A Cultural Materialist Comparative Study of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to identify the caste-based social structure of India by implementing the theory of cultural materialism. It evaluates how caste becomes a tool for social dominance and oppression of individual identity by comparing Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Om Prakash Valmiki's autobiographical work *Joothan*. Both protagonists, Bakha (*Untouchable*) and Valmiki (*Joothan*), faced cultural dominance through ideologies of one class over another and how it completely blocks an individual's progress. It shows how people are subjected to both physical and psychological violence and how the Power of money and materialism shapes this society. While Indian culture is often projected as rich and diverse, the analysis reveals underlying materialism and inherent biases. The study demonstrates how inter-generational social practices, as depicted in *Untouchable* and *Joothan*, severely restrict social mobility for lower cast members.

Keywords: *Caste, Untouchability, Cultural Materialism, Untouchable, Joothan, India, Social Hierarchy, Materialist Ideology.*

Introduction

India is considered one of the fastest-growing world economies, and it has progressed a lot since it gained independence from the clutches of British imperialism. However, from a social perspective, society is still dominated by the old, pathetic ideologies of caste and untouchability. Although the government passed several acts to eradicate caste discrimination, their impact remains pervasive, affecting social interactions, behavior, and even personal

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choices like marriage. The paper further analyzes the complex interplay between cultural and material factors that shape society. Focusing on the autobiographical narrative of Om Prakash Valmiki *Joothan* (1997) and Mulk Raj Anand's debut novel *Untouchable* (1935), the study examines the realities of caste division in India and the marginalization of Dalit communities. Both*Untouchable* and *Joothan* are written from the protagonist's perspective and offer powerful insights into the psychological oppression and social consequences of untouchability and casteism. The paper identifies the common thread of culture that dehumanizes a person's identity and struggles for social inclusion with dignity through caste discrimination. The paper challenges the social norms and ideology of caste that hinder progress and social inclusion.

Cultural Materialism: A Literary Theory

Cultural materialism is a literary theory that offers to interpret a literary text through cultural aspects and shows how culture is inseparable from literature; it is closely associated with the material conditions of a society. This literary theory incorporates various economic, social, and political factors of the age in which a literary work is created, and it suggests reading a text in the context of other texts that were prevalent in that society, such as newspapers, books, magazines, etc. This literary theory came into existence in the later half of the twentieth century, with inspiration from British social thinker Sir Raymond Williams, who revolted against all traditional literary criticism theories and embarked on the idea that culture is a way of life and is not just limited to literature but also includes everyday practices shaped by material circumstances. These insights formed the basis for cultural materialism, which overlaps with Marxist literary criticism while broadening its focus to include cultural and ideological elements.

The main aim of cultural materialism is to read a text in context with other texts as well. In simple words, it doesn't just read the text but also calls for parallel readings of other prevalent texts like history, books, newspapers, magazines, etc. This makes it unique and segregates it from the old methods of criticism like Formalism, New Criticism, or Practical Criticism, which favor the form and structure of the text. For instance, reading a Shakespearean play might seem like a timeless masterpiece, but from a cultural aspect, one can dive into the social structure and power politics of the Elizabethan era. One can also understand how Shakespeare's works were not meant for the 'groundlings' (common man). From this aspect, it becomes clear to the reader that there is an inherent tension between the classes within the realm of Christianity

during the Elizabethan era. The material conditions, viz. class relations, distribution of wealth, and economy, are vital in influencing cultural expressions. Literature becomes a significant platform for projecting ideological conflicts, social inequalities, and class struggles in one place.

Cultural materialism explores the range of power politics and its dynamics within a culture. It examines how Power operates within a society through dominant beliefs and paves the way for cultural aspects encompassing products, business, ideas, and entertainment. It is the Power that runs into institutions like schools, colleges, courts, and police, and has an effect on ideas and sets the ideologies. Influenced by the famous social critic Louis Althusser, who explained how ideologies control society and its thinking in a particular way and how dominating ideologies repress revolts via repressive measures like school education, entertainment, or media control the thinking of a society, which further converts into what Antonio Gramsci termed cultural hegemony. Cultural materialism delves into how literature can reinforce or challenge those prevailing ideologies. Cultural materialists often explore texts as a medium for spreading ideology or changing or regulating it in a certain way.

One primary method of cultural materialism is to understand literature through culture and to shift attention from form and structure to social aspects like the issues of gender crisis, social dominance, minorities, and the working class. Thus, it has attempted to trace the hidden relations of Power and structural inequalities embedded within literary works. They look for a connecting link between historical literary analysis and contemporary issues, making the theory of cultural materialism more diverse and dynamic. This theory draws insights from history, sociology, anthropology, and political science, which is also one reason why it is often called New Historicism. It invites scope for multidisciplinary studies, which makes this theory more relevant and appealing in understanding social problems and their trends.

The literary theory of Cultural Materialism accounts for the materialistic elements while analyzing a text, such as the author's social and economic background, the social dynamics, and the trending ideologies of that era, to interpret a text accurately. If one can read Anand's *Untouchable* from that perspective, it is visible that it shows how caste-based oppression is rooted in cultural ideologies that hinder material progress for the oppressed and downtrodden communities. In the same vein, Valmiki shows in *Joothan* how caste-based oppression continues to exploit communities that are socially weak and marginalized. Time has not

changed for them, even after the adoption of the constitution. The traumatic experiences of a Dalit life are presented with crudeness, irrespective of age, caste, and gender. The humiliation and torture will have the same level of intensity for all age groups, and Valmiki illustrates this through his own experiences in his biographical work. He was mentally traumatized from childhood while accessing basic things like education and jobs with equality in a world where society provides limited access to basic resources based on caste hierarchies.

The literary theory of Cultural Materialism emerged as a response to challenge the established critical theories in the latter half of the twentieth century. Scholars like Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and Catherine Belsey demonstrated how culture can be integral to evaluating any literary text. Williams emphasized the idea of culture as a 'whole way of life,' embracing artistic expressions and everyday practices conditioned by material conditions. The core ideas of Cultural Materialism are based on Marxist literary criticism but with a wide scope of culture and ideology. It asserts that a literary text cannot be studied separately; it requires holistic reading with historical context and calls for contextual readings. The theory addresses different aspects that contribute to the production of a text, such as the analysis of the political milieu, economic factors, and the social background that frames a connecting link for the reader to understand not just the text but also the social and political conditions of that era for better interpretation.

Literature is a medium of representation of society and social issues, and in literature, the writer can express his ideas directly or symbolically. The reader can strengthen his concepts of society and its inherent problems with cultural materialism criticism. The theory emphasizes material things like money or wealth distribution, economic systems, and relations within classes, which comprise an integral element of cultural expressions. The power dynamics and hegemonic ideologies are cultural commodities through which we can see the dominance and resistance of a culture and how writers represent these conflicts through their imagination using Antonio Gramsci's model of hegemony.

The thinkers of cultural materialism are deeply influenced by sociology and anthropology and draw ideas from thinkers like Louis Althusser to explore how literature either upholds or contests prevailing ideologies. It broadly focuses on texts as a medium to spread ideas and reflects various cultural aspects of society that legitimize cultural ideology and dominance, offering a new perspective to understand a society in a better way. The method of cultural

materialism interpretation is to connect the dots of unnoticed voices of the marginalized classes, including women, minorities, and LGBT. In this manner, this theory unravels the underlying power dynamics and social inequalities of society expressed by writers.

Cultural materialism's unique feature is associatingCultural materialism's unique feature is associating literary criticism with present-day issues, making a literary text relevant to the readers. The theory is highly adaptive and holistic, broadly covering all facets of criticism, including structuralism, Marxist criticism, post-colonialism, and deconstruction. This allows researchers to broaden their scope of analysis and raise questions about the present social scenario. It also makes a text universal and timeless, helps in developing and understanding the text better in synchronization with its social issue, and provides a deep understanding of various cultures.This makes it particularly effective for exploring how texts connect to more significant cultural and societal trends.

In practical terms, it focuses on the tangible aspects of literary creation, such as the author's socio-economic background, the class relationships depicted in the story, and the ideological messages conveyed through the text. For example, Mulk Raj Anand's*Untouchable*can be viewed as a critique of caste oppression, reflecting the realities of colonial India while challenging the dominant ideologies of that era. Likewise, Om Prakash Valmiki's*Joothan* sheds light on the real experiences of Dalits, revealing the entrenched material inequalities driven by caste systems. Cultural materialism is a powerful theoretical framework that enables one to examine the complicated relationship between culture and material conditions. It encourages scholars to go beyond purely textual analyses to consider the socio-economic and political forces that shape the literary works under question. This theory is pertinent to literature's study of inequality, marginalization, and resistance.

Cultural materialism is sometimes labeled as the British equivalent of New Historicism. It is a relatively recent field in literary theory and criticism, but it has made an impact since its term was coined in the 1980s, especially after the appearance of Political Shakespearein 1985 (Dollimore & Sinfield, 1985). However, its foundations are in British scholars from the 1970s and 1980s, such as Raymond Williams, Simon Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and Catherine Belsey, who endeavored to combat traditional literary criticism by focusing attention on the mutual relationship between culture, politics, and material circumstances (Williams, 1977; Hall, 1980; Belsey, 1980).

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the most important figures in Indian English literature, especially for the portrayal of socio-political realities through works such as *Untouchable* (Anand, 1935). This novel is now a classic that vividly captures the plight of Bakha, its *Untouchable* protagonist. Through the experiences of Bakha, Anand critiques the caste system and illustrates how the Ideological State Apparatus of Religion is used to marginalize and oppress lower-caste individuals (Althusser, 1971). Religious sanctity supports the caste hierarchy, which puts the *Untouchable*s at the bottom rung of the social ladder.

The upper castes, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas, sustain their dominance by exploiting Shudras. Anand's story reveals how dominant discourses are internalized by the subalterns under the watchful eye of societal norms, like a 'Panopticon'(Foucault, 1977), thereby rendering them incapable of resisting oppression. This dynamic highlights the fact that the oppression of caste is entrenched within the socio-religious structure of India.

Reading Om Prakash Valmiki's autobiography *Joothan* from a cultural point of view, a deep social analysis can be identified. He illustrates his microcosm of social complexities and how they affect society's thinking. The theme of the autobiographical work reveals the dark side of Indian society, which is bound by caste and class, as well as the dehumanizing experiences inflicted on the marginalized. *Joothan* covers the social and cultural complications faced by Dalits for centuries, and the problem of 'untouchability' is still prevalent even after celebrating the platinum years of independence. The novel begins with the inhuman living conditions of lower-caste people, who have to live under the most pathetic and unbearable conditions.

On the edges of the pond were the homes of the 'Chuhras. All the women of the village, young girls, older women, and even the newly married brides, would sit in the open space behind these homes at the edges of the pond to take a shit. Not just under the cover of darkness but even in the daylight. The purdah observing Tyagi women had their faces covered with saris and shawls around their shoulders and found relief in an open-air latrine. They sat on Dabbowali's shore without worrying about decency, exposing their private parts. The stench was so overpowering that one would choke within a minute. The pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, and daily fights this was my childhood environment. If the people who call the caste system an ideal social arrangement had to live in this environment for a day or two, they would change their minds. (*Joothan*: An *Untouchable*'s Life 2)

All of society's material things were inaccessible to Dalits, and Valmiki's memoir demonstrated how materials determine one's destiny and establish oneself in a society. According to Michael Foucault's concept of Power, Power operates within a culture that is hidden beneath the rules of religion and ritual. Foucault puts it in the following way in Power and Knowledge in Discipline and Punish as :

> Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain . . . Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organization. . . Individuals are the vehicles of Power, not its points of application. (1980: 98)

Untouchability is one example, and Valmiki showed glimpses of the community's exploitation as material things were taken away from them. They often have to 'work without pay.' Nobody dared to refuse the unpaid work; instead, they were abused. Here are a few instances of Omprakash Valmiki's humiliation and unfairness that made people cry, which occurred in a village, a school, and government buildings. In the initial pages of *Joothan*, Omprakash claims that Chuhraswere not regarded as human. However, upper caste members use Chuhra for household tasks like cleaning the cowshed and working on agricultural farmlands. "Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes if one [a higher-caste person] happened to touch a 'Chuhra', one got contaminated or polluted. The 'Chuhra' were not seen as humans; they were just things to be used. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and then throw them away." (*Joothan*:2006: 2). Om Prakash was taunted by the Tyagi children, who called him 'Chuhre ka'. They occasionally beat him without cause. This was a bogus tragedy that was ludicrous.

On the other hand, the novel *Untouchable* offers a wide range of interpretations of Anand's message from a critical point of view. If one reads the novel, it is based on the deep-rooted casteism in Indian culture. The novel begins with class demarcation and how they are allocated space within the villages. The opening of the novel depicts the pathetic condition of lower-caste *Untouchable*s as follows: outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow of both the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with the crystal clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odor of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes

heaped up to be made into fuel cakes... The absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made the quarter a marsh that gave out the most offensive stink. And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse... lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery ... lay within it.' (*Untouchable* 9)

Class and caste-based Discrimination

Issues of caste and class are key themes focused on so often by Cultural Studies and Cultural Materialism. Caste, in the Indian setting, is alone a critical determinant of the individual and the group's identity and social status, and caste differentiates amongst people based on some 'inherited' characteristics. Thematically, it embodies a socio-cultural system within a hierarchical structure designed in historical terms based on writings like Manusmriti and Yagnavalkyasmriti. Systemic oppression is inevitable as these Brahminical texts encourage a structure whereby Brahmins top the social ladder and Dalits bottom it.

As Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* shows, in pre-independence India, caste-based discrimination was intimately embedded in the socio-economic polity. It deals with the travails of groups that are systematically denied access to shared amenities and privileges in the village that are for the upper castes, such as Bakha, Sohini, Lakha, and Rakha. The Dalits were denied access to temples and markets so that their subordinate status was emphasized.

The control of water resources is one of the most poignant symbols of caste-based oppression sketched out in the novel. Dalits were not allowed to draw water themselves from the communal wells. This illustrates a form of systemic deprivation—even of necessities such as water—because unless an upper-caste person fetched water for them, they had to wait. The reality that outcast women waited outside the well with pitchers they carried, without assurance of help, is exemplified by the routine. Marginalized individuals too often conflict among themselves: take Gulabo, a dominating and aggressive outcaste woman who attacks Sohini, who is gentle and submissive. These interpersonal dynamics reflect an internalization of oppression within the community that further fragments the solidarity of the marginalized. Even after their toil and endurance, Dalits are refused dignity, autonomy, and what many of us take for granted in life's necessities, effectively re-humanizing their dehumanization in the caste hierarchy.

Untouchable powerfully rethinks this caste-bound discrimination by developing it as an institutional device keeping inequality intact. As a major cultural artifact, the novel presents an important challenge to structures of dominance and asks thought-provoking questions about the vexed intersections of caste, class, and identity under colonial India.

Hegemony and Ideology Dissemination

Social discrimination becomes accepted when power groups use ideas and mainstream thinking in Anand's *Untouchable*(1935) and Valmiki's *Joothan* (1997). Hindu cultural practices and beliefs behind Indian traditional ways of life let a powerful caste class rule over other weaker castes. Through the work of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci, scholars discover methods that sustain this mindset, ranging from obvious force to subtle social practices (Gramsci, 1971; Althusser, 1971). Both Louis Althusser's and Antonio Gramsci's theoretical frameworks provide good insight into how such ideologies are maintained, either through more openly repressive means or socially via Althusser (1971) or Gramsci (1971).The narrative in *Joothan*highlights instead the one-sidedness of the version of Eklavya's story given from a Brahminical point of view. Guru Dronacharya, who demands Eklavya's thumb as gurudakshina, is a treacherous action that is normalized, not discouraged. Rather than bringing Dronacharya out to be a cunning and prejudiced man, this popular narrative extols Eklavya for his submissiveness as an exemplary thing. This serves as a cultural manipulation that reinforces the caste hierarchy and justifies systematic injustice (Valmiki, 1997).

In *Joothan*, Om Prakash Valmiki gives a magnificent criticism of this narrative. When such a teacher narrates the saga of Dronacharya giving flour to his son, Ashwatthama, in place of milk, Valmiki asks why the suffering of Dalits, like having to drink mar (dirty water), is never mentioned in historical epics. The teacher responds violently when he dares to question caste norms, thus his defiance. The incantation of the teacher: 'Darkest Kalyug has come upon us to allow an *Untouchable* the sheer gall to talk back' (Valmiki, 1997 26), encapsulates the entrenched psychological and violent fact that sustains the oppression of caste (whether 'touchable' or '*Untouchable*') (Frankenberg in Harasym, 1993).

In *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand vividly depicts the everyday humiliations Bakha, a Dalit protagonist, feels, which serve as a microcosm of the everyday humiliations lower caste individuals face. This narrative reveals how customs, rituals, and economic practices of society ensure inequality. Bakha's experiences with high-caste Hindus—being overcharged by

shopkeepers, being thrown food as if he were an animal, and being forbidden to touch communal water resources—are all part of the regularization of exploitation and dehumanization in caste-based societies (Anand 1935).

A powerful instance of this oppression occurs when Bakha approaches a Hindu temple. Assigned the task of sweeping the courtyard, he is drawn to the rhythmic singing and the sight of the stone deities. As he instinctively folds his hands in worship, his presence triggers cries of "polluted, polluted, polluted!" Bakha is immediately ostracized for violating caste boundaries despite his purely spiritual intentions. This moment encapsulates the psychological violence of untouchability, as Bakha's human instincts for faith and belonging are crushed under the weight of social stigmas (Anand, 1935 67).

Anand's depiction of Bakha's interactions with high-caste individuals further underscores the cruelty of caste-based hierarchies. In one instance, a Hindu man hurls a packet of cigarettes at him, treating him with the same disdain one would show an animal. When Bakha attempts to buy chapattis, they are thrown to him in a manner that mirrors how food is tossed to a dog. These acts of humiliation culminate in a traumatic encounter where Bakha is accused of defiling a high-caste man by unintentionally touching him. The man's outburst—filled with vulgar insults and threats—leaves Bakha stunned, ashamed, and fearful (Anand, 1935, pp. 48–51). The psychological toll of these incidents is immense. Anand describes Bakha's reaction as one of paralysis, where his senses are numbed by terror and his spirit subdued by servility. This trauma reflects the broader condition of lower-caste individuals in pre-independent India, whose identities were constantly undermined by systemic discrimination. The irreversible burden of caste, tied to one's birth and immutable throughout life, renders any form of escape or mobility nearly impossible (Anand 1935).

The ideology and hegemony surrounding caste-based inequalities is both *Untouchable* and *Joothan*. These texts expose the mechanisms that normalize oppression—who or what perpetuates the abuse, and in what ways, be it through cultural narrative, economic practice, or social custom—and challenge the caste system, arguing for a fairer and less cruel society.

Revolt within Culture

Bakha, a young Dalit in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, is segregated into his position of hierarchy within the caste system via extensive use of psychological descriptive tactics that

gradually reveal the overwhelming psychological damage caused by caste discrimination. The presence of rejection of the very culture Bakha is born into, and the fascination with British culture shows Bakha's longing to flee a system of oppression and find meaning in an equal structure. This cultural mimicry and aspiration are all part of a broader subaltern resistance, an adaptive pattern that aligns with Raymond Williams's concept of emergent culture.

Williams speaks in terms of emergent culture, that is, new meanings and values that confront the dominant culture to produce emergent structures of feeling and possibilities of social transformation (Williams 1977). As an emergent response to the oppressive social order of the caste system, Bakha's admiration for the British lifestyle—contemplating becoming an army man, boasting that he can play hockey, and explaining to them that he believes the British officer's uniform and discipline are great—suggests it is an emergent response. His identity as "Pipali Sahib," a nickname given by his community, embodies this duality: although it indicates his desire to escape caste, it also expresses the ridicule to which his social existence subjects him.

From the very beginning, Bakha is shown as a loser of social justice. Public latrine cleaning is a job his caste orders him to do every day. Often frustrated, his father, Lakha, yells at him to live in a cramped, unsanitary one-room mud house he shares with his father. Bakha works very hard, although he isn't appreciated or given a break. The inter-sectional burden of caste and familial expectations is reflected in Lakha's scolding, including harsh comments such as "get up, ohe you Bakhya, ohe son of a pig!" (Anand 1935 13).

Bakha's admiration for the British way of life is not just mimicry but a way to resist the dehumanizing treatment he faces. While British colonialism was based on exploitation, Bakha sees the colonial culture as more supportive of marginalized groups like his own. This idealized view gives him a way to imagine new possibilities for dignity and social mobility. For example, when an upper-caste man named Charat Singh gives Bakha a hockey stick, Bakha feels proud and validated. This brief moment of recognition contrasts sharply with his usual experiences of humiliation and rejection, offering a glimpse of Williams's new culture—one that challenges dominant ideas and opens up space for new dreams and values.

Though Bakha has positive ambitions, he is also aware of the society that blocks his aspirations. His dream of becoming a 'saheb' like 'white' person with authority and holding a higher position in society remains unfulfilled as he was under the clutches of pre-independence, where

physically people were colonized by the British. However, psychologically they were the slaves of cultural hierarchies. The cycle of oppression begins at home, where he is abused by his father to clean the 'latrines' and forced to survive in social exclusion, where he is called by abusive names, thrown food, and given no wage, and above all, no self-respect. Bakha's respect for British culture reflects Raymond Williams' concept of how a new culture can dismantle the established social structure and how culture first impacts ideologies. As cultural practices shape thinking and ideologies, the traditional religious ideology of India breeds the social evils of casteism and untouchability, but in British culture, there is no place for caste, so it paved the way into the minds of Bakha as an 'emerging culture'. However, Bakha's failure to fully overcome his circumstances reveals the limits of individual resistance against deeply rooted systems of oppression.

Subaltern Approach

The dehumanizing experience of Dalit life is vividly explained in both *Untouchable* and *Joothan* through the subaltern studies aspect, which is an important part of Cultural Materialism analysis. The subaltern study showed how one can be forced to become marginalized using the cultural norms as Power and exploitation of the caste-based society of Dalit is the recurrent theme of study. A lighter form of subaltern studies, as utilized by Antonio Gramsci and further expounded by Ranajit Guha, concerned itself with apprehending the social, historical, and cultural aspects of the exercise of oppression. The term 'subaltern' was coined by Gramsci to refer to the marginalized and voiceless classes, which he wished to highlight by hegemonic excluding them from a dominant discourse (Gramsci 1971). Guha further explored this concept in Subaltern Studies: Writing and Essays on Indian History and Society (1982) about the collective suffering of people under the domination of the colonizers and the post-colonizers.

The devices of systematized discrimination and trauma on the subaltern Dalit community are the common themes of both novels. Bakha is described in *Untouchable* as a young industrious man, physically strong and dedicated to his work, but eventually humiliated and excluded from his society despite his efforts. As in Jonathan, Om Prakash Valmiki tells us in his story of his experiences of prejudice based on caste, even after being educated. Together, these narratives highlight how caste is an 'invincible sword' that cuts off access for Dalits and keeps them in perpetual marginalization.

Taking a cultural study of Indian society, it is visible that caste is a dominant facet of society that demarcates the hierarchy of classes. Caste is a center of Power within a society that regulates the social division of India. Bakha, in *Untouchable*, yearns for social acceptance with dignity in a society that was denied to him as he was considered to be 'polluted' and '*Untouchable*'. Similarly, in his autobiographical work *Joothan*, Valmiki gives his account of his struggle since his childhood, which is similar on the same grounds where society is unjust and biased based on class and caste. Personal and educational achievements remain unnoticed in a caste-conscious society. He was humiliated in school and college, and caste-based subjugation followed him even at the workplace. In both literary works, the deep impact of psychological humiliation is powerfully narrated, proving how difficult it is to break the Power of social dominance and caste ideologies.

Hegemony in culture is significant to understanding the subaltern experience, and these two texts vividly exemplify it. Gramsci emphasized that hegemony runs within a social system through social customs, rituals, and religious practices. The social dominance is often related to religion or culture, which ultimately becomes unchallenged for the common person. Cultural hegemony normalizes the practice of caste-based social discrimination and the dominance of upper castes in India. For instance, the Dalit in India is considered to be 'inferior' and 'lower,' and their main aim is to serve other communities like Brahmins, Kshatriyas, or Vaishyas. The concept of Gramsci's hegemony within a culture is central to comprehending the subaltern experience while comparing both texts. Hegemony operates within social orders through rituals, religion, social customs, and the social institutions that normalize the dominance and dehumanizing practices that make people from lower castes socially oppressed and marginalized. Guha's focus on recovering the voices of the oppressed subaltern is crucial.

The narratives of Bakha and Valmiki reveal the significance of subaltern studies in understanding the social and cultural dimensions of caste. However, both characters—Bakha and Valmiki—resisted their subjugation in their way: Bakha through silent endurance, while on the other hand, Valmiki raised his voice as he was educated. Their struggles present the hardships faced by the marginalized to attain social presence. These literary works are not just a critique of India's caste system; they also play a vital role in the larger discourse on social justice and equality. They call for a review of traditional cultural values and practices that perpetuate oppression.

Conclusion

The paper's central finding is that reading the literary text within a cultural materialism framework provides an understanding of how the writers have reflected the oppressed voices of downtrodden and marginalized communities and how it is important for readers to interpret a text from the cultural aspect if they want to comprehend society in a better form than just sticking to the traditional parameters of narrative technique, plot, and characterization.

Literary analysis, ranging from the scope of cultural materialism, is broadened by placing texts in their socio-historical contexts, thereby situating the literary texts within the social and historical dynamics of the period. *Untouchable* and *Joothan* are both concerned with how the central characters are manifestations of resistance to entrenched systems of social discrimination. The narratives highlight the large presence of collective societal structures defined over individual identity and critique the firm caste-based hierarchy and the traces of untouchability. The practices have historically been part of the tradition, but the stigma is so deeply rooted that it is almost impossible for those born into lower castes to rid their families of the stigma.

Additionally, the analysis reveals that these same upper-caste elite hegemony control how progress in society occurs. Bakha and Valmiki experience similar patterns of dehumanization and psychological distress, and their experiences draw attention to the general experiences of Dalit communities. However, these groups are shown as having no individuality, freedom of expression, or basic rights, enjoying solely the mercy of dominant caste groups. Legislative measures to redress caste-based inequalities have been enacted, but deeply embedded social ideologies and materially entrenched power structures work together to marginalize. The system affords the rich and socially privileged classes much clout, granting them considerable Power in social institutions, thereby securing the system and placing the underprivileged in subjugation. A cultural materialist approach is significant in discovering the hidden power politics, social discrimination, and domination of materialism in real life. This paper opens a new discussion on reading a literary text from a cultural point of view and finding hidden social structures that control the people's narrative.

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