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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I.1 Preliminaries:

Literature is always concerned with man’s social world, his adaptation to it and his desire to change it. Literature is a representation of reality. The socio-economic-political scenario is quite alive in the literary work. Literature is a social institution, it has a social function and it is inseparably connected to religion, culture, history and philosophy of the people. Literature is a product of the general climate of thoughts and feelings. The social issues in India during the pre-independence and post-independence period are topics for discussion.

Novels are representation of human life. Novel can be studied as a faithful attempt to recreate the social world of man and his concerns with his family and other social institutes. It delineates his role within the family and other institutes, the conflict and tensions between groups and social classes. Indian novel in English has created a special norm of a social reality. Indian writers have their typical regional and religious identity. The caste and class consciousness is deep-rooted in the minds of people. The birth of a man in a particular caste and class has specific impact upon the personality, views and attitudes. Diversity is the major characteristic of Indian society. The writers are representatives of the society. The social reality is presented in their creative art with all layers. George Lukacs’ claim is that literature, particularly the novel, is able to penetrate the surface of society, highlighting hidden
connections and identifying the underlying trends which may lead to its revolutionary transformation. Louis Althusser asserts that literature can make us aware of ideological nature of our conventional conception of reality. Lucien Goldmann argues that literature represents the world-view of a particular group.

Literature is a powerful weapon in the education of masses. The social changes are possible through literary works. It is impossible to change the orthodox, traditional concepts of religion, casteism and class-division. It is impossible to change the social inequality and establish equality by revolution. It is possible only through literature – to make sufferers aware in the system and to make those who are responsible for inequality conscious. Such awareness is created by the writings of downtrodden, low caste and class Dalit writers in Marathi, Hindi, Telugu and Malayalam. The social-economic inequality and injustice is presented by the autobiographical and fictional writings. The writer belongs to society and his social experience is his identity. His milieu, social awareness, struggle is reflected and narrated in the writing. One can understand and interpret social interaction with the help of literary creation. The changing nature of society and contemporary social life are effectively represented in the literature.

Religion plays a very important role in Indian life. The major characteristic of Indian society is caste-system. Caste is more a sociological reality than a religious phenomenon. The division of castes into sub-castes is another special feature of the Indian society. Caste-system is the identity of the Hindu society, persisting for ages, despite many attempts by many reformers to break its shackles; caste concepts have
continued to permeate Indian society. Naturally the caste and class influence and impress subjectively all creative novelists.

Mulk Raj Anand is the first Indian English novelist to write about caste and class-system. His novels deal with social issues like castes, child-abuse and poverty. He wrote about the untouchables, the peasants, the oppressed and suppressed sections of society, human sufferings and the dignity of the downtrodden women. He is closely associated with various ideologies from Marxism to Gandhism. In novel after novel Anand has given a fictional expression to his philosophy. Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya also presented the poverty and problems of poor peasants effectively. Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai have reflected upon the present society. Their characters represent the caste-class consciousness more effectively.

I.2 Historical Survey:

It is necessary to discuss the history of Indian culture here because the concept of caste is developed from the Aryan period. Hinduism is the dominant religion in India and it can be traced back to Aryan origin. The Sanskrit language, the idea of caste society, religious sacrifice (*yadnya*), the philosophy of the *Upanishads* and agriculture are the important contributions of Aryans to India. The cultural history of India is related to Aryan philosophy and the impact is felt even today. The *Chaturvarna* is related to Aryan period. The caste system has survived in India for two thousand years despite frequent efforts to break.
Ancient Indian culture is mainly explained with the help of Vedic literature and stories in Puranas. Manusmruti is the major Hindu scripture. The name Manu is referred to manava meaning ‘mankind’. It was once believed that the king of India was Manu Svayambhu (the self-born Manu). Vedic literature is associated with the Aryans. The Aryans came from the north-west of India. They had constant wars with non-Aryan people in north India. In those times, the enemies were referred to as Panis and Dasas. The word dasa later came to mean ‘a slave’. The Dasas were held to be inferior because of their dark colour and flat features. They spoke different languages. The Aryans spoke Sanskrit and had fair skins.

The Aryans came as semi-nomadic pastoralists living chiefly on the produce of cattle. The cow was the measure of value and was a very precious commodity. The cow was regarded as a totem animal by these tribes. Its meat was taboo. The economic value of the cow enhanced the usual veneration given to it. The tribes changed from tending herds of cattle to agriculture. Agriculture led to trade. The more wealthy landowners, who could afford to employ others to cultivate their land, were the potential traders and they had both leisure and capital. The historian Romila Thapar says, “When the Aryans first came to India, they were divided into three social classes, the warriors or aristocracy, the priests, and the common people. There was no consciousness of caste. Professions were not hereditary, nor were there any rules limiting marriage within these classes, or taboos on whom one could eat with. The three divisions (classes) merely facilitated social and economic organization.”

(Thapar: 1975, 37)
I.1.1 Emergence and Nature of Caste System:

The beginning of the caste system in the ancient society and the reason behind the Dasa-Shudra as slaves is interpreted by the historians, archaeologist and sociologist. Romila Thapar argues, “The first step in the direction of caste was taken when the Aryans treated the Dasa as beyond the social pale, probably owing to a fear of the Dasas and the even greater fear that assimilation with them would lead to a loss of Aryan identity.”² (Thapar: 1975, 38)

The examples of master-servant relations or slavery are plenty in ancient Indian classical literature. During war, the entire conquered races were put into slavery. And the Aryans in India did it. The *sudras* were called *dasas* – servants. The Sanskrit word for caste is *varna* which means colour. The colour element of caste was emphasized during Aryan period. The Aryans were the dvija or twice-born castes, consisting of the *kshatriyas* (warriors and aristocracy), the *brahmans* (priests), and the *vaishyas* (cultivators); the fourth caste, the *shudras*, were the Dasas.

Originally society was not divided into four broad groups. But with the transition from nomadic pastoralism to a settled agrarian economy, specialization of labour became a major characteristic of Aryan society. The king emerged as the dominant power, and the warriors (*kshatriyas*) were therefore of the first rank in caste. The caste was secured by its heredity, taboo on commensality, and taboo on inter-caste marriage.

The caste-system was powerful not because of four-fold division but due to sub-castes, which was intimately connected with occupation. It is evident that the sub-
caste (jati, literally ‘birth’) came to have more relevance for the day-to-day working of Hindu society than the main caste (varna), since the functioning of society was dependent on sub-caste relationships and adjustments; the varna remained as a framework.

The term ‘caste’ is used to denote large scale kinship groups that are hierarchically organized within a rigid system of stratification. In the caste system a person’s social position is determined by birth. The ‘caste’ system has been defined by Indians as well as foreign sociologists. O’Malley gives the origin of the word ‘caste’ as “The word ‘caste’ is derived from the Portuguese word ‘casta’ meaning race or breed used by Portuguese settlers in India to describe the different sections of Hindu community.”³ (O’Malley:1932, 7)

Early Hindu literary classics described a society divided into four Varnas: Brahman (poet-priest), Kshatriya (warrior-chief), Vaishya (traders) and Shudras (menials-servants). The Varnas were characterized by differential access to spiritual and material privileges. It excluded the Untouchables, who were despised because they were engaged in occupations that were considered unclean and polluting.

The basis of caste ranking is the concept of purity and pollution with Brahmins because they were engaged in priestly duties considered ritually pure. Those who were engaged in manual labor and with ritually polluting objects were regarded as impure. Usually those who had high ritual status also had high economic and political power. Beliefs about pollution generally regulated all relations between castes. Mr. Nesfield comments, “A class of the community which disowns any
connections with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat nor drink with any but persons of their own community." (Moon: 1989, 6)

Members of one caste were not allowed to marry outside their caste. There were strict rules about the kind of food and drink one could accept. There were restrictions on approaching and visiting members of another caste. Violation of these rules entailed purifactory rites and sometimes expulsion from the caste.

I.1.2 Concept of Caste:

H. Risley tries to define caste as an isolated unit. He writes, “A caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming common decent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional callings and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community.” (Moon: 1989, 7)

Dr. Ketkar stresses the definite relations as a whole. He defines caste as, “Caste is a social group having two characteristics. (I) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born, (ii) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group.” (Moon: 1989, 7)

Usually those who had high ritual status also had economic and political power. G. S Ghurye in his definition gives traditional features of the caste-system. These are: 1) Endogamy, 2) Hierarchy, 3) Restrictions on the relations between castes, 4) Restrictions on choice of occupation, 5) Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of certain groups and 6) Untouchability. (Paranjpe: 1970, 6)
According to the well-known Maharasrtian anthropologist Iravati Karve, “Caste is an extended kinship group in which every member is either an actual or potential kin of another, these kinship groups are called Jatis.”8 (Paranjpe: 1970, 5)

These groups are locally jatis or subcastes. Jatis are to be distinguished from the Varnas. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar calls the Varnas as classes. He says, “Hindu society was composed of classes and they are the (1) Brahmins or the priestly class, (2) the Kshtriya or the military class, (3) the Vaishya or the merchant class and (4) the Shudra or the artisan and the menial class. He defined “a caste is an enclosed class.”9 (Paranjpe: 1970, 7)

The sub-division of a society has lost the open door character of the class system and has become self enclosed. Max Weber’s definition of caste as ‘doubtlessly a closed status group’10 (Moon: 1989, 9) is noticeable.

The various definitions of ‘caste’ reveal that caste is nothing but hierarchically arranged endogamous social groups. The caste divides the society into groups. The grouping is principally based on kinship relations. Another characteristic feature of caste is its traditional association with an occupation. Each caste has its own occupation. For example, Brahmins thought that it was correct for them to be priests. The cobbler regarded it his duty to cure hides and prepare shoes.

Every society has a system of grading social prestige. Status is attached to possession of wealth, education and political power in India. There is close relationship between the caste and its economic position because generally the higher classes tend to be landowners. Tenants are mostly from middle castes and agricultural laborers come
mostly from the untouchable castes. It is sometimes said that, ‘a Hindu is born, not made.’ The Hindus believe in Rebirth and Karma. These doctrines are coupled with the concepts of pollution and ritual relations between castes. The Brahmins have the highest position in the caste hierarchy. Untouchables have the lowest position. In the caste hierarchy positions are based on the ideas of purity and pollution. The most extreme form of pollution is untouchability.

The untouchable castes were supposed to have no place in the fourfold *Varna* system. The hierarchical Hindu society was justified with reference to traditional religious belief in *Karma*. A person’s position in this life was determined by his or her actions in the previous lives. Persons who were born in a Brahmin family must have performed good deeds in their earlier lives. Being born a Shudra or an untouchable was punishment for the sinful acts committed in previous lives.

The *Varna* system was essentially exploitative and oppressive, particularly for the untouchables who were confined to menial, despised jobs, working as sweepers, watchmen, gutter and latrine cleaners, scavengers, farm labourers and curers of hides. They were denied entry into Hindu temples. They were not allowed to read religious Sanskrit books. They could not use village wells and tanks, were forced to live in settlements outside the village, and were forbidden to enter the residential areas of the upper castes.

**I.1.3 Influence of the British Rule on Caste System:**

British rule affected the Indian social order. The ideas of western culture, the opening of English educational institutions, the legal system, and the new economic
order resulted in greater mobility and opened doors for even the low castes. After Independence, the Indian leaders hoped that legislative and legal measures would reorder an entrenched social structure. A new Constitution abolished untouchability and prohibited discrimination in public places.

Mahatma Gandhi called untouchables as Harijans. Those who object to being called Harijans, prefer to call themselves Dalits. The word ‘dalit’ was first used in Marathi by neo-Buddhist activists, the followers of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in the early seventies. It implies “those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, karma and justified caste hierarchy.” [Zelliot: 1978, 77]

In the legal parlance, the ex-untouchables are called scheduled castes (SCs). But, all ex-untouchables, especially those converted to Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, are not included in this category. In the past, these castes were called ‘ati-sudras’ or ‘avarna’ placed outside the Chaturvarna system. They were also called ‘achhut’, i.e., untouchable. Their touch, shadows and voices were believed to pollute caste Hindus. Legally they are no longer untouchables, though in practice many of them still bear that stigma and suffer discrimination. The British rulers were compelled to usher in new capitalist means of production. The new forces of production established the new class relations of production. The social revolution in the nineteenth century made all Indians equal before law, and threw the doors of education open to all, irrespective of caste, class, race, religion and gender.
I.1.4 Transition towards Modernity:

The change from a traditional to a modern economy - increase in educational facilities, expansion of white-collar jobs, especially in the state sector, expansion of the transportation and communication network, increase in agricultural production etc. have had a significant impact on the institution of caste. The close association between caste and traditional occupation broke down because of the expansion of modern education and urban-industrial sector.

Today India is divided into two classes - urban and rural. In the cosmopolitan cities the middle class has formed a new group. It has reduced the structural and cultural differences between castes. The social division based on income, education and occupation became more important than caste for social and economic purposes. The untouchable castes were supposed to have no place in the four-fold Varna system. Regarding India’s transition from a caste system to that of the capitalistic societies, R. Jayraman, a socialist has argued that, “in the cities the caste system is being replaced by a system of social classes.”12 (Jayraman: 1981, 24)

Social reformers in the beginning of 19th century had tried to eradicate the caste and stigma of untouchability. The inter-caste marriage is an important step to remove the caste. But today’s Indian society is a revival of the past. The Khap panchayat in Haryana disapproves inter-caste marriages. ‘Caste’ is a major social and political issue. In the democratic political context, the effective unit is a caste federation, a product of the fusion of a set of jatis.
I.1.5 Ill-effects of Caste System:

The evil effects of the caste system have been termed as casteism. In a caste-ridden society caste loyalty frequently drives a man to subordinate his sense of justice, fair play and humanity to the interest of the caste. To remove the evils of casteism, the Central and the State Governments have taken certain measures after Independence. The main target is to remove untouchability and to improve the economic conditions of lower castes. In cities many hotels, housing societies, charities, and marriage halls are run on caste lines. The matrimonial advertisements have demands for same caste selections. Each caste has its special marriage-bureau.

I.3 Class System:

The word ‘class’ refers to economic divisions in society. The word ‘class’ is derived from the Latin classis (plural classes). The word ‘class’ entered into the English language in the seventeenth century. There was the development of capitalism in the mid-seventeenth century. The feudal economy was based on agriculture. It was characterized by a series of obligations between landlord and tenant. The capitalist economy was based on manufacture and characterized by a momentary relation between employers and employees. The word ‘class’ is linked to fundamental changes in the economy and to its effect on social relations. The word in the new idiom of class is an expression of social conflict. The Indian Marxist philosopher Manvendra Nath Roy thought that the lord-servant relations in India started from ancient period. The so-called Aryan conquerors started the slavery in India. Slave labour having no or little value is squandered by the slave-owner. He writes, “Class
rises on the foundation of slave-labour, the great bulk of it is employed in the production of luxuries or domestic services.” (Roy 1970, 9) The effect of the slavery was that the slaves remained slaves and landless labourers for centuries.

The rise of Buddhism was a tremendous revolt against the ancient Brahmanic social order. The old social order collapsed during Buddhist period. Buddha himself was against parasitic luxury. After nearly a thousand years, Brahmanic reaction appeared to overwhelm the Buddhist revolution. The old was not revived but the new Hindu kings incipient patriarchal feudal monarchs. This feudal social order was founded upon a new mode of production. The new social order based upon slave-labour is performed in serfdom which replaced the older system of slavery. Private property in land created the feudal class. Under feudalism, the cultivator is not the owner of the land. The peasant cultivates the land but he is obliged to deliver to the owner of the land. The feudal system governs agricultural production and exploits the landless or peasant. The capitalist mode of production is progressed in the feudalism. Between the feudal landlord and the peasant held in serfdom, there arises the new class of traders.

The rise of the trading class changed the face of feudalism system. The product of agriculture is difficult to sell in the market by the producer. A growing part of it becomes commodity. Markets developed, the trade expanded and a new class appeared. The profit in trading had changed the old class of feudal into traders. The trader grows rich, the new class of traders started to invest wealth in industries.
The new change has abolished feudalism and frees the peasant from land. ‘Slave-labour’ system changed into ‘wage-labour’ that is the basis of capitalist production. The peasant is not compelled to work on the landlord’s land. He is free to become a wage-slave. He can sell his labour power in the open market. Even then the feudal system has not abolished in India. The country is agricultural from ancient period and not totally developed into industrial. The peasant is free to go away from land, there is a legal restriction on serfdom but they cannot avail the law because they there is little demand for their labour elsewhere. Legally, there is no feudalism, more than half peasantry live and labour in the state of serfdom.

I.3.1 Concept of Class:

The term class generally refers to a set of phenomena with common attributes. It connotes a set of shared economic, political and cultural attributes. Sociology and economics normally use this term to refer to certain kind of shared characteristics which are essentially economic. Marxists, Weberians and many sociologists believed that the foundations of class lie in the economic realm. The social evolution is studied from ancient to modern as feudalism – capitalism – socialism. The agency of revolutionary transformation from feudalism to capitalism is the bourgeoisie. In the case of transformation from capitalism to socialism it is the class that the industrial bourgeoisie creates through factory production the industrial proletariat. Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920) are widely recognized as the most influential commentators on class.

Karl Marx’s interpretation of ‘Class’ is useful here because he scientifically analyzed the economic basis of classes and the antagonistic relations between them. He
defines classes in terms of their relation to the means of production. He divides the society into two broad categories: The Capitalist and the Proletariat. Capitalists are the owners of the means of production. The proletariat work for wage or salary. They possess only labour power. The capitalist class would become wealthier and more powerful as industrialization expands. While the working class could grow in size and suffer increasing poverty. Thus Marx’s concept of social classes is basically in terms of the system of production. Marx further says that the workers became class conscious, aware of their lot of life. They organize in the trade unions. Marx writes: “Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the people of the country into workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests.”\(^{14}\) (Bottomore: 1966, 18)

**I.3.2 Class Conflict:**

The class conflict begins by the unity of workers and a revolution takes place when they reject the capitalist exploitative system. The inequality of income is one important element in the class hierarchy. The social classes are economic groups. They are not supported by any specific legal or religious rules. Generally three social classes are found. These are - the ‘upper’ class of the owners of capital, a ‘middle’ or bourgeois class of the professional people and ‘lower’ class of workers. Karl Marx wrote that “the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles.” Marx claims that critics the class which owns the means of production can determine the character of a society.

The individual is born into a particular social class, just as he is born into a particular caste. The position upon a person is forced by birth in the caste system. In the class
system an individual in his own lifetime may rise or fall in the class hierarchy. He may acquire upper or lower position with a particular economic or occupational role. There is a possibility for upward mobility for an individual in the class system which is not so in the caste system.

Max Weber thinks class is simply a scale of relative income. The class structure in industrial capitalist societies is divided into four as 1) Proletarian 2) Bourgeois 3) Differentiated 4) Classless. Max Weber writes about the three dimensions of social stratification: economic power, political power and prestige. Wealth, political influence and prestige usually determine the “status” of individual in the society. Ralph Miliband’s observation is, “The businessmen belong in economic and social terms to the upper and middle classes. Working class belongs to the lower.”

Wealthy class is predominant in government and administration because they use their positions to protect their class interests. The economic and political determinants of status are objective. Third determinant, prestige is subjective. It depends on the grade of people i.e. superiority and inferiority. Prestige may relate to person’s occupation, personal qualities or reputation. The fact is that the weak and lower class have to face and suffer discrimination. Society is characterized by a plurality of oppressions. Karl Marx explained that the class which owns the means of production can determine the character of a society.

W. Lloyd Warner, an American sociologist defines ‘Class’ as: “By class is meant two or more orders of people who are believed to be and are accordingly ranked by
the members of the community, in socially superior and inferior positions.”

Jayraman: 1981, 18-19)

Giddens’ basic scheme of ‘upper’, ‘middle’ and ‘lower’ or ‘working’ classes are determined in the following manner: ‘Upper’: ownership of property in the means of production, ‘Middle’: Possession of educational or technical qualifications, ‘Lower’: possession of manual labour power.

Karl Marx in his treaties proved that social problems like unemployment, poverty, crime, corruption and warfare are not usually the fault of individuals or of poorly functioning organizations. He argued that class is created because of unequal distribution of wealth and power. According to Marx, the social problems of modern societies arise from capitalism. An inevitable outcome of capitalism is class conflict, especially between those who won the means of production and those who sell their labour for wages. In such system workers are exploited by their owners.

For Marx, a class truly exists only when people become aware of their conflicting relation to other classes. Without this awareness, they only constitute what Marx called ‘a class in itself’. When they become aware of the conflict they become a true class, ‘a class for itself.’

I.3.3 Influence of the Industrial Revolution:

The Industrial Revolution in Europe in 1850 is associated with innovations like the steam engine, invention of the printing press, power looms and machinery. The change from the old system of agriculture to new system of industries brought capitalism. The Industrial Revolution depended on the development of markets – the
supply of and demand for goods. The transition from an agrarian to an industrial society affected every aspect of social life. It changed the structure of society. The growth of towns, cities and suburbs was one major change during the industrialization. The transition has created the new classes like industrial workers and scientific professionals as engineers, technicians and new social movements like the women’s movement and the movement for racial equality. The most important change is that the world becomes a “global capitalistic society.”

The rich get richer while the poor get poorer in capitalist structure of society. The capitalistic system is constantly increases inequality in the society. The history of society shows that all human societies produce some form of inequality. Social stratification ranks people according to their income, wealth, power, prestige, age, sex, ethnicity, race, religion etc. These ranking systems correspond to actual social structures, such as castes and classes. They account for a great deal of experience in life. In every society, people are grouped into different categories according to their living. Societies that maintain rigid boundaries between social strata are said to have closed stratification system; societies in which the boundaries are easily crossed are said to have open stratification system.

The best example of closed societies is found in caste societies. Castes are social strata into which people are born and in which they remain for life. Membership in a caste is an ascribed status i.e. a status acquired at birth rather than an achieved status i.e. based on the efforts of an individual. Members of a particular caste cannot leave that caste. Classes and castes are social strata. Classes are based primarily on economic criteria such as occupation, income and wealth. England is famous for its
social classes. Classes are generally open to entry by new comers. There is ranking from high to low in the classes. The ‘lifestyle’ of the people indicates their class. Indian society is the best example of closed society. In the Indian caste hierarchy, a person acquires social status by birth. But in the class system a person acquires status by his own efforts - through education or economic or political power. He is born into a particular status group, but may move into a higher group through success in business or games or through marriage. In the same way, a person may lose status by becoming poor. The concept of status is used here to refer to the relative standing of men and women in the various areas of family relations, economy, politics and religion. William Kornblum observes, “India is often considered ‘a capitalist success story’ because it has a rapidly growing and well-educated urban middle class of over 250 million people and its major entrepreneurs are investing heavily in the older industrialized nations. But as some grow richer, the gap between the haves and the have-nots grows wider, creating the age-old problem of relative deprivation.” (Kornblum: 2008, 238)

It is true that poverty and population in India have been creating many socio-economic-political problems. The poor remain poor while the rich and powerful become richer and more powerful. It is essential to see that between the rich and the poor there are other strata – the middle castes and class people who are self-centered and busy in their mediocre position. They have attraction for the rich class and their pleasures. They console themselves that they are fortunate that they are not below poverty level people. The religious minded people accept their ‘place’ as the wish and gift of God. Their poverty is justified by the accident of their birth. Through
socialization people learn the cultural norms to accept the social position. The rich learn how to act like rich people, the poor learn how to survive and in doing so they accept their poverty.

It is clear that caste in India has existed for a very long period of time and that it has survived through major socio-historical changes. Gail Omvedt argues that, “Caste has co-existed with different modes of production, right from the tributary modes to the present capitalist ones. She thinks that caste certainly requires for its existence surplus production and economic inequality.” 18 (Omvedt: 1982, 12)

The economic condition of Dalits is wretched because of low caste. Majority of the land-workers are landless. They belong to Adivasi tribes and more than 70% Dalits depend for their wages upon labour and menial-work. They are victims of social and economic exploitation. Caste conflict is not related to the economic relations and capitalism but related to caste differences. Caste conflict is not the question of the lower caste or untouchables. It is a question of all castes. Caste conflict is basically related to other questions of society. If we solve the caste problem, we can solve class problems.

I.3.4 Current Situation:

If we see the history of Indian society we can see the basic reasons behind caste-discrimination. The Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya varnas people got the right of education, land, property, weapon and cattle. Caste-wise division of work was granted. Physical labour and intellectual work was decided by the birth caste. The upper castes avoided labour work but they received all the authority upon the
production created by the lower caste menial work. Caste system has created two classes by the labour. Those who actually work, do the physical hard work in the land, create things to satisfy the needs of society, serve and entertain upper castes do not benefit from it directly.

The class division is not the special feature of the Indian society. The important aspect of class division based on labour work is that the working class was denied the right to possess the property in the form of land and money, cattle and weapons. The caste system is totally based on the birth of the individual. Caste system is based on various concepts of purity and impurity, superior and inferior position. Caste is associated with religion. Four Varnas are described in the religion. The scholars regard that there is no scientific base to the caste system; it is completely a psychological concept.

Indian Marxist thinker Comrade Sharad Patil argued that “the institution of class did not exist in India prior to the British rule. Hence, caste is a pre-class institution of exploitation and administration in India. With the colonial regime, the two modes of production, that of caste and class, came to co-exist with each other.”19 (Mathew and Muricken: 1987, 223) Marxism explains the social development in five stages: primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism-communism. Class is the institution of exploitation and administration. Varna society was ousted by jati society during the lifetime of the Buddha. Though jati was an institution of exploitation and administration of a non-tribal society, it remained one of the basic features of a pre-class institution of exploitation and administration.
India is known as ‘poor’ country. Indian capitalism since Independence grew on stretches of poverty i.e. the foundation for the prevailing structures of deprivation and inequalities. The poor classes are not only landless peasants and unorganized workers but also the scheduled castes, backward classes and scheduled tribes. Caste is a haunting idea and all Indians are conscious of the caste. The Constitutional support favours lower-castes. Minority institutes can earn money and spread religious ideas among people. They get many facilities from the government. The Dalits have freedom to do any work. They are working as agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants and marginal farmers. Yet most of them are engaged in jobs like sweeping, scavenging and tanning. Most of them live below the poverty line and they are the victims of social and economic exploitation and continue to be subjected to discrimination, harassment and humiliation.

The underprivileged castes and classes are given an inferior status due to their ‘birth’ in low caste though the government has made the laws to abolish an untouchability, to protect from social injustice and exploitation. There are many legal rights and laws related to land, property, marriage, untouchability, equal rights of women but they remain implemented in the breach. We have a democratic political structure but we are not democratic in our attitude. We always think about others as superiors or inferiors but never as our equals. We have political freedom but we are bound with our prejudices. Our minds are not free. Different groups within a society get alienated and marginalized and this makes it difficult for all to feel that they have an equal stake in the process of development.
Caste is a nation without walls. Some castes have their own panchayat and law system. The present Indian society is a peculiar combination of monopoly capitalist domination with caste, communal and tribal institutions. Political parties speak against casteism but their focus is on Hindu-Muslim divide. They never try to end caste system. All political parties ‘cash’ the votes on the basis of caste. The freedom movement was against the British rule but caste struggle is the inner movement. We have to struggle for human rights with our own people. It may lead to a civil war for the establishment of humanity. E. M. S. Namboodiripad argues, “The conflicting classes and their struggle, which is the essence of the politics of Marxism, is alien to Indian society. Whatever social conflicts developed in India were of casteist or religious-communal character.”20 (Namboodiripad: 2010, 43) He argued that the class struggle of the oppressed classes against the oppressors cannot develop in our country unless the working class takes up the banner of anti-caste and anti-communal struggle.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s contribution to Indian political economy is established in his undelivered speech published as a booklet entitled *Annihilation of Caste* in 1936. The Communist parties in India argue that the caste system was never the material base of the Indian social structure but was its ideological remnants. They will be gradually effaced from the minds of Indian people after the socialist revolution. Babasaheb Ambedkar argued that, “Caste system still constitutes the material base, i.e. the relations of production, and that the precondition of socialist revolution in India is a democratic revolution which must abolish the caste system.”21 (Moon: 1989, 47)
The supposed path of development in India is capitalist. It is oriented to growth, market and profits. The market and economic growth help those who have large resources at their command and who have social and political clout. Agricultural modernization has brought prosperity to some and misery to others. Drought and other scarcities have exasperated the laboring classes. Rural poverty has increased and it has its socio-cultural aftermaths. The untouchable groups and other lower castes majority in poor class. The urban and poor have the major question of survival in present. There is no unity and solidarity among the working classes. The society is divided on the basis of caste, religion, region and language.

I.4 Anti-Caste Movement:

The history of anti-caste movement shows that the bourgeois nationalism nor republicanism nor Marxism provided any satisfactory solution to the problem of caste. Hence Ambedkar turned to religion. He rejected Christianity and Islam because they did not face the task of fighting the caste system. The only Indian religion which arose and struggle of against the caste system was Buddhism. Ambedkar noted that the Buddha created his sangha as a model of casteless society. The so-called Hindu history, philosophy, literature, arts and culture were considered to be a blasphemy. Buddhist philosophy and culture can be a vehicle of anti-caste movement.

The concepts ‘class and caste’ are age-old. Though the Constitution declared India to be a country ‘a sovereign, secular, democratic republic’, the situation is different. The ‘secular’ country is turning into ‘fundamental’ nation. The ‘reservation policy’
has not changed the relations between the poor and lower class. Class and caste are mixed in a curious way in Indian society. Generally upper castes live in good economic condition and lower castes in the poverty. The Government made many laws and welfare policies for uplift and progress of the lower castes. But such attempts are not enough to change and solve the social problems in the country.

The religious faith is mixed with everyday activities. The daily life is observed by the norms of religion. The class and caste barriers are present in educated-illiterate, rich-poor, rural-urban, agrarian-industrial fields. People with a deep faith blindly follow the rules and regulations of caste.

In Indian context ‘Class’ is a political economy category referring to a social group. As a social group it is located in a mode of production. The ruling class or classes are the owners of the means of production. Means of production range from land and factories to technology and knowledge and other forms of capital. The ruled are those who are engaged in labour and are subject to exploitation by the owners. Thus, class is not an income group or a simple economic category. It is a political economy category that is placed in production relations as well as power relations.

India is known as an outstanding example of society having “unity in diversity”. It is the largest democratic country in the world. However, contemporary society shows caste and class difference. The terrorism in Kashmir, Naxalite movements in Andhra Pradesh and Maharastra, insurgency in North-East region, communal riots in Gujarat cannot easily be washed out from the national history. We are living in a very chaotic world. We have had riots based on the rights of other backward castes
to protection and reservations. We have farmers’ lobbies, campus politics, broken workers’ movements, worsening law and order situation in the cities, violence, criminality, depression, re-session and inflammation. Natural calamities like floods and droughts are destroying the farm-economy. It is a fact that different groups within a society get alienated and marginalized to varying degrees. This makes it difficult for all individuals to feel that they have an equal state in the process of development.

**1.5 Caste / Class and Author’s Background:**

Class and caste identities play very important roles in Indian society. The author also is related to a particular caste and class. His own personal views, ideas, way of life and philosophy are directly or indirectly expressed in the writing. The novels for the present study are well known, popular, best-seller, prize winning novels. The theme of literature is society. Therefore these works are representative. They are social documents which focus upon the various socio-economic-political issues. Works of art and literature are products of and reflections on the class society in which their author lives. Dalit literature proved for the first time that literature also can belong to caste. It is Marxist ideology to divide literature as pre-colonial caste-society, colonial class-society and the modern caste-class society. The literary study in this thesis is from Mulk Raj Anand to Aravind Adiga, from 1935 to 2008 (publication years of the novels).

The novels effectively present the reality. The social realism is the major characteristic of the novel. Class and caste conflict is common theme in many Indian
English novels. The caste-system turned generic. Casteism is common in all religions. The unity and diversity of people, the social functions and gatherings, democratic elections, educational system – all these major activities are affected by the class and caste. Caste is not an individual identity, religion is not for personal life but it is rapidly developing as a main factor in all fields.

The selected novelists and their representative literary work are very important to study the ‘class and caste’ as a social background and theme. Caste is a social phenomenon and class is economic. The researcher intends to select nine novels for analysis of these two concepts class and caste handled by well-known Indian novelists in English.

1.6 A Brief Introduction to the Selected Novels:

Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable presents the horrible face of untouchability. The inhuman treatment by upper caste people to an untouchable is a social documentary of Indian society. Anand’s Coolie represents economic factors that determine social functions and positions of an individual. His works manifest religion, the caste-system, colonization and wealth.

Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya’s So Many Hungers represents poverty and hunger, the rumblings of a suppressed voice, wretched condition of women, flesh-marketing, poor-rich divide, exploitation of the poor, starvation of poor and need to remove poverty. He Who Rides a Tiger is above the eradication of caste-system. The caste of an individual is insignificant in the struggle for survival. There is necessity to revolt
against the evils of caste and class. The lower caste man can do the work of upper caste and vice versa.

Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* represents the impact of monsoon on India’s agrarian economy, honesty and simplicity as the greatest virtues of India’s poor peasant, the trials and tribulations of arranged marriage and dowry, rural and urban economy. Markandaya’s *A Handful of Rice* tries to convey that the essential need of man is a handful of rice. A majority of Indian people struggle for food. Ordinary man overcomes poverty by sheer will-power and human spirit.

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* represents a Syrian-Christian family in Kerala, orthodox family, barriers of class and caste, a small world of ordinary people, sufferings of people belonging to lower class and caste. Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* represents the class barriers, migrated Indians and their socio-economic problems, effects of globalization, economic inequality, terrorism etc. Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* deals with a number of vital themes like the migration of poor, the search of opportunities for economic security, changing values and morality, struggles of deprived classes and new class of ‘white tigers’ in the capitalist, corrupt democracy.

The deprived India is presented by Mulk Raj Anand in his *Untouchable*. His *Coolie* is a representation of exploitation of child. Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers* is a tragic saga of the starvation. His *He Who Rides a Tiger* is representation of dirty face of caste. Kamala Markandaya narrated that the farmers’ nectar is in a sieve and a handful of rice is the only need of man. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*
shows that ‘god of small things’ have no place in the caste-hierarchy and in the religion drenched society. The Inheritance of Loss presents the disturbed nation, frustrated minds and cultural dilemmas. Arvind Adiga’s representative character in The White Tiger is the output of new ethics, changed morality and victory of money.

1.7 Book Review:

The study reviewed books on caste and class which provided a sound theoretical base to the study of the novel. The researcher also went through a few sites on the web.

1) Class and Caste in literature


The focus of this book is the fiction of Harriet B Stowe and Mulk Raj Anand. The writer talks about slave oppression in America and caste oppression in India. It is a comparative study between America and India, a Human predicament in Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin is juxtaposed with human predicament in Anand’s Untouchable. The writer observes that Bakha had dreamed of attaining the white man’s way of life which was denied to him irrevocably because of his caste exclusion and his lack of education. The writer has considered the views of major critics while dealing with the novel. The views and opinions of critics are analyzed systematically. By comparing the novel with Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the writer has pointed out the sad predicament of the oppressed in society. The tragic condition of Bakha is to be understood in terms of sympathy for the untouchable in the individual. The book also
shows the different ways in which Anand has handled the issue of untouchable. Anand’s projection of the theme differed from that of other writers in his passionate concern for the low caste, his sure grasp of the subject and his emphasis on the need for locating our society deeply in the modern world. Anand was closely associated with the sweepers’ children hence he had a remarkable insight into the psychology of the characters belonging to the lower castes. He is aware of their sacred sentiments and secret longings. The author has rightly observed that Anand has been influenced by so many ideas, ideologies, individuals and events. Anand’s commitment is to Man and he is first the Anglo-Indian writer to find a protagonist amongst the ‘lowest dregs of humanity.’ It is Anand’s unshakable belief in humanity, in man’s tremendous potential and innate dignity coupled with his deep compassion for all who are exploited, humiliated and prevented from realizing their full human potential. Anand was attracted towards Gandhiji because of his great love for the poor and the suffering, and his tireless efforts to uplift them materially and spiritually. Anand had imbibed Gandhiji’s teachings and followed them without reservations.

The writer concludes that religious and racial prejudices are the basic components to suppress the lower classes in various forms across the globe. The predicament of the lower classes can be attributed to racism, colour distinction, caste discrimination, religious prejudice and economic misery. These degraded human beings have suffered for centuries. It is rightly pointed out that untouchability emerged out of the caste system. Though the occupational patterns of the untouchables have changed today, the stigma of untouchability has not been removed. In the end, the writer
emphasizes a need to arouse and awaken the dead sensibilities to bring about the much-desired change in human society, because reformation of the society is impossible without reformation of the inner self.

A review of this book enabled the researcher to understand how the caste system in ancient India functioned and how the society came to be divided into Varnas. The researcher could trace the origin of untouchability to the caste system. This understanding served as a useful base to analyze the issue of caste in the selected novels. A comprehensive view of major critics on Anand’s novel ‘Untouchable’ enabled the researcher to deal with the novel.

2) Dalit Literature


This book deals with a number of topics which are significant from the point of view of the present research. It assesses the Dalit narratives of 1887 and also touches upon the education system, the curriculum pedagogy and its evolution. It discusses Dalit and Indian literature and also literature on the Dalit movement. It deals with Dalit culture as well.

Dalit literature is now recognized as a separate stream. It grew as an inherent part of the Dalit movement in Karnataka. The inner essence of these literary works contained organized experience of the writers representing pain, hunger and humiliation. Dalit literature created a great deal of awakening, enthusiasm, anxiety and ability to perform.
Since caste-conflict is a major issue in this study, the origin and nature of Dalit literature and its commitment cannot be ignored. A review of this book acquainted the study with the true nature and spirit of Dalit literature and its commitment. Most of the authors selected by the researcher are committed to a similar social cause. Hence, a background of Dalit literature enabled the researcher to handle the novels of social commitment and do justice to them during the process of analysis.

3) **Caste, Conflict and Ideology**


**ISBN: 0 521 523087**

This is a more recent book that analyzes the situation in India. It considers religion and society under early British rule and discusses the crisis of cultural legitimacy – the missionaries, reformers and Hindu society in the mid 19th century. It talks about the growth of religious reforms in India. It also touches upon the creation of a lower caste identity in history and popular culture around 1869 to 1873. It leads to other developments like religious emancipation, political competition, social protest and the construction of a religious ethic. It talks of traditional privileges verses new skills and Mahatma Jotiba Phule’s analysis of the nature of Brahmin power. It throws some light on the non-Brahmin movement in 1880s and concludes with a view of the ideology and politics in 19th century India.

This review enabled the researcher to perceive and interpret the recent novels by Adiga, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai against a changing socio-economic, political and cultural background. As technology advanced and the political conditions changed,
social awareness was created and the caste victims were perceived from a new angle. The study of lower caste movements and ideologies helps to turn our attention to the much neglected area of Indian politics in the 19th century. The writer has tried to discover the development of non-Brahmin ideology out of real caste antagonism.

The study is based on the assumption that we can learn much more about the real origins of non-Brahmin politics and ideology, and the social context which shaped them, by examining the actual content of non-Brahmin ideas. There is a need to recognize that older groupings and identities formed the ideological background to the competing attempts of caste at all levels. This shift of emphasis towards the investigation of older social structures and group identities bring its own set of problems. We tend naturally to know about the small, high-caste communities of the literate, about urban societies and about those in the centers of political power. The further we move from these narrow circles, towards the much larger groupings of pre-literate peasants, artisans and small trading castes, the less we have.

4) Class and Caste Conflict in Industrial Society


ISBN: 080 470 5607, 978080 470 5608

The first section of this book deals with the Marxian doctrine in the light of historical changes and sociological insights. It gives in detail the social etymology of the concept of class, the consequences of industrialization, Marx’s theory of class, class organization, class struggle and Marx’s image of the capitalist class society. It talks
about the changes in the structure of Industrial societies and the class conflict. It explains the recent theories of class conflict in modern societies.

The second section consists of topics like social structure, conflict groups, social change, the variability of class conflict, classless society, classes in post-capitalist society, and society in the modern age.

Evaluative shifts of meaning have accompanied the concept of class throughout history. According to the writer, wealth and poverty, domination and subjection, property and propertylessness, high and low prestige were present before industrialization as well as after. A society based on class conflict leads to brutal opposition, and ultimately to a clash between individuals.

With the differentiation of capitalist modes, the composition of the entrepreneurial class also changes. The capitalist is a man who owns and manages an enterprise which he has founded himself. From having been perhaps a skilled craftsman or a shopkeeper at the beginning of his career, he has built up, ‘from scratch,’ a sizeable firm or factory and one that continues to grow in scope, size and production. The heir, by contrast, is born into the ownership of an enterprise, and apart from perhaps a few years experience in some of its departments, he has known nothing but what he has inherited.

1.8 Conclusion:

The first chapter serves as a background to the entire study. Initially, the reasearcher has pointed out the relationship between literature and society. Literature represents human life and socio-economic conditions in society. The chapter contains a brief
historical survey of the nature of society in ancient times and traces the origin of ‘caste’ to the ‘varna’ system that existed in ancient India. Initially, there were no divisions in society but gradually the varna system became rigid and society assumed a closed structure. It was supported by religion which always held an important position in Indian society. The untouchables were the lowest of the low castes and did not have any place in the varna system. The high caste Brahmins enjoyed all privileges including the right to education. Their high religious position also afforded them high economic and political status. They suppressed the lower classes and exploited them. Mulk Raj Anand was the first Indian English writer to turn his attention to the miseries and sufferings of the untouchables and write about it in his novels.

Circumstances changed with the advent of the British and rise of industrialization. Wide-spread education and anti-caste movements improved the conditions of the lower castes and helped to narrow caste boundaries. On the other hand, the theories of Karl Marx and changing economic systems affected the social structure and society assumed a new stratification where hierarchy was in terms of economic class, rather than caste. At the top-most level were the capitalists while the workers and menial laborers were at the lower level of the social ladder. Between the two extremes, there is also a middle-class. Thus, stratification is a general characteristic of any society.

The chapter includes important definitions and detailed explanation of the concepts of caste and class. The researcher has also given a brief introduction to the novels selected for study. Beginning with Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* and *Cooie* in
which caste is an important issue, the study proceeds to the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya which reflect the changing nature of society and the plight of humanity in the face of large scale natural calamities like the Bengal Famine in 1947. The study also includes three modern novels, The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy, The Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai and Arvind Adiga’s The White Tiger. While these novels touch upon minor issues like Gorkha uprising in the North East of India and the growth of economy among other things, one does not fail to notice that caste is so deeply embedded in the Indian psyche that it is a common thread that runs through all the novels and traces of it are evident in the modern novels as well, though comparatively, the intensity of oppression is not as severe as we find in the earlier novels.

Each of the selected novels reflects the social structure of the times when it was written and the researcher has analysed the effects of caste and class as social evils and pointed out their long term effects on the nature of Indian society, in the following chapters.
References:

2) Ibid. p. 38.
5) Ibid. p. 7.
6) Ibid. p. 7.
8) Ibid. p. 5
9) Ibid. p. 7.


