

***LITERARY EXPRESSION OF FREEDOM AND EQUALITY:
READING CASTE, RACE AND HOLOCAUST IN FICTION***

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ABSTRACT

This thesis has focused on reading questions of freedom, equality and justice in selected literary works of Dalit, African American and Post Holocaust Jewish writers. The intention has been to map the way these questions come to inform fictional works. My central argument locates the articulation of caste, race and antisemitism in these literary texts in conjunction with the critical and conceptual frameworks provided by Dr. BR Ambedkar, WEB Du Bois and Hannah Arendt respectively. This thesis especially draws its conceptual framework from the discussion of the question of Enlightenment thought by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

In the Introduction, I lay out my preoccupations with questions of freedom and equality in the context of caste, race and antisemitism. I discuss my objectives, my methodological framework and the chapterization of the thesis. Chapter 1 of this study has discussed some of the fundamental concepts with regard to the question of equality and freedom. This chapter reviews the literature on the conceptual frameworks which theorize freedom and equality; side by side it works out a methodology for the chapters on caste, race and antisemitism. I track these two concepts through Enlightenment thought and work out, in the context of my thesis, the relationship between the concepts of law, justice, violence, critique, myth, and literature. I look at the philosophical and theoretical insights offered by Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and others.

Chapter 2 of this thesis discusses the impact of the Ambedkarite thought on Dalit fiction after the rise of Dalit Panther Party and the Dalit movement. It focuses on the complex and peculiar way in which the caste system has developed and operated throughout the centuries in India. This chapter also focuses on how anti-caste protests were always there against the exploitative power of the caste system. This chapter finds that the fictional work created by the marginalised communities especially the Dalits, holds the struggle for the freedom and equality as a central theme. In this chapter I have argued that Macwan's *The Stepchild* infuses the mood of struggle

after two anti-reservation riots in Gujarat of 1981 and 1985. The second novel studied in this thesis by G. Kalyana Rao titled *Untouchable Spring* holds a very special place in the Dalit literature of India. Written in Telugu, it has captured unwritten history of Dalit community (Malas and Madigas) in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. Fiction created by the Dalit writers, I have shown, present everyday reality of the millions of Dalits.

Chapter 3 discusses the issues of racism in the United States of America. This chapter discusses the problem of racism and its disastrous effects on the polity, particularly African Americans. In this chapter I have argued that *Beloved* by Toni Morrison is uncomfortable to read. The central question for Morrison is “What does it mean to be free?”: this thematic is observed throughout the novel. I have also argued that Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man* explores the dilemma of the African Americans of the past and present. The protagonist tries to deal with the world where he is invisible. Ellison has captured the profound sadness felt by African Americans due to the betrayal by the US Government and American Justice system. I have shown how the works of Du Bois has helped in motivating the writers and activists in the struggle for civil rights through a rearticulation of freedom and equality. This chapter finds that the impact of slavery is still felt in every aspect of American life, culture, history, politics and economy

Chapter 4 discusses the post-Holocaust literary response by Jewish survivors. The conceptual framework for this chapter is drawn from Hannah Arendt’s politico-philosophical writings. I argue in this chapter that the literary writing and testimonies of the Holocaust survivors has enabled the construction and preservation of public memory of the Holocaust. In this Chapter, I have argued that Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus* deal with the theme of survival, existentialism and memory. These texts try to elaborate the view that when the freedoms of some are compromised, the freedoms of all are affected. This Chapter finds that the Holocaust is non-representable in the sense that it operates beyond the limits of rationality and human comprehension. I have also argued that Arendt’s theorization of fascism and totalitarianism enable a nuanced reading of these memory texts

The last chapter which is the conclusion includes key findings of the thesis. It also discusses the limitations of the research and areas of further study. Some of the key findings of the thesis are as follows:

- (1) New conceptual tools that came into being with Enlightenment enabled the emergence of new voices from marginalized groups and allowed them to make a claim for freedom and equality.
- (2) Contemporary critique of Enlightenment thought embodied by Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin and others show both its possibilities and limits. These critiques tie the concepts of law, justice, violence and critique to the quest for freedom and equality.
- (3) Dr. BR Ambedkar on caste, WEB Du Bois on race and Hannah Arendt on the Holocaust draw on both the possibilities and limits of Enlightenment thought to articulate the world view of the marginalized and to enable the fashioning of a just world where freedom and equality are available to all.
- (4) On the theoretical level, fiction created by the marginalised and oppressed communities has brought to the table plurality of narratives, experiences and understanding of the world
- (5) On the social level these fictional works have created and provided a sense of belonging and solidarity to the marginalised and victims. The derogatory representations have been supplanted by more respectful definition and self-image
- (6) On the level of critique, these theoretical and fictional works have brought new understandings of protests, identities, and the possibility of promoting solidarity through shared experiences of communities.

Keywords: *freedom, equality, critique, justice, enlightenment thought, caste, race, holocaust*