four main castes, with yet another estimated two million categorized beneath this caste system. Many in society consider these people to be unclean and unworthy of basic human rights and label them ‘The Untouchables’ or Dalits.

The protagonists live under the restrictions of various hurdles created by their ancestors. In spite of India’s industrialization and globalization, Indian society is totally dependent on the evils of castes. It is this caste that impedes the growth of the protagonists in the novels and as a result, they suffer. It is not only caste, but various other evils such as the problems of untouchables, evils of dowry, ill-treatment of women, evils of superstitious beliefs, sexual molestation and abuses, misleading of children etc - all these prevent the protagonists to sag themselves into the confinements of the worn-out traditions and customs of the society in which they live.

Novelists like Mulk Raj Anand or Anita Desai or Arundhati Roy or Neela Padmanaban or Perumal Murugan or Yuma. Vasuki, portray their characters in reality they faced and to some extent bring out their real - life experiences and the India they witnessed before and after the independence era.
The novelists show that the individuals are placed in a society wherein the forces of conventional authority and modernity are pitted against each other. So it becomes necessary on the part of the individuals to make themselves felt in society in order to assert their position. The ultimate good being the progress of society: changes at all levels are envisaged by the individuals. Progress can be achieved by assimilating the positive aspects of life and nurturing hope. Dostoyevsky is of the opinion that ‘if a man loses his hope and has no aim in view, sheer boredom, can turn him into a beast’ (qtd. in Lukas 487).

It is hope, which alone raises man to a higher level and it alone can kindle in him the creative qualities essential for the progress of society. The novelists show their deep-rooted social consciousness. They discern the evolution of society necessitating a change in the present set-up and it is through their protagonists, they try to impose that change and the first step they pay their attention to is the positive attitudes present in their respective characters.

Authors like Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Perumal Murugan and Neela Padmanaban portray the marginalized section of society in a more effective manner than any other author because of their involvement and their interests in the reformation they expect in their respective societies in which they live. They picture the very condition of the lives of the protagonists and the miseries imposed by the so-called upper - caste people.

The positive aspect of society the novelists portray is to create both good and bad among the minds of their audience. The goodness of society that the novelist brings out from different corners and through different sources. Moreover, this goodness moulds their characters irrespective of the innumerable evils in their society.
It is a mere co-incidence that the novelists’ protagonists are children and through them they want to create a new generation by breaking all the taboos and restrictions laid down by their ancestors. The chief characters of the writers are from the marginalized section of society. Anand’s Bakha in Untouchable is of Bhangi, the untouchable. Roy’s Velutha in The God of Small Things belongs to an untouchable caste called the Paravan. Perumal Murugan’s Shortie from the Chakkilis, the lowest rung of the hierarchal untouchable order in Seasons of the Palm and Neela Padmanaban’s Kuttalam of The Generations and Thambi of Yuma Vasuki’s Blood Ties are from the lower-caste. Throughout the novel the good nature of these protagonists, creates a hope of change in the dehumanized society for the betterment of the generations to come.

The novelists have chosen characters from humble life and presented their sorrows and sufferings for evoking a fitting response in their readers. Their positive characters are broad-minded, progressive, benevolent and kind. The negative characters are ruthless villains who are devoid of sympathy, kindness and love. They are also sadists and ill tempered. They picture the evils and vices of their contemporary societies in their novels through their character creations. They are sympathetic towards the poor and the suppressed and this is seen in their characterization. By presenting the children as the victims of reckless society, they highlight the social evils to deduce pity and sympathy for the poor and the innocent. However, their protagonists are individuals and governed by their respective social and cultural backgrounds, their sorrows and the sufferings are the same. They are the exploited lot. They have been either neglected by their parents and society or ill-treated by the rich. They long for love and affection, which have been denied to them. Their child heroes
are the representatives of various experiences at the adolescent level and this gives an essential oneness and uniqueness to their terrified, unwanted, persecuted and helpless children. In their lone fight against society, they are par excellence and emerge as heroes.

Though their characters represent their respective societies caught in the midst of certain socio-economic forces, the characters have their astounding range and variety. They are not the same as each other but within the limited range, they present completely the socio-economic scene of Indian society. Though their characters have local as well as national characteristics, they are universal.

Bakha, in *Untouchable* a strong male of eighteen years, has a fascination for the western dress. He does the job of cleaning the latrines of the upper-caste colony but loves to live in a clean and decent manner. He is lovable and highly duty-conscious. Anand explains his sincerity and he says that he is dexterous in his job. Here Anand’s concept of work as worship, his faith in the dignity of labour and the value of growing man’s positive nature and his personality as a whole are depicted when he says: Bakha had principles. For him, duty came first, although he was a champion at all kinds of games … (42).

Arundhati Roy exposes the ugliness of society by bringing two children, Rahel and Estha to react to it, since children are yet uncorrupted and unwrapped by rigid social attitudes and can bring their pure response, however upset, to an issue or an event; the children’s pain serves as a powerful language of rejection of this system. The victim Velutha, the son of a Paravan, - a community subjected to extreme ignominy through ages, is forced to live a life of exploitation compounded by unspeakable abuse even to the extent of sweeping off their footprints as they crawled
back so that no Brahmins or Syrian Christians got defiled by treading on the same.

Though born a Paravan, Velutha is different from the traditional Paravan. Velutha belongs to the new generation who grow up in independent India; he has finished his school, gets training in carpentry in addition to his natural skill in machines, tools and handicraft. Yet he is sneered upon by the ‘Touchables’, the rich and the poor alike; while being hated by the touchable unskilled workers in the factory, he is exploited by the ‘kind’ employed, who, shrewdly uses the helplessness of his situation as a detested Paravan.

Portraying two children as the responder to the social ‘Laws’ which are still operative in larger parts of India, Roy brings a fresh perspective to bear on an age-old subject. Anand’s Untouchable has created waves as protest against social injustice. Roy has used the sad sincerity of penance which is perhaps the only way to overcome ‘man’s inhumanity to man.

In The God of Small Things Velutha, is a master craftsman and possesses great mechanical skills in his job. Roy points out that

He was a little magician. He could make intricate toys – tiny windmills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds; he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and fringes on cashew nuts...

Velutha had a way with machines (74-75).

Further, through Mammachi, Roy compliments Velutha, as ‘if only he hadn’t been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer... it is he who designed and built the sliding – folding door...’ (75). We see Velutha is the only man in Ayemenem who knew more about the machines in the factory than anyone else (75) and he is the one who reassembled the Bharat bottle-sealing machine. Such is the talent of this
youth and like Bakha, very conscious of his duties. This positive nature in him makes the Ayemenem family to live in its dignity and glory.

Perumal Murugan's *Seasons of the Palm* focuses on the arduous lives of a group of children as lovingly drawn characters with colourful names like 'Shortie', 'Tallfellow', 'Matchbox', and 'Stumpleg'. Born into the 'untouchable' class in Southern India, the children work as goat herders and face not only the universal difficulties of adolescence but also at the same time heartbreaking hunger and dispossession. In *Seasons of the Palm*, we come across the children of the lower caste community who are in bondage to their respective landlords - the Gounder community, also this shows their sincerity in being punctual in looking after the cattle and their conscientiousness is clearly brought out. The main character Shortie grazes the goats of his Gounder master in open field. In the cowshed, he has to do all cleaning works and look after the cows and goats. Further, he has to gather carefully the dung. After gathering this dung,

He has to feed the animals. He fetches hay and dried stalks of the kambu to the shed, huge piles that exhaust his thin hands.

The animals immediately set up a chewing rhythm that follows Shortie as he sets about his next task. There is not a minute to be lost between his various duties (17).

In spite of his hectic schedule, Shortie is very good to show off his face towards anyone else. He loves his job and he treats the animals in a very kind manner. Shortie's kindness to animals reveals his good nature throughout the novel. A very good example in the novel is during the birth of a kid, Shortie feels the pain of the she-goat, and he 'darts forward and holds his right hand out. The kid, still in its
birth-sheath, drops gently into his open palm’ (100). Shortie is very compassionate towards his dog named *poochi* and he never forgets to bring food for all his pets - ‘he cannot eat them all up; there are always the crows and sparrows. They will thank him for the food’ (26). This is the mentality of Shortie.

Tallfellow, another character in the novel, who is also a bonded labourer, works for his Gounder Master. Though he is pictured as harsh, he has a soft corner for the old Gounder, as ‘whenever this man wants to piss or shit, the pan is brought forward’ (52) and this is the major duty of Tallfellow. Though the old man has three sons, none of them ‘comes near his bed. Neither do their wives. He lies waiting to piss and shit until Tallfellow arrives for the day’s work’ (52).

Tallfellow feels pity for the old man and does his duty. All these characters are responsible for the smooth functioning of society and they are compassionate towards their fellow beings. The authors in their respective novels bring out this trait effectively. In *Seasons of the Palm*, Perumal Murugan depicts the character of Shortie in such a way that he is very close even to his masters’ sons and they play together. There is no class, caste, or colour difference among these children. It is all there, only in the minds of the grown-ups and elders. It is they who create discrimination among the young minds as we see in every novel, the so-called lower caste children are very friendly and playful as there is no differentiation among them. This is beautifully illustrated by the novelist:

... every evening, barely home from school, they elude their mothers’ watchful eyes and race to the fields before they are caught and held back at home... But the children do not think of their fathers often and ‘...for the children from school, the day is not done, unless they come to the fields (104-05).
Bakha in *Untouchable* is a very good player of hockey and his talents are well known in the entire colony. In the preparation for the match to be played, Bakha is overwhelmed by the care and affection showered by the sons of the babu and he had a great respect for them. In his team Bakha knows very well that the boys

Chota and Ram Charan followed by various boys, the armourer’s sons, Niamat and Asmat; the tailor-master’s son, Ibrahim; the bandmaster’s sons, Ali, Abdulla, Hassan and Hussein (126)

are from upper-caste except Bakha. Again, there is no difference among them and they act as a synergy. The grown-ups pollute the minds of the young and sow the seeds of caste in them even when they are young.

Similarly, we find that Velutha Pappen in *The God of Small Things* is very good to the children of Ammu and he is the best companion of them. He loves the twins, treats them with great courtesy and consideration, not because they are his boss’ family but because they are children.

They have lived in a natural state. Except for the untouchable, Velutha, there is no one to take delight in their play. No one participates in their games. No family dotes over them. They only have Velutha and in turn Velutha has both of them. They ride on Velutha’s back, play with the toys he whittled for them and rocked on a boat he mended for them to strange and fantastic lands. Since they are still children, they cannot be defiled by his touch. It is only through this positive aspect of these characters that the society evolves in the right manner and the authors build their plot of their respective novels.

The other similarity that we find in the novels lies in their treatment of the theme of education, and the corruption associated with schools. In the novels, the
characters show their thirst for learning, which, in turn was denied to them by the upper class people for many generations.

The marginalized sections have not only been exploited socially, politically and economically, but they have also been deprived of the right to education for centuries. Centuries of caste stigma and segregation have benumbed the intellectual life of the marginalized. Their world-views and perceptions have been reduced to merely struggling for survival and not looking beyond for growth and development despite the richness and variety of their socio-cultural resources. Worse still, they are made to think that their culture is low and mean.

In *Untouchable*, Bakha yearns to be educated and he longs to speak in English in order to become a *sahib*. It is his dream and Anand significantly portrays his feeling in the following sentences:

Bakha noticed the ardent, enthusiastic look that lit up the little one’s face.

The anxiety of going to school! How beautiful it felt! How nice it must be to be able to read and write! One could read the papers after having been to school. One could talk to the sahibs. One wouldn’t have to run to the scribe every time a letter came (44).

However, he is not sent to school for the very reason, that he is an untouchable.

Like Anand, other authors are also very much concerned with education of the marginalised section. Further, such an education is the monopoly of the rich and the caste-Hindus. The poor and the outcastes cannot think of attending schools for fear of polluting the children of the caste-Hindus.

Bakha’s sense of dissatisfaction with his physical and social environment later in the novel makes him wish to be educated but he and the marginalized are denied
the school environment, from other students and even from the teachers. Because the upper-caste teachers have low expectations of marginalized pupils and often consider them ‘dull’ and ‘unteachable’ and for the reason that

‘the masters wouldn’t teach the outcaste lest their fingers which guided the students across the text should touch the leaves of the outcastes’ books and they are polluted’ (44).

Shortie in *Seasons of the Palm* too has a great feeling to be educated and there is a thirst for learning in him, as he knows very well, ‘school was fun…’ (36) but he is denied for the same reason like Bakha. He is thrilled to listen to the school stories narrated to him by Selvam, the other character in the novel. Shortie has a great regard for him for simple reason that he goes to school. Nevertheless, the children of lower castes are not provided even their basic needs and there is no facility, which the upper-caste children enjoy, and Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* brings out this differentiation between the haves and the have-nots, when she says that there is a separate school for the untouchables built by Pappachi (13).

Those who have knowledge, have power, so the decisions and the understanding of the intellectual and powerful few seem to be serving better in the interests of the ignorant and the powerless who constitute the majority, "the other". And the perception of these intellectual few wins credibility or legitimacy over other available meanings. This is very true in the case of Hindu society too. Knowledge and power are concentrated in the hands of the upper caste Hindus. Denial of knowledge is denial of power. For centuries, caste system in the Indian subcontinent has controlled, regulated the knowledge hierarchies. As a result, the upper-caste people have sought to legitimize the servitude.
The untouchables live in ghettos and the novelists depict their living conditions as they lead a subhuman life. The Hindu society insists on segregation of the Untouchables. The Hindu will not live in the quarters of the Untouchables and will not allow the Untouchables to live inside Hindu quarters. This is a fundamental feature of Untouchability as it is practised by the Hindus. It is not a case of social separation, a mere stoppage of social intercourse for a temporary period. It is a case of territorial segregation and of a cordon sanitaire putting the impure people inside a barbed wire into a sort of a cage. Every Hindu village has a ghetto. The Hindus live in the village and the untouchables in the ghetto.

In Untouchable, the lower class people live in a colony that is isolated from the rest of the place and they lead a sub-human life in mud-walled, one-room, cottages in unhygienic conditions

‘... soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses ... the absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarter a march which gave out the most offensive smell’ (11).

This is the condition of all the untouchable colonies.

In The God of Small Things, the locale is Ayemenem near Kottayam in Kerala and Roy pictures the house of Velutha, the Paravan as it

‘... was dark and clean. It smelled of fish curry and woodsmoke. Heat cleaved to things like a low fever... Velutha and Vellya Paapen’s bedding was rolled up and propped against the wall. ... A grown man could stand up straight in the centre of the room, but not along its sides’ (208).
In *Seasons of the Palm*, Perumal Murugan portrays the cattle shed not as an asylum for Shortie but a torture cell for poor children like him. It is a symbol of oppression and suppression and Shortie leads his life in constant fear. The worst condition is that Shortie, the shepherd boy has to spend his life only in the cow shed along with the cows and goats. As the place is full of mosquitoes,

They hang in thick clusters, on the roof of the goat shed, on the walls.

The goat shed is a natural mosquito breeder. Its mud floor is always wet with goat piss and shit. Shortie cannot ever hope to keep the tiny wretches away. They are at their worst in the monsoon months. Then he needs two jute sacks - one to lie on, and one to cover himself with (15) and he is totally accustomed to sleep with the smell of goat shit in his nose (122).

Perumal Murugan writes that on

Many nights he has woken up, feeling a spray of piss wet his face.

On rainy nights, he has no choice and has to seek shelter under the stilts. At other times, though, he prefers the field – broad, dark, and inviting (123) he ‘sleeps on the very mud of the land, with only a ragged sack to cover himself’ (121).

This is the position of these characters and they are treated worse than animals for the very reason that they are the subalterns.

In such a condition, it is highly impossible for the characters to make any sort of progress. The novelists portray their characters as incapable of fighting the forces as long as these restrictions are prevalent which naturally impede the growth of the characters. The novelists’ study reveals that the cause of their position is due to
various social factors such as lack of proper education as discussed earlier, lack of awareness of their position and their environment. This is due to their ignorance and because of their ignorance, the upper-caste people utilize their ignorance as their advantage and they reap the labour of these marginalized sections.

The marginalized sections are poor, deprived and socially backward. They do not have access to enough food, health care, housing and or clothing, and their physiological needs are not fulfilled. They also do not have access to education and employment. Perumal Murugan underlines the injustice that his protagonist faces in everyday life. Officially, everybody in India has the same rights and duties, but the practice is different. Social backwardness, lack of access to food, education and health care keep them in bondage of the upper castes. In *Seasons of the Palm*, the marginalized characters that are under bondage to Gounder community are economically exploited by the upper-caste people. Belly, the shepherd-girl knows very well:

How much she was spoken for, how much money her father received as an advance, how much of her pay remains with the Gounder, what amount her father claimed from that pay during the village temple festival: she knows it all. Shortie cannot know things like that (23).

Though Belly is aware a little bit of her condition, Shortie is totally ignorant and helpless as he reveals his anguish when Belly teases him of his position; he says, ‘What’s the big use? No one asks you anyway, you do what they tell you to...’ (23) brings out clearly the miserable plight of these marginalized sections as they are forced to accept as it is imposed on them and Shortie continues ‘... someone decides, takes the money. We graze the goats, that’s all’ (23).
Further, as this bondage varies, their wages too vary accordingly. The pitiable condition is that not only the children of these marginalized sections are bonded to the Gounder families, but their parents too work for generations. Belly’s father is a leather worker in the farm of the other landlord and her mother works for Belly’s Gounder Mistress, doing her household duties throughout the day. It is an indictment against the inhuman treatment given to the poor, against the denial of the right to happiness to a simple landless orphan, and against the exploitations of the underprivileged and unjust social system.

The rich and the greedy moneylenders exploit the poor marginalized. The exploitation is so cruel that the poor are cheated and their strips of lands are illegally taken away. The utter poverty of the family of Shortie makes them bonded labourers. It is the responsibility of society to take care of the people, the marginalized section of society.

This sort of economic exploitation is also brought out by Anand in Untouchable, the evil mind of the Hindus sucking their own fellow creatures is brought out when Anand says that Ganesh Nath of Bani community, would squeeze the blood of the needy by levying compound interest beyond reckoning. The incident of borrowing money from him for the funeral of Bakha’s mother is reminded here: ‘Lakha had borrowed on the mortgage of his wife’s trinkets to pay for her funeral. That was an unpleasant thing!’ (50).

In The God of Small Things, “old world paravan” (76), Vellyan Paapen, the father of Velutha has to crawl backwards and he takes the social disabilities that is imposed on the marginalized section by the worn-out tradition. He does not want either to question or to violate the false authority in the name of caste rules imposed
on them. Out of his ignorance, he blindly believes that it will be sinful to deviate from
the false accusations made by Mammachi because of his gratitude that he believes
that the family of Mammachi is ‘as wide and deep as a river in spate’ (37). Moreover,
the family has done so much for them for generations right from Reverend E. John Ipe
to Mammachi. Once, when he met with an accident and lost one of his eyes,
Mammachi paid for his glass eye (76, 255). In reality, it is paid as a loan but Vellya
Paapen has not been able to work off his debt nor seems to be able to do that. Apart
from this, Mammachi arranged Velutha’s education and gave him a job (255).
Mammachi and her family too benefit from their labour. When he comes to know of
his son’s affair with a ‘touchable woman’ he feels obliged to go to Mammachi to
report and he asks for ‘God’s forgiveness for having spared a monster’ and he even
goes to the extent ‘to kill his son with his own bare hands’ (78), which eventually
brings the downfall of his son Velutha. Here Arundhati Roy says,

By the time he understood his part in History’s Plans, it was too late to
retrace his steps. He had swept his footprints away himself. Crawling
backwards with a broom (200).

This present system is opposed by the younger generation because it limits their
perspectives and places checks on their independent view of life.

An intense human drama issues out of the untouchables’ confrontation with
the monster of authority in the caste - Hindus that Perumal Murugan, Mulk Raj Anand
and Arundhati Roy capture vividly by achieving an artistic fusion of form with the
content.

Some of the novels throw light on the protagonist’s utter poverty, which is so
complete, degrading, sorrowful, and realistic that they do not have an identity of their
own. In *Seasons of the Palm*, Shortie and his friends do not even have proper clothes to cover the upper part of their body. Further, we see they do not cover their body completely and it is through Stonedeaf, the other character in the novel, Perumal Murugan portrays thus,

> She sits cross-legged, in her ragged, faded long skirt and blouse.

> The blouse is an old one. It has shrunk and become short.

> Between her skirt and blouse a thin line of flesh can be seen (52).

This shows their impecunious status that has been enforced on them by the upper-caste people.

Similarly, we come across Velutha in *The God of Small Things*, who is also deprived of the right to cover over the upper part of his body. This trend is clear when he is introduced in the novel ‘...someone like Velutha, bare bodied and shining, sitting on a plank, swinging from the scaffolding in the high dome of the church, painting silver jets in a blue church sky’ (6). In this context, M.K.Naik brings out the significance of colour consciousness:

> The dark complexion is specially significant in the Indian context, where the colour of the skin is often regarded as an index to one’s caste-status. Velutha is a Paravan by caste, the lowest in the Caste hierarchy and actually an untouchable (68).

The marginalized sections do not have an identity of their own. The marginalized sections are not referred by their respective names and some of the characters like Belly have her name given by her parents, but no one calls her by her name, rather by their caste or by their appearances. The authors make use of irony in order to exemplify the nature of the society in which their protagonists live. In
*Seasons of the Palm*, Shortie literally means ‘a small boy’; ironically, the author has not given any name to him but he is called only Shortie. It shows how he is suppressed and that he remains without any identity.

Likewise Belly’s real name is Raamyi, but no one calls her by her name and the author says ‘only her mother calls her Raamu, short for Raamayi, her given name. But no one knows that’ (36) because no one wants to give an identity to her by referring to her name. In this context it is worth pointing V. Geetha in translating the book from Tamil ‘underscores the point how dalit (subaltern) children are not even allowed the dignity of being called their own names but are called by other cruel names’ (*The Hindu*, 03 2005). Like the same way Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*, makes use of irony to represent the Christian community and she purposely gives her protagonist the name Velutha, which literally means ‘white’ ‘While the man himself is dark’ (Naik 68).

Moreover, these marginalized characters are called either by their caste or by vulgar words like “Chakkili! Bastard! Naked son of a …” (SP145). Like Shortie, Belly refers to the projection of the stomach due to malnutrition and Perumal Murugan projects her as ‘her stomach sticks out from her tiny body. Straw-stuffed-scarecrow’ (23). However, her Mistress scowls at her by saying: ‘Foul Belly! Just a strip of a stomach, but always hungry. I keep pouring the *kanji* and still she holds her bowl out!’ (23).

Caste is also the dominant factor on party lines. Even Pillai in *The God of Small Things*, refer to Velutha not by his name but by his caste, a ‘paravan’ (278). Further, we see in order to frustrate his affairs with Ammu, Pillai advises Chacko: ‘that paravan is going to cause troubles for you… get him a job somewhere else. Send
him off" (278), brings out clearly that the upper-caste people do not consider the lower caste as a human being and they try to suppress them without giving an identity for them. In Untouchable, Bakha is very often compared to animals – elephants, tiger (12), black bear (13), ape (14) and his sense of revolt is easily comparable to the angry growl of beasts.

Another form of suppression is the complexity of Indian superstitious beliefs and values that are imposed on the minds of suppressed.

Religious practices and beliefs based on blind faith as against rationalism are branded as superstitious beliefs. Accordingly, rituals and ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death, religious worship, omens and sooth sayings, belief in soul, life after death, heaven and hell, incarnations, spirits, magic and miracles, and the like become the subjects of attack and criticism by the authors on the ground that they are kept human beings permanently in bondage of ignorance and slavery. Besides offering rationalistic criticism to such beliefs through their writings the writers tried on several occasions in their respective novels to expose, the evil consequences accrued from such practices and prevented people from practicising them further.

Lack of reasoning, resulting from being uneducated, the marginalized sections of the society are forced to accept the beliefs imposed on them. As a result, the upper castes people take advantage of their ignorance and suppress them for generations. The authors utilize these superstitious beliefs as a tool in their respective novels to bring out the ignorance of the marginalized sections. In Seasons of the Palm, a series of superstitious beliefs are imposed on the children by their ancestors and thwart their progress. It is a common belief that spirits are visible only to dogs and cattle. When a dog barks into an empty space that means 'he has spied a spirit and is barking at it' (126)
In Yuma Vasuki’s *Blood Ties*, we hear that ‘every tree there had a ghost in it, Akka had told Thambi, and instructed him never to look in its direction’ (21).

Again, in *Seasons of the Palm*,

Tiruchengode hill ... is sacred to the god Murugan and people in the village do not dare to sleep with their feet in its direction. To show one’s feet to the hill is to insult it. And to insult it is to spite the god (143-144)

and

falling of fruits in the yard as the work of spirits ... , sometimes, spirits are known to get angry, just like that for no reason at all, and slap a person on his face until he bleeds (165).

Further we see if a child suffers from fever, it is customary that the people, instead going to a hospital take it to a mosque of Allah where a bearded Muslim healer chanted over this piece of metal and gave it to his mother, who tied it to his string. He has had it since then. As long as he holds unto this enchanted piece, no spirit can do anything to him (165-166).

Yuma Vasuki in *Blood Ties* also depicts the same when he says that the black thread which *Akka* had tied around his wrist to protect him had also acquired the colour of mud… ‘It was a holy thread. *Akka* had told him to be very careful with it… You must make sure that this thread does not touch the ground. If it does, that is it; it will be the end of the world’ (163).

It is a widely accepted belief even today that, it is not good to pronounce the word ‘snake’ during night as
Shortie hears something slither on the ground. He stops, pulls Selvan back, and motions to him to stand still. A long rope of a thing slides under the fence. Its undersides glow in the moonlight. Selvan screams: “Snake! Snake!”

“Ssh…ssh… not that, don’t call it by name…” (189).

There are various similar instances in The Generations where the protagonist Diravi is highly influenced not only by the stories of his community, but also by superstitious beliefs that are incorporated in him by his grandmother to express the traditional and customary ideas that prevailed in their society. Diravi asks his grandmother, ‘Achi … in our caste, no one has so far been bitten by a snake - no, no’, he immediately corrects himself and says, ‘I mean a rope and died. Isn’t it?’ (12) because he knows very well that ‘to mention the word ‘snake’ when it was not full daylight was something which achi did not like or allow’ (12) brings out how the society in southern part of India is deeply superstitious and tradition oriented. Further, ‘to see the palm fronts first thing in the morning on waking up as an “all giving tree”’ (6). Whenever Diravi steps into the street, his grandmother has ingrained in him the habit of looking for right and auspicious omen. It is generally considered to face a widow (23) or to come across ‘a black cat cross his path’ (31) or to put his foot crossing across the rope of a tied cow or calf (31) - as a sign of ill omen. It is the irony that people even in their advanced culture, are forced to behave in such a manner, and they restrict themselves into the confinements of the age-old taboos and worn out beliefs of their society. In The God of Small Things, we see through the character Vellaya Paapen that the presence of ghost is real. What he believes, he tries to impose and make - the children of Ammu believe, Rahel and Esthahappen and he says ‘he
pinned the ghost to the trunk of a rubber tree’ (199), and according to ‘Vellaya Paapen, it still remained’ (199). Psychologically speaking the anatomy of people, the environment in which they live and the nature of their bringing combined with their imbalanced and disturbed mind, lead them believe that there is ghost.

Rahel is of the opinion that ‘one should never wake dreaming people suddenly’ as ‘they could easily have a Heart Attack’ (217). All these are the outcome of the formative influences imposed on the characters by their elders. Because of this, the characters are forced to stick to the ancestral path and, life in such a condition is impossible for the characters to make progress towards any achievements, and as a result, they remain as they are.

Further, the upper-caste people are opportunists and they take chances to exploit the environment of the marginalized sections by various means. One such Machiavellianism is the conversion from one religion to the other. Mulk Raj Anand in Untouchable and Arundhati Roy in The God of Small Things, have effectively handled this theme in order to bring out the ignorance of the marginalized sections of society. Their novels focus on the class distinctions between the rich and the poor, between the high caste Hindus and the dregs of humanity, known as untouchables, hamper the growth of individuals, which ultimately results in social evils. They hate the social institution that causes the cleavage between the different strata in the social structure. They present simple and noble human beings enmeshed in the net of poverty and injustice. Though they fight to come out of it, they are helpless to shake off the coils of social evil. In The God of Small Things, Roy describes how the British converted the people of lower castes to Christianity and Velutha’s grandfather Kelan is a victim of this.
After the British came to Malabar, a number of low caste people including Velan, Velutha’s grandfather, became Christians and joined the Anglican Church in the hope of being liberated from the clutches of untouchability. They are also given incentive to promote the cause of Christianity. They got little food and money. Perhaps this is why they are known as Rice Christians but very soon, they came to know that they have just jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They are given separate churches, separate priests, separate service and through a special favour, they are entitled to own a separate Pariah Bishop. Their condition began to worsen after independence when they found that they were not given any benefits provided by the government like job reservation or bank loans at low interest. It was only because they are casteless. Through this historical reference, Roy seems to fling a mild satire on Christianity and she says,

Kelan converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. As added incentive, they were given a little food and money. They were known as the Rice-Christians. It didn’t take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Parish Bishop (74).

Roy, ironically holds: ‘It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all’ (74). By embracing Christianity, they had only received the status of ‘untouchable Christians’ with separate church and priest. In this context, M.K.Naik says ‘the irony is that Velutha and his father are both Christians, like their masters but that does not annul
their age-old Paravan identity, which is the albatross round their untouchable
necks’ (68). The marginalized sections are unaware of their environment and they
easily become victims of the Machiavellianism of the upper caste people.

Mulk Raj Anand in Untouchable portrays this type of exploitation, where
Colonel Hutchinson, the chief of the local Salvation Army tries to exploit the
condition of Bakha as a solution to Bakha’s series of humiliations. The Colonel
provides the suggestion of conversion to Christianity and says there is no difference
among the rich and the poor, the upper-caste and the lower-caste in Christianity.

He says:

‘I am a padre and my God is Yessuh Messah’ emphasized the Colonel…’

Who is Yessuh Messah, really, Sahib?’

Bakha asked eager to ally his curiosity.

‘Come, I shall tell you,’ said Colonel Hutchinson. ‘Come to the church.’

And dragging the boy by the arm, babbling, babbling…’ (140).

The Colonel talks of the Missions of Lord Jesus Christ – the son of God and Man. The
Colonel in a very clever manner explains Bakha “He sacrificed Himself out of love
for us… ‘He sacrificed Himself to help us all; for the rich and the poor; for Brahmin
and the Bhangi’” (144). However, Bakha could not understand who this Yessuh
Messiah was, was baffled and bored by the sermon of the Colonel as he realizes that
‘the Sahib probably wanted to convert him to his religion. He didn’t want to be
converted’ (142) and Bakha narrowly escapes from the unscrupulousness of Colonel
Hutchinson. Bakha seems to feel that in Christianity, there is no difference between
‘the pundit of the morning’ who thought himself defiled and polluted by his touch,
and a sweeper-boy or bhangi like him. He also cannot bring himself to accepting
conversion to Christianity for the sake of equality.
Untouchability is the notion of defilement, pollution, contamination and the ways and means of getting rid of that defilement. The next kind of subjugation imposed by the upper-caste people upon the lower-caste is that the suppressed are not allowed to enter or touch things, people, or house of the upper-castes, which is characterized by all authors in their respective novels.

Untouchables cannot enter into the house of upper-castes and they should not touch anything that is used by upper-caste people. In *Seasons of the Palm*, Perumal Murugan explains how Shortie and his companions are treated by the Gounder community. One of the duties of his protagonist, Shortie is to provide milk from his Masters’ house to other houses and he has

‘... to take the can to where the nadar caste people live. This is not easy, for he has to hold the heavy can by the cloth. On no account must he touch the can directly. Once he gets to the houses in the Nadar neighborhood that buys milk, he sets the can down and stands away. The lady of the house opens the cloth lid, pours her share of the milk into a vessel and ties up the can’s mouth once more. This happens in all the houses to which Shortie goes’ (17-18).

It is an act of defilement if the lower caste people touch anything that the upper-caste use and it is a pollution to use those things that are used by the lower caste people.

Roy in *The God of Small Things*, brings out the condition of the untouchables through Mammachi when she narrates how the untouchables are treated during her days to Rahel. She says that, Vellya Paapen has to enter the house of Mammachi only through the ‘back entrance of the Ayemenem House’ and that
Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprint (73-74).

When there is a need, the upper-caste people forget the caste barriers and they extract work from the downtrodden. In *Seasons of the Palm*, we see that the house of the upper-caste people was constructed in such a way that they make use of it in their needs. The untouchables are allowed to enter into their house to do their household duties only in the absence of the male members. Stonedeaf, another character in the novel works for her Gounder Mistress and she

usually keeps the door leading to the well shut and bolted. This is the door that the Gounder uses to come into the house. As soon as Stonedeaf finishes her shed and yard work, her mistress motions to her to come into the house. Once she is inside, Stonedeaf is made to sweep, mop, and wash vessels. Stonedeaf’s Mistress has made her promise that she will not tell anyone that she does housework, especially about the vessels... At times Stonedeaf even washes clothes for her Mistress (49-50).

In Hindu society, the untouchables are restricted to enter or go around the place that the upper-caste uses frequently.
A strong believer in the dignity of man and equality of all men, Mulk Raj Anand is naturally shocked by the inhuman treatment meted out by those that belong to superior castes. The degradation and humiliation inflicted on the unfortunate sections of society is highlighted through the repeated refrain of Bakha ‘Posh, posh, sweeper coming’ (57). Bakha protests against the false accusation and asks for forgiveness for his crime of ‘forgetting to announce his arrival’ and ‘touching the caste-Hindu’ in the novel but no one in the crowd believes a word of what he says. The crowd feels absolutely no sympathy for Bakha. Rather the onlookers take a sadistic pleasure in watching him in distress. The peculiarity of his complicated situation is echoed aptly in these observations:

He was really sorry and tried to convey his repentance to his tormentors. But the barrier of space that the crowd had placed between themselves and him seemed to prevent his feeling from getting across.

And he stood still while they raged and fumed and sneered in fury (56).

The Mohammedan tonga-wallah shows sympathy towards him. This sympathy infuriates the ‘touched man’ further who gives Bakha a harsh and sharp slap on the face and it results in his turban falling off and the jelebis in the paper bag in his hand getting scattered in the dust. Bakha is slapped and for the only reason that, he belongs to a low caste. When he is slapped, he faces a crisis of identity and it is not only an attack on the caste system but then it is also an individual’s struggle against a sea of dogmas. This unfortunate incident makes him indulge in pitiable self-analysis of his plight

‘Why all this fuss?’ he asked himself in the soundless speech of cells receiving and transmitting emotions, which was his usual way of
communicating with himself. 'Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. Why didn't I shout to warn the people of my approach? That comes of not looking after one's work. I should have begun to sweep the thoroughfare. I should have seen the high-caste people in the street. That man! That he should have hit me! (58).

He becomes aware of his low social status and at the same time Bakha is moved by the kindness of the *tonga-wallah* but the word "untouchable" haunts him:

The *tonga-wallah* was kind. He made me weep telling me, in that way, to take my things and walk along. But he is a Muhammadan. They don't mind touching us, the Muhammadans and the sahibs. It is only the Hindus, and the outcastes who are not sweepers. For them I am a sweeper, sweeper — untouchable! Untouchable!

Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!

(58-59).

Bakha's powers and place in society are not determined by his ability but his birth in a subaltern or 'dalit' family. (10).

With developing rage in his mind, he asks himself why the Hindus treat him in such an abusive and insulting manner. He also wonders why the sahibs and Muslims do not mind touching them. The cruelty and orthodoxy of the Hindus is thus sharply focused. These factors, the novelist seems to hint, are the probable reasons for conversions of a large number of low caste Hindus to Christianity like that of Kelen in *The God of Small Things*.

The other kind of oppression that is imposed upon the lower-castes is that the untouchables are not allowed to enter the temple by the caste Hindus as they consider
it as an act of defiling the temple yard. Mulk Raj Anand, Perumal Murugan, and Arundathi Roy effectively bring out this theme in their novels. In a series of humiliations, Bakha faces in the novel Untouchable, the temple incident is the most striking and important. Bakha goes to the temple where he is to sweep the courtyard. Bakha has an urge to see the deity inside the temple, but he is also simultaneously gripped with the fear of breaking a sacrosanct barrier and

He was affected by the rhythm of the song. His blood has coursed along the balanced melodic line to the final note of strength with such sheer vigour that his hands joined unconsciously, and his head hung in the worship of the unknown god (68).

In this context, P.K. Rajan in his essay *Realist and Fabulist: Untouchable and the Road* makes an appropriate observation that ‘Anand delineates the spiritual growth of his hero from innocence to awareness, and his emergence from the anonymous mass into the quick of his individual life’ (30).

The sight of the God makes him forget himself and he instinctively folds his hands as if to worship inwardly the unknown god. He hears just then a loud cry, ‘Polluted!, Polluted!, Polluted!,’ (68). This runs a wave of shock among the devotees. As he goes near, the crowd also closes in, shouting that Bakha had defiled the holy precincts. It creates a panic in him with mortal fright; the crowd sees Bakha and screams at him for having defiled the temple.

This incident creates the spark in Bakha to realize his self and feels that he is a victim of the caste-conscious society. Bakha is made to feel that he is a sweeper’s son and hence untouchable. When he hears that loud cry “polluted, polluted, polluted”, he is perplexed. He knows what is meant. Pandit Kalinath was a little man
Bakha also sees the figure of a woman Sohini, behind the shouting priest. The priest has not only disgraced Bakha's sister but has also attracted the sympathy of the crowd by accusing him of having polluted the premises.

Though he feels much troubled at heart, Bakha realizes his helplessness; he can do nothing to expose the hypocrisy of the priest. The little priest, angrily shrieking, 'You people have only been polluted from a distance. ... I have been defiled by contact' (69-70). The crowd feels that the priest had suffered terribly. All worshippers sympathize with him but they do not ask about the way he has been polluted. Bakha turns into an incipient rebel and ultimately, in his quest for identity becomes an articulate thinking individual. In this connection, Ravi Jauhari and Kiran Kamboj in *A Social Evil in Untouchable* point out that religious diplomacy and hypocrisy were real instruments to exploit the untouchable the priest (Brahmin), the so-called custodian of religion is on one hand ready to have physical relation with a beautiful untouchable girl, Sohini, and on the other hand, Bakha, Sohini's brother is not allowed even to touch the steps of the temple. Anand tries to reveal such religious bigotry in his novel (83).

Bakha realizes how Hindu society is a society of hypocrites. They are proud of their religiousness; cast - offs certain sections of human beings. Moreover, they feel that they have been polluted so much by being merely touched by an untouchable. Pandit Kali Nath is not ashamed of making indecent suggestions at Sohini. When exposed he cries out “Polluted, Polluted” and accuses her of defiling the platform and polluting him by her physical proximity to him. Such brazen insolence of the priest is
tolerated by the Hindu society, because in the caste hierarchy Brahmin is superior to everybody else.

Emotionally tortured soul and heart of Bakha make him realize his own existence in this sadistic society. Bakha’s touching a caste Hindu and his being slapped by the latter and subjected to the most inhuman treatment before a crowd of people is the fateful accident that opens his eyes for the first time and lets him have vague glimpses into the real meaning of his own self, his own place in society.

Alastair Niven, in *The Yoke of Pity: A Study in the Fictional Writings of Mulk Raj Anand* says that it becomes ‘a crucial moment of realization when the main character fully understands his place in the social order’ (56). Further about the spiritual development in *Untouchable*, Alastair Niven says, is ‘episodic in nature, each episode serving as a form of community existence from which Bakha is socially or emotionally excluded’ (48).

In connection with this most significant incident P.K. Rajan in *A Dialogue with Mulk Raj Anand*, quotes Anand’s creation of Bakha as

... I meant to recreate the lives of the millions of untouchables through one single person. In only one incident. The slap on the face of the hero. Now the slap on the face evoked all the human relations ... of the sixty-five millions of people whom the hero represents, against the millions of caste Hindus (102).

Anand shows a complete understanding of the human situation and a sensitive discrimination of moral values and we hear the deep cry of these human beings who are considered untouchable sub-human beings, thus, *Untouchable* is essentially a tragic creation of the individual caught in the net of the age-old caste system crying for an escape.
Again in *Untouchable*, Bakha is humiliated for sitting on the doorstep of a caste-Hindu and the lady of the house shouts and curses him for defiling her house. Bakha goes for collecting food and he shouts: ‘Bread for the sweeper, mother; bread for the sweeper’ (76). Feeling tired and defeated, when no one responds to his requests, he sits down on the wooden platform of a house and leaning against the door, falls asleep. The lady of the house becomes furious when she sees Bakha on the threshold of her house and scolds him “perish and die” (80) as he has defiled her house. Bakha asks for forgiveness and appeals for food. After a lot of fuss, she flings a *chapatti* (83) as if giving it to a dog. Bakha’s tolerance now reaches the nadir and in the hockey match, the younger son of the Babu gets hurt. Bakha carries him when he is still bleeding profusely. The Babu’s wife is surprised to see her injured son and accuses Bakha of defiling her house by coming there. This confuses his mind and infuriates his heart.

This piteous plight of the untouchable reminds us of Roy, who presents a similar attitude in *The God of Small Things*. Velutha, like Bakha in *Untouchable* is not allowed to enter the house of the upper castes. They are not allowed to touch anything that touchables touched.

Similarly, in *Seasons of the Palm*, during the temple festival, the untouchables are not allowed into the temple as Shortie and Tallfellow of course not allowed into the grove, now that the festivities had begun. No untouchable *chakkili* was (222).

Further the lower - castes are cursed and punished even if they enter the temple ‘... if they tried to peer into one of the makeshift shops that had come up, they were chased away. ‘Bloody chakkilis! What does a *chakkili* want with a temple festival? Get out! Out!’ (223).
Rahel and Estha in *The God of Small Things*, Diravi in *The Generations* and Shortie in *Seasons of the Palm* and Bakha in *Untouchable* find themselves in a very new environment. All the characters realize that life has more to offer if only the individuals take effort to go beyond the barriers established by the conventions of society. We see Ammu in *The God of Small Things*, drifts into a hurried marriage because marriage is the only position to escape the disparities of her parents and society. Again, Rahel feels free from the influence of her parents and in such a state of mind, she thinks of a possible profession that suits her. She wants to be free from the world that her mother clings on to, and sees the world in her own way. Bakha in *Untouchable* comes to realize his position in society after the day’s cup of misery is full. In his quest for identity, Bakha seeks the sympathy of the Muslim smoker and the tonga-wallah, another subaltern in the caste-ridden Hindu society. His dreams are pathetically shattered by “a sharp, clear slap” (31). His agony in not being allowed to visit a temple as “an untouchable going into a temple polluted it past purification” (66) is an indignant attack on the heinous caste system which insulted and sidelined a Dalit or Sublatem.

His sister Sohini too is subjected to inter-caste abuses and recriminations when she approaches the well for water. But pathetically she becomes the first recipient of Pandit Kail Nath’s generosity as she seems to satisfy his waves of amorousness. He tries to malign her to come and clean the courtyard of his house at the temple. On her arrival, he holds her by her breasts when she bends in the lavatory of his house. Out of anger, she screams, he comes out shouting that, “he had been defiled” (70). It tries the patience of Bakha who is full of disgust, anger and indignation for the priest. Further, in a public fight, a little boy is injured, and trying to lift him up, Bakha is
accused of 'polluting' the boy. A dejected and disappointed Bakha is observed by
Colonel Hutchinson of the Salvation Army who expounds Jesus Christ to Bakha and
tries to convert him. Bakha is disillusioned when the colonel’s wife chides her
husband for “messing about with all those dirty bhangis and camars” (111). Bakah’s
lesson of the social snobbery (which has distorted Christianity too) is over. In
addition, in him we find proof of the truth, “does, subaltern speak?” Dejection leads
him to a strong optimism.

To him comes the local Salvation Army Colonel with his Gospel of Christ. For
Bakha, Colonel Hutchinson’s arrival is more than he has bargained for. Then he
stumbles on Gandhi who was considered a panacea for all national evil, at the time.
The emphasis in Hutchinson’s religion is on sin, love and equality of birth whereas it
is on cleanliness, morality and dignity of work in Gandhi’s approach to the problem
of emancipation of the untouchables. Of these, Bakha likes only the idea of equality
and cleanliness but he feels flattered by Gandhi’s sympathy. It is only the third
solution offered by the poet, Iqbal Nath Sarshar that engages Bakha’s attention—the
flush system. It is a tremendous common sense appeal and is practical as Moore
Williams feels “solution through technology”. In the same manner we see Shortie in
Seasons of the Palm running away from his Master, go to his home for solace.
Moreover, even there he could not get that kind of comfort and he goes to his
grandmother’s house. To him it is a day of full joy and comfort that he longs for and
when he returns again to his masters he thought of those feelings as

‘How wonderful it had been, the night before, when he cuddled up to
his grandmother and slept in the vast folds of her sari! It made him
forget all those other nights, wiped away their memory’ (283).
On the personal side, Roy through her mother felt the weight of the patriarchal views. The early setback in her mother’s life and their suffering left a deep impression on her. Roy inspired by her mother on one hand and the social and political changes, which were brought about by industrialization, urbanization, and globalization on the other, moulded her thinking a lot. Thus she creates Velutha.

This is also true in the case of Mulk Raj Anand. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes in his book *Indian Writing in English* that Anand will be remembered most of all for portraying ‘the lowly, the lost, the underdog’ (333). Not that he was the first to voice in his novels the voice of the poor and the downtrodden. Iyengar regards Anand as a novelist with

‘... stamina and stern consistency of purpose ... He wrote of the people, for the people, and as a man of the people’ (333).

Anand aimed successfully at giving to Indian English novel the true surrealistic novel. He introduced men, women, and children with poverty and sufferance as the badge of the class to which they belonged. P.P. Metha in his essay *Indo-Anglian Fiction: An Assessment*, rightly observes that Anand as a novelist

...is of the earth, earthly. No act, no circumstance, howsoever ugly is debarred from Anand’s novels as long as it furthers his purpose of exposing the social shame and hoax [...]. His purpose is [...] to show his readers the true dignity that is hidden behind the dirt and poverty and disease (149).

In *The Generations*, Neela Padamanaban reflects the pattern of rites, customs, rituals, and habits of the society in which the protagonists live. The hero of the novel Diravi personifies the spirit of freedom. He puts up a valiant struggle to put
an end to these age-old practices. However, to present only a realistic picture of
society is not the real business of art and literature. However rich and profound the
author’s knowledge about society may be, it has no permanent significance in the
realm of literature unless it is woven into the fabric of art. Neela Padmanaban, who
has lived up to the ideals of great art in his novel, has shown the naked truth of
society. Neela Padmanaban through his protagonist tries to present a new generation
with modern outlook incorporating a rational attitude to the social problems. So also
Bakha in Untouchable – when he is slapped, he faces a crisis of identity. Bakha
attains the level of consciousness, as in the temple scene, through rebellion. Yet, he
does not rebel aimless but for the freedom, dignity and love. Bakha strikes a positive
note, for the rebel in him succeeds to a small yet significant extent. One should keep
in mind that Anand’s caste Hindus are not all bullies and tyrants; nor are all his
untouchables admirable; nor yet is the life of his untouchable hero a saga of
unrelieved misery. In full contrast with the hypocritical priest, Pandit Kali Nath,
stands Havildar Charat Singh, who is so far above caste prejudices as to ask Bakha
to go and fetch pieces of coal from the kitchen for the hubble-bubble, and who
actually pours tea out of his own tumbler into the pan in Bakha’s hand. Again, in
contrast with the termagant who heaps abuse on him for having defiled the wooden
platform outside her house, the other woman hands a chapatti to Bakha, “adding
kindly ‘My child’, you shouldn’t sit on people’s door-steps like this” (81) shows the
positive note of Anand’s humanistic values and it also brings out his care and concern.

The novelists selected for the study are from different social backgrounds and
their novels reflect the changing trends in society and the life of their respective
periods. A very good example is exemplified by Anand through one of his characters
who reveal in an angry manner, ‘... you... have lifted your heads to the sky nowadays’ (81) and the lady exclaimed ‘Aren’t they superior a lot these days!’ ... ‘They are getting more and more uppish’ (83), shows naturally the changing trends of society and the better future of the suppressed classes.

India attained freedom, the narrow racial feelings based on caste, and creeds have subsided over the years. We have come a long way. However, the narrow walls of casteism, racial discriminations and other class and gender related prejudices still divide us and create frictions and cracks in the glorious homogeneity of our social make-up.

The theme of suffering and exploitation are the major areas in which the novelists excel. It is this aspect of the writers’ mind and writing which calls for similarities in the novels. All of them are deeply interested in the lot of the marginalized, underprivileged; poverty, social discrimination, injustice, exploitation, and the cruelty of man-to-man being the principal concerns. All novels reveal the same problem-solving pattern. Every novelist pursues his own way and offers different solutions to the problems through their protagonists. Their protagonists are the personifications of all the qualities known to man and while at times they may be over simplified versions of one particular quality or exaggeration of one monstrous trait at other times, they are characters of great depth and complexity containing in them diverse and opposite qualities that makes for a paradoxical patterns. Again, they are characters who represent a whole society caught in the midst of certain socio-economical forces working at a given point of time. With all their individuality, they represent the national character and therefore they become typical of a race, a nation or a community and more than anything else, they are memorable to the point of immortality.
The other theme of suppression is the treatment of women who belong to the selected novels and authors, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Neela Padmanaban and Yuma Vasuki picture women living in the shadow of men but they tend to revolt if their legitimate position is weakened. They also exhibit their innate human qualities and at the same time, they try to vehemently assert their individuality and claim their rightful place in society. A full-length discussion of the treatment of women in the novels selected is taken up in the next chapter.