

Exegesis of Varna through the Lens of Social Dominance Theory in Sunjeev Sahota's *The Year of The Runaways*

Maryam Raza, Dr Nadia Anjum

Abstract

Sunjeev Sahota's thematic concerns border on immigrant literature, identity crisis and Indian roots. The aim of the research is to explore the exploitation of Varna Casteism in South Asian writer Sunjeev Sahota's novel *The Year of the Runaways* published in 2015. The researcher probes the role of casteism in a post-capitalistic world to assess how much it has seeped in the financial sector. The objectives are to unravel the hegemonic casteism; and to gauge the extent of conditioning through textual events and characters' fates.

To analyze the primary text, Lewis Coser and Ralf Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory and, Jim Sidanius and Felecia Pratto's Social Dominance Theory with specific focus on Legitimizing Myths have been employed. As secondary sources, literary reviews, online journals, print and written material have been used. The novel has hitherto been merely studied as Dalit Literature. However, the research undertaken expands the meagre research by bringing in the complete social model of Varna system. Research findings strongly endorse the role of Indian community itself in sustaining Varna Casteism through myth-making strategies employed.

Key words: Caste System, Conflict Theory, Exploitation, Indian Literature, Unconscious.

Introduction

The research aims to explicate hierarchal stratification in the novel *The Year of the Runaways* by Sunjeev Sahota against Varna casteism. The aim of this research is to

explain the exploitation of legitimization of myths deeply immersed in the South Asian, specifically Indian, psyche in Sunjeev Sahota's novel *The Year of the Runaways*. The objective is to unravel the conscious misuse of inherent myths in a communal setup to fend for the voracious desires of the hegemonic castes and gender. The objective is also to gauge the text in which these socially constructed ideologies of the Indian psychology dominate all other forms of knowledge; how characters' relationships are impacted by the grand narratives. By and large, the objective is to unmask exploitation of humans as the ulterior motive for disseminating such narratives. The study illuminates how the "wolves of hunger, destitution, exploitation and death hang around the door" (Rustin "Sunjeev Sahota") impelling characters to resort to emerge from the created neighbourhood of Sheffield in order to survive and live in the fast lane. Thus, the research tries to verbally illustrate the reins of mythical frameworks guiding them into a "sense of solidarity" (Rustin "Sunjeev Sahota") in uplifting their ulterior motives. This allows the incorporation of Social Dominance theory by the researcher in the study to affirm and uplift conflicts which arise on the surface in the guise of a "search for a better life" (Rustin "Sunjeev Sahota"). The study aims to show how the Indian psychology manoeuvres its followers who make the marginal "invisible" (Daniel "The Year of"). Every nail that sticks out must be hammered lest the framework of metanarratives disintegrates. Therefore, this study locates an Indian collective unconscious working at full throttle and incessantly.

Sunjeev Sahota is a modern British-Indian novelist born and bred in Derby, England. Sahota's familial chart is a meshwork of migration and varying routes to physical and, consequently cognitive displacement. Hailing from a Sikh family and being a third generation British who could not evade the nepotism against immigrants due to their foreign and uncanny outlook he claims to have experienced identity crisis and

dislocation. Interestingly his ancestors migrated from the modern-day Pakistan to Indian Punjab followed by a final shift to England in 1966. From his birthplace, Derby, Sahota travelled to Chesterfield at the tender age of seven, to Sheffield which provides the setting for his creative works till now. Though he studied Mathematics from Imperial College London and pursued a career in the world of marketing for Aviva, an insurance company, he gave up the technical self to pursue writing. His first publication titled “Ours are the Streets” in 2011, sealed his fate as a writer only. Sahota credits Salman Rushdie’s “Midnight’s Children” as his inspiration. It is inferred as a symbolic flight of the literary self coming atop his old self. His first encounter with a novel was a means of knowing thyself. “It was like making up for lost time – not that I had to catch up. But it was as though I couldn’t quite believe this world of storytelling I had found and I wanted to get as much of it down me as I possibly could” (“Sunjeev Sahota” *Wikipedia*).

The Year of the Runaways is Sunjeev Sahota’s second novel which shook the literary domain in 2015 with its “stylistically brilliant” (Kazmi “The Year of”) plot and poignant thematic concerns of contemporary times. The novel is par excellence for “in the (writing) process Sahota throws a piercing light on Indian society, both in India and Britain” (Bose “The Year of”) to unravel the latent nefarious symptoms lurking underneath a bedazzled veil of exuberance and Indian cosmopolitanism. The writer employs episodic flashbacks, portrayal of the present lives of characters and then reels to the near future. The interposing of different timeframes “...is a risky strategy – if just one of these sections sags by comparison with the others the whole structure could collapse – but Sahota is more than equal to the task” (Shamsie “The Year of”). It is remarkable that Sunjeev Sahota has been harped upon by critics and readers alike for his literary prowess in spite of him having submerged late into the skin of an author.

The Year of the Runaways is an aspiring tale of human tenacity and the unflinching ambition of its characters to surpass boundaries. Three young boys immigrate to England and strive as undocumented individuals to thrive each dawn. Their paths overlap; they raise doubts, and at times sink into an endless ocean of questions. The novel is a testimony to the voracious plight of all forms of marginality; illegal citizenship, casteism and gendering. The indelible miasma of urgency; uncertainty, bleakness and secrecy is evocative in its mimetic depiction of reality for the four protagonists in real world.

Conflict theory is deeply embedded in sociology. It throws limelight on the genesis, cause, evolution or devolution and the aftermath of any conflict and dissent in society. The theory investigates and explicates a universal phenomenon symbiotic with the prevalence of humans. The prototypical tier by Weber denotes the classification of class, status and power as all encompassing.

However, Karl Marx's notion influenced Max Weber who updated the theory according to the Contemporary norms of 20th century. With the onset of stock market, Marx's Dialectical Change morphed a little. Weber contends that "... the state and economy together set up conditions for conflict" (Allan 233). The notion of legitimacy along with the facets of status and power are imperative for Weber. According to the modern construct, Conflict theory has three main branches, namely Functionalism of Conflict, Dialectical Change and Marx's Critical Tradition by Ruth Wallace and Allison Wolf. This study lays emphasis on the first two types only. Their offshoots are evident in Lewis A. Coser's work which is modelled after George Simmel's Functionalism. On the contrary, the Marxian Dialectical Change sought a haven in Ralf Dahrendorf's literary criticism. He has also referred to Weber's proclivity for Power and Authority. The conglomeration of ideas borrowed from these two predecessors has rendered

Dahrendorf's contribution via the formation of his new version of Conflict theory. "Dahrendorf claims that power is the one unavoidable feature for all social relations" (Allan 213). Unlike Marx, his theory depends on class groups for these groups denote a breakdown of Authority and Power, ensuing the vicious cycle of dysfunctionality in a social set up. It is noteworthy that the Marxian conflict heralds the advent of a revolution as opposed to Dahrendorf's theory. For him "the inequality of power and authority which inevitable accompanies social organizations" (qtd. in Guclu "Karl Marx and") garners a conflict of interests rendering a disruptive society. The idea of class(es) metamorphoses when highlighted by Dahrendorf. Individuals with similar interests form a class, irrespective of their economic backgrounds. However, the authority structure becomes an elemental drive for brewing dissent which is subtly regulated by beguiling Imperatively Coordinated Associations. Dahrendorf propounds that a society is like a coin with two sides to it; of discord and harmony, coercion and consensus. It is the pillars of Authority which unravel whether the building is of dissent or coherence. However, Coser's merciful and optimistic gaze connotes positivity with conflict. It can be a source of binding amongst multifarious conflicting groups in a society. He posits that conflict maintains a structure of stability in the social paradigms. Consequently, he advocated Functionalism of Conflict. Whilst society can be torn apart by conflict, it can also revel in a state of harmony due to conflict. All in all, conflict theorists deem power and authority to be the edifice of a society. On the other hand, Functionalists have a conviction in the "collective agreement concerning a cohesive set of cultural trends" ("Chapter 7").

The research undertaken examines Sunjeev Sahota's *The Year of the Runaways* against this theory. Sahota's novel revolves around Indian community which showcases India as pre-dominantly renowned for its caste system which is hereditary and defines the social status and confined occupational opportunities based on the malevolent caste

dynamics. The words Varna and Jati are interchangeably employed to denote casteism which ensure the prevalence of Endogamy for a strict adherence to an inter-caste existence. The pernicious prejudices associated with casteism thrive in order “...to promote... (the) vested interest” (Kaur “Caste System in”) of the hegemonic powers who disseminate the discourse of casteism for their ulterior motive; in order to sustain their power, authority and a sublime aura in the social set up. Hence, it engenders “unequal access to natural as well as man-made resources” (Kaur “Caste System in”). True to form, the highest tier of Brahmins are mainly priests, while the following hierarchies of caste being Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are allowed to enter the temples and perform Puja (worship of Hindu deities) unlike Sudras. Although Sudras have secured themselves the lowest position in the Varna model, they have outcasted Dalits/Untouchables. The Untouchables, formerly known by the derogatory term of Chamaars, fail to be enlisted in the Varna model. They are an outcaste whose mere shadow symbolises filth akin to their jobs such as removing faeces or carcass of dead animals. They call themselves Dalit to denote their oppressed state. This structure of Varna model is evident in Rig Veda, an early Hindu text. This intimates the prevalence of casteism since time immemorial. It is a facet of the Indian society which cannot be effaced as it is seeped into the unconscious psyche of Indians. Consequently, Gandhi’s endeavours at uplifting the status of Dalits by labelling them as Harijan, God’s people, went down the drain. The concept of Casteism was reinforced by the invading British who classified four hundred tribal groups as Untouchables. They were later termed as Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. Contemporary India of the post-capitalist era is deemed to relish “significant change in the occupation sector...as now it is not restricted to caste” (Kaur “Caste System in”).

The genesis of the Varna model is a bone of contention among scholars and historians who have arrived at multiple conclusions. The Rig Veda intimates that Brahma

was the creator of the Universe, a four-headed and four-handed deity. He formed humans into four categories pouring forth from his body.

The origin of Varnas is debatable and sceptic for its historical record is rich with varying tales. Whilst Rig Veda denotes Brahma to be the originator of Varnas, it is also contested that Purush, the first primitive man, annihilated himself in order to formulate a society. The distribution and rendering of his body parts is synonymous to that of Brahma's. On the other hand, the Biological Theory relies on attributes. Sattva has distinctive qualities such as wisdom, intelligence, honesty and goodness which signifies Brahmins. Rajas ooze with passion, pride and valour which forms the main matter of Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The traits of dullness, stupidity and lack of creativity throb in the veins of Tamas; viz the Sudras. It is a palpable notion that Varna depicts skin colour and not caste or status.

Social Dominance Theory crystallized in 1999 by psychology professors and researchers Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto. It is affiliated with the Authoritarian Personality Theory, Jim Sidanius's Theory on Conservatism, Rokeach's Two-Value theory of political behaviours and the Critical Theory with a narrowed focus on Hegemony and Ideology amongst many others. It also delves into the domain of psychological studies as it explicates the social structure. Consequently, the theory examines behaviour of humans clustered in groups in any social organisation. The theory explicates the reason behind hierarchical structures, and the ideologies and institutions which propound a certain metanarrative. The discussed social hierarchies are of "some groups systematically privileged over other groups" ("Social dominance theory"). The procuring of privileges by a specific strata devoids another usually based on the role of marginality pertaining to race, gender, ethnicity etc. This is reinforced by dint of "ideological myths" ("Social dominance theory") labelled as Legitimizing Myths. "These

myths become codified and institutionalized, and serve to convince people that existing structures of inequality are just and desirable despite their unequal outcomes with respect to low-status groups” (“Social dominance theory”). Furthermore, “ideological structures become internalized in individual attitudes and beliefs” (“Social dominance theory”) which makes the injustice a mundane and readily accepted phenomena.

Hierarchical stratification is a universal phenomenon based on a trimorphic structure, viz of age, gender and arbitrary set system. It is noteworthy that the division is “socially constructed” (qtd. in *Handbook of Theories*). Therefore, some reap good rewards due to their dominant status in society whereas “members of subordinate groups receive a disproportionate share of the bad things in life” (qtd. in *Handbook of Theories*). The oligarchic strata bears the responsibility of creating a self-serving narrative. This is aided by power and legitimizing ideologies. “...stereotypes and remembered histories of past conflicts” (qtd. in *Handbook of Theories*) albeit hierarchy enhancing myths. Although, there should be a balance between the disparate hierarchy-enhancing and hierarch-attenuating myths. Whilst the former consists of internal security force, the latter comprises human rights and civil rights organisation. Furthermore, legitimizing myths “organize and justify social relationships” (qtd. in *Handbook of Theories*) under the pretext of stereotypes, cosmologies and shared representations. It is evident that legitimizing myths are an illusory act though the beguiling sheen overwhelms the masses culminating in Behavioural Asymmetry in the form of servile appeasing by the subordinate groups. Nevertheless, “cultural ideologies can also work against hierarchy” (qtd. in *Handbook of Theories*) such as anti-colonial movements raising the hue and cry of equality and fraternity.

Social Dominance theory was formed to fathom the emergence and sustenance of group-based hierarchy. Hence, it asserts that “process of producing and maintaining

prejudices and discrimination” (“Social Dominance Theory” *Research Gate*) is inclusive of “cultural ideologies” (“Social Dominance Theory” *Research Gate*). These ideologies are “consensually held values, attitudes, beliefs, (and) stereotypes” (“Social Dominance Theory” *Research Gate*) known as Legitimizing Myths according to Sidanius and Pratto. They are glossed with a sheen of fairness and morality to curb and compel subalterns to cooperate. “*Negative social value* is disproportionately left to or forced upon members of subordinate groups in the form of substandard housing, disease, underemployment, dangerous and distasteful work, disproportionate punishment, stigmatisation, and vilification” (“Social Dominance Theory” *Research Gate*). It is noteworthy that negative social value is “forced upon” (“Social Dominance Theory” *Research Gate*) the less privileged to intimate the unnaturalness and the latent malign besmirching legitimizing myths. Consequently, meritocracy and racism are employed by brutal force as they go against the grain.

The critical study illustrates the following research questions:-

- Is the metanarrative of casteism a socially, culturally, psychologically or religiously driven elemental drive?
- Is the Indian bigotry and violence against Dalits an internal or external conflict?

Literature Review

Sunjeev Sahota is a postmodern Indian-British novelist who has the accolade of penning down two literary masterpieces, *Ours are the Streets* and *The Year of the Runaways* published in 2015. His work primarily explores the psychological impact of one’s socioeconomic patterns of living. Thereby, engaging contemporary issues and complexities ranging from fundamentalism to up rootedness in foreign setting.

“Although he writes in a familiar form, the content of his work is anything but ordinary” (Shaw “Living by the Pen”). Sahota’s form of choice is prose which mirrors the elongated lives of his characters most judiciously. Till now he has incorporated flashbacks and the stylistic of journal writing to explore latent concerns within his characters drawn from real life. It is quite ironic that Sahota depicts life in a “familiar” (Shaw “Living by the Pen”) manner but his finesse is “anything but ordinary” (Shaw “Living by the Pen”). This review makes one ponder over Sahota’s double vision and mesmerizing craft. His mind and pen excavates and then brushes off the dust from banal circumstances to relay the hidden truth. Consequently, “my novels encourage them (readers) to think differently about things” (Shaw “Living by the Pen”). His objective is to unveil the truth to depict the uncanny banal side to normal life. Sahota denotes the common and overlooks the caste system of India but the research probes into the concealed psychological reasoning of endorsing prejudices and consciously exploiting an unconscious trend. Rushdie has rightly put, pertaining to *The Year of the Runaways* that “All you can do is surrender happily to its power” (Shaw “Living by the Pen”). His objective is to depict the painstaking sight which examines the baroque from within the commonplace using the style of magical realism in his third and upcoming book. This is also redolent of the symbolic selection of Salman Rushdie’s “Midnight Children” at the age of eighteen, heralding a literary soul within Sunjeev Sahota.

The Year of the Runaways has been viewed as a round “fighting against the wall of awful media” (Shaw “Living by the Pen”) representation of an Indian immigrants’ life abroad. It is Julia Calagiovanni’s scholarly gaze which fails to overlook “the remnants of a lingering caste system; questions of faith and scepticism; [and] the difficult limitations of conventional ideas about gender and sex” (Calagiovanni “Man Booker Shortlist”). Her review in *The Atlantic* unveils Sahota’s multi-layered writing as a thematic vista. Albeit,

Calagiovanni interprets all the leading characters as “non-revolutionary characters on the basis of their yielding natures in the wake of the trials and tribulations faced by them” (Calagiovanni “Man Booker Shortlist”).

Conflict theory’s inception is dated in 1950s when there was a dire need to illuminate the persistent drawbacks and limitations of the preceding Structural Functionalism by a Jewish sociologist, E’mile Durkheim. Dahrendorf sees conflict as universally present in all human relations but Dahrendorf does not see the inevitability of conflict as part of human nature; he sees it, rather, as a normal part of how “we structure society and create social order” (“Chapter 7”). Conflict, for Dahrendorf, is a product of social relations as Marx intimated about the tension between the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. Consequently, Dahrendorf’s ideas stem from Marxism. Since he is intrigued by the societal set up, akin to Parsons, Dahrendorf is interested in the role of conflict in acquiring social stability in a given society. Parson believed in “collective agreement about norms, values, and social positions” (“Chapter 7”) as the prerequisites for prevalence of conflict, and consequently social order. “A norm is a cultural rule that associates people’s behaviour or appearance with rewards or punishments” (“Chapter 7”). A norm is a metanarrative devised to interpellate the masses in order to stratify them. Adherence to a norm is fundamental for doing otherwise reeks with the punitive status of being marginalised, othered, silenced and a Subaltern. Normative acts and demeanour are in congruent for they are “not... governed by a norm or standard” (“Chapter 7”). According to Shamsie, Sahota therefore identifies the norms created by an Indian state which are then the metaphorical Fates of all Indians.

A society is governed through its devised and religiously obeyed norms. These norms are infused into humans via power. Consequently, “power (is viewed) as a central social factor” (“Chapter 7”) by the Conflict theorists, whereas Functionalists adhere to

mutual cultural agreement. It is felt Ralf Dahrendorf's observation that "power designs the society" ("Chapter 7") is redolent of Michel Foucault's Discourse of Power. True to form, a discourse is formed by the elite since the "culture of any society reflects the interests of the powerful elite" ("Chapter 7"). They are the Power holders and bearers of Authority, reverting the rest in a subordinate position. "Dahrendorf sees class as related more to power than to money or occupation" ("Chapter 7"). Hence, his theory is steeped in internal class conflicts of any paragon of a society.

Jim Sidanous and Felicia Pratto propound in their Social Dominance theory that "societies organize themselves as group-based social hierarchies" (qtd. in *Handbook of Theories*). The pair of theorists manifest a universal aspect of any society. Hence, their research is painstaking and incorporates the sociological and psychological attributes of a society formed by human subjects. These various nexus reap rewards for the hegemonic dominating parties while conferring loss to the subservient rung of this man-made ladder of success.

Their research endorses that "all large human societies, with economic surplus" (Pratto et al. "Social Dominance Theory") manipulate "cultural ideologies" (Pratto et al. Social Dominance Theory") to create a static hierarchy which cannot be morphed. The underlying reason behind such an ideology is to be the sole shareholder of power dynamics and economic resources. Hence, the discourse is rigorously aided and abetted by oligarchies.

"Pareto (1935) argued that there are two major means by which members of dominant groups establish and maintain hegemony, force and fraud" (qtd. in *Handbook of Theories*). Force is employed via the Repressive State Agents such as the police force, whereas fraud constitutes of the meta-narratives of any society. These are the

“consensually shared social (ideologies) functioning to legitimize the dominant groups” (qtd. in *Handbook of Theories*). However, it is noteworthy that Elitism and Marxism eschew the use of force as it is ineffectual due to the inevitable backlash in the form of an uprising as is evident in Marxism itself.

The concept of Varna hovers over everyone in India. Varna is an Indian discourse crafted since time immemorial to establish hierarchy amidst the society. This hierarchy is based on caste and Jat. Furthermore, it stratifies people in groups based on the colour of their skin as the genesis of Varna denotes, viz colour. As a result, the Brahmin caste is always congenial and alluring while the Sudras are not. This is intermingled with the fiscal distribution also since the high caste earns more, thus has a balanced diet and is hale and hearty unlike the malnourished Dalits.

Louis Dumont writes in his book titled *Homo Hierarchicus* that the “Indian society was structured on a firm notion of hierarchy based on the relationship between the pure and the impure” (“Literature on the”). This claim shatters the façade of the Government of India which posits that its aim is to efface caste discrimination. In fact, it is impossible to do so because casteism is more of a religious than a political or economic notion. The phenomena surges from the Indian holy scriptures, however warped the inference may be. Consequently, the notion is deeply engraved in the Indian collective unconscious psyche. Traditionally, the system of hierarchy is based on the Varna model which is a microcosmic model of racism as Varna meant colour. Hence, four castes are distinguished from each other following a descending order of supremacy for Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. Chamaars are beyond the boundary of this model but most recently the society has commenced to assimilate them as a fifth class of untouchable. The post capitalist world of India is immersed in a sea of dichotomy “... urbanized young people ... consider caste detrimental to health, relations between

people” (“Literature on the”) but “caste panchaayats are still functioning strongly” (“Literature on the”) in the rural areas. Furthermore, the abhorrence for the Other and lower caste is the vogue even in some urban spaces.

Research Methodology

Since the aim of this research is to explore the exploitation of Varna casteism in the guise of a religious myth, hence duly, the primary source for this research is Sunjeev Sahota’s novel *The Year of the Runaways*. Lewis A. Coser and Ralf Dahrendorf’s distinctive notions on Conflict Theory along with Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto’s Social Dominance Theory with specific focus on Legitimizing Myths as theoretical framework within Sahota’s text should be analysed as tools of research. Furthermore, reviews, scholarly journals, podcasts, interviews, seminar recordings, dissertations and other electronic media has been employed as secondary tools.

It is a content-based analysis, following the grounded-theory pattern. Consequently, it is inductive research. The relative absence of substantive critical material on Sahota’s novel examining the psychological drive weaving the web of social conflicts provides a stimulus for this critical study.

The dearth of critical material on the novel and theories confers certain limitations for this research. Future researchers can explore the sociological concept of Functionalism of caste conflicts and unmask the façade of Agency of Global South women dwelling in a White community.

Discussion and Analysis

Sunjeev Sahota’s Man-Booker short-listed book is imbued with a rich canvas of towering characters enmeshed in a spectacular web work of thematic concerns which

regularly haunt the human existence. It is noteworthy that the author unconsciously amalgamates the journalistic writing style with that of fairy tale writing. This fusion is inferred by the researcher to be significant and symbolic. It is an emblem of the casteism which is explored in the research study. Casteism has been narrated by weaving a story which highlights certain journalistic accounts of casteism connoted with Indians. By portraying the issues at large of the people even in his proximity, he is able to unlock the Pandora's Box of global problems. It is an intricately woven meshwork for his delineation of one human's plight opens gateways to assess the mutual bonds of suffering and paths, or even elation as a matter of fact, of humankind. This is prevalent due to the collective experience and crude fundamentals intrinsic to each human being which break boundaries to form a collective core of human elements. Therefore, "social dislocation" (Shaw "Living by the Pen") and other "pressing social and political concerns of our times" (Shaw "Living by the Pen") seep into Sahota's books.

The novel's only female protagonist is Narinder Kaur alongside four male protagonists who despite her gender marginality looms large as a towering figure. She is a Sikhni who belongs to a family settled in Sheffield. As a second generation she is expected to Westernize rather than Indianize. Yet, eccentrically Narinder turns out to be Indian than other female characters.

Throughout the novel, Narinder is connoted with Indian roots and religious rites. "She's Sikhni" (21) affirms Randeep to his roommates, as if to intimate that her being a Sikhni guaranteed her the top most rung of piety's ladder, depriving him of any chance to stay with his visa-wife in the same house. Her virtues are accentuated by Narinder's own refutation: "'I don't care what Vakeelji said'. She shut the album and dropped it onto the settee. 'This isn't what I agreed to'." (22). Narinder is incessantly tied with religious rites that she is introduced "... in the middle of ... paat" (21) and with "the gurbani ... still

playing” (21) reflective of the intrinsic and inevitable sound of the throbbing of one’s veins. True to form, for Narinder her gurdwara and religion is of utmost significance. Her clothes are always unembellished. “Her chunni (is) ... pinned in the traditional manner” (171). It is noteworthy that the author grants her a “traditional” attire for she is an emblem of the Indian “traditional manner”. It is perplexing to see such a “traditional” character set in the Western world. Her conventional personality interpellates her as the quintessential Indian woman. It also grants her the label “of a kind daughter” (260) as long as she fervently adheres to the mores set for an Indian woman such as being docile and a silent victim of patriarchy.

Narinder’s Samaritan image is a fixed one throughout the novel. Consequently, her exposition as a religious Sikhni merely foreshadows her role as a beacon of light for the other three male characters. True to form, she is Randeep’s visa-wife, gives lodgings to Avtar who is Randeep’s friend and cares for Tochi who is an outcast striving for success abroad. Her role as a caretaker and as a person on a spiritual quest or a Vessel is omnipresent. This trope culminates in the title of chapter number six dedicated to Narinder as “The Girl from God”, substantiating her role in Sahota’s array of characters. Furthermore, it suggests she belongs to the tier of Brahmins in the Varna model. She is always involved in charitable acts within and outside the Gurdwara. She aids the lower castes as a religious duty which evokes the stereotypical profession of Brahmins i.e. priesthood. Narinder is indeed Sahota’s priestess.

Randeep Sanghera is a gullible male character who at times is deemed to have been showered upon with excessive fortune; his fate is symbolically foreshadowed by his act of “looking out at this new world. He hadn’t realised they were so high up” (203). The inadequate realisation aligns him to the Varna tier. The novel justifies by eventually ending with Randeep “on his way to Director” (462). The former are conventionally

categorized as rulers and warriors while the latter belong to the mercantile group of traders. At the onset of the novel he falls in the mercenary category of Vaishyas as his father works a menial job. They are not nobility or rulers yet the novel ends with Randeep atop other castes. He gradually escalates his position and acquires the commanding stature of a Director as his mother affirms that he was en route to becoming the next Director.

It is commendable that amidst all male characters, it is only Randeep who has a progressive mind. He is not immersed in the typical caste prejudice reeking within the Indian mind-set. Consequently, he does not feel any sense of abhorrence in sharing the room and, especially, food with Tochi who is a Chamaar. In addition, Tochi only trusts Randeep with his private information. He confides in Randeep regarding the proposal and even asks him to translate Narinder's letter. This reconfirms Randeep's educated and modern outlook on casteism. He pays no heed to the metanarrative of prejudice unlike Avtar.

Avtar Nijjar, a highly dexterous and laborious individual is introduced to the reader as one. Avtar's act of quenching his thirst denotes hard labour. "Downstairs, he went through the beaded curtain and found Avtar gulping straight from the tap" (6). Due to financial constraints, he could not even afford the basic amenities of life, even water. A lack of resources and monetary instability intimates larger social concerns: economic disparity and an unequal distribution of resources for people like Avtar who do not belong to a high caste. To make both ends meet, he worked an oxen life. "One job was enough. He didn't know how Avtar managed two" (7). Despite that, Avtar fails to attain a high rank in the Indian society because of his low caste. Hence, deemed to be a Vshatriyas, at a lower tier in the Varna model. Though rated as merchants and traders, a level higher than the working class Sudras, Avtar can be inferred as such because of the labour he

practices, Avtar's fate unfurls itself according to the doctrines of Varna which confer surplus benefits to Brahmins and Kshatriyas only.

Sahota formally introduces Avtar as "Avtar Nijjar, former student and now the youngest conductor employed by BUTA Travel, held on to the rubber loop above the door and leaned out of the bus" (102). The text questions the distribution of intrinsic needs, such as education. Why does it remain scanty for the lower caste? Why Avtar remains devoid of lucrative education even when he migrates. He is ironically registered as a visa student but lives barred from education by dint of financial pressure. He carries the label of "former student" forever. "The youngest conductor" denotes that he is newly-hired, as a bread-winner of the immigrant family, a tradition that hurls him into the jaws of illegal immigration. He burns midnight oil in Sheffield to fend for his family swelling back in India which does not facilitate caste to affluency. The impact of that Indian taboo is so strong that it does not permit any social change in this caste-hierarchy or mindset. Avtar's lifestyle abroad is the same as it was in India. He works in multiple shifts, immersed in a gruelling routine. It is almost as if his caste is ostracised from moments of bliss, "... he couldn't go on. He was exhausted" (448). His kidney failure alludes to his financial and emotional condition. After having worked so diligently, his body gives up on him as if the physical self was aware of the Varna discrimination. "he couldn't go on" striving against the Transcendental norm of caste injustice. Hence, falters towards the end.

Tochi on the other hand, seems a contention for his life depicts tragic waste in its utmost sense. Interestingly, he is the only character whose caste has been revealed by the author. His caste becomes his identity and haunts him akin to a menacing shadow. He is labelled and introduced as a Chamaar. His caste is tantamount to a second skin which becomes his identity as the Jewish star during the Nazi regime. Sahota incessantly refers

to Tochi as a Chamaar in the novel, yet all characters prefer silence when referring to Tochi. The word Chamaar is almost hissed by all characters to shun Tochi away from privileges. His caste is low, hence the Untouchable. He is fated to remain at bay from all advantages in life. The Untouchability connoted with a Chamaar reeks in social, personal, economic and religious domains. As a result, the Gurdwara bars its doors on Tochi. He is robbed of salvation or spiritual tranquillity. "...he could (not) sit in peace and close his eyes for a while" (212) in a religious building even. The Chamaar is seen as an embodiment of filth.

The temple scene of Tochi resonates how the respective local temple refused to allow entry to Sunny Leone's parents for her choice to be an actress of adult films. It is felt to be sardonic that the temple opens its doors to thieves like Avtar but not dexterous men like Tochi or helpless parents who were equally alien to the daughter's plans as the other temple-goers.

By dint of such depiction, Sahota unveils the hypocrisy of religious institutions which play the role of sturdy Ideological State Apparatuses. They disseminate myths in society under the guise of piety which are legitimized by their powerful stature. As a result, the priestly Brahmin strata monopolizes ideologies which confer them all the success and bliss. Whereas, the Dalit community is ostracized or cast out. True to form, the only time Tochi agrees to visit the Gurdwara to appease Narinder, he is mirthlessly kicked out reaffirming the bigotry inherent in Indian religious paradigms. This justifies Tochi's nihilistic aversion for religious institutions. The priests become demi-gods or Fates and dictate the thread work of his life. Tochi is also pushed aside from many other opportunities at advancing merely based on his caste. It is felt that Tochi is par excellence. The rate of his brilliance amalgamated with hard work guarantees economic success for Tochi the most in comparison to other characters but it is felt that Sahota

weaves a plot which mirrors the Indian casteism. Consequently, Tochi is ousted from Sheffield and sent back to the squalor of a remote Indian town to serve the Varna model. It is implied that the Varna Model is evidently prevalent and controls even immigrants who are bound to Robotic decisions. All the Varna ranking characters stay in Sheffield in order to prosper. The geographical expulsion of Tochi is redolent of how the Chamaars are not enlisted in the Varna model even.

When analysed against Coser and Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory, the narrative effectively pulls of the demarcated boundaries. Hegemonic agencies create groups which fall into two categories, viz the dominant and privileged group, and the marginal and subservient group. The novel is replete with consistent mentioning of "apneh" (20) which always abandons the Untouchable. Since Tochi is not one of the "apneh", he exists as a solitary caste, almost an exiled caste. His façade is also transparent at the time of the marriage proposal when his dialect betrays him as a subaltern. The girl's father roars "... I don't know any of our people, especially if he's a doabi like he claims (Tochi), who would say "sold" in the way he did. *Vho bikhegiya* instead of *eh bichdah*" (308). Subalterity thereby is coded and decoded through cultural emblems. For example, language, dressing etc. This grouping ensures caste purity amongst Indians who have a conviction in the Varna model. Such belonging is ingrained. "Answers that our people would know in their bones" (308) when not employed make Tochi an alien to their "people". Social discourses reflect identities formulated and guarded by a specific strata of each communal group. Such a strategy ensures Varna Model functions in terms of ethnic cleansing as well as allocation of resources for the rightful group. Therefore, the significant information is only confined to their chosen people so that Tochi or any other non-Varna caste fails infiltrating the structure.

The text also highlights the process of Legitimizing Myths. The Indian community accepts myths as an acknowledged and propagated Transcendental truth. The myth suggests a subtle undertone of falsehood which is made legitimate by various supporting ideological and repressive agents ranging from religion to police. Usually these myths are formulated by hegemonic groups to create a self-serving chasm in the gorge of society. The dominant group creates an ideology. It is then imparted consciously and unconsciously at full throttle and with utmost rigour that it becomes interweaved in the collective unconscious psych of humans who either enhance or refute it with hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths or hierarchy-attenuating legitimizing myths, respectively.

Furthermore, the discourse of casteism is uplifted and promoted by “The Sena Logh” who employ brutal force to achieve their goal. Use of violence and conflict is used as an effective strategy by groups to attain their aspirations. Likewise, “a bright white banner twisted itself across the brambles. Bharat is for the pure of blood and blood we will shed to keep it pure” (44). This Indian discourse is reiterated by Repressive State Agents of India in the form of fascist political parties who incessantly recur the notion lest it diminishes. “‘Let there be no doubt’, the speaker went on, as if someone had turned up the volume. ‘We will fight to keep our country pure ... It will be a day for the pure only. So the pure can enjoy the parks and the streets as Ishvar intended’” (55). It is noteworthy that the Mehshwar Sena employs two strategies. Firstly, it utilizes the concept of purity to allure support. There is a stark divide uttered betwixt the “pure” and the impure i.e. the Untouchables. Purity is a coveted state which no human soul eschews from. Hence, the Sena party blatantly tells the masses to choose between a state of purity and filth. Secondly, it relies upon the hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myth of religious ideology under the pretext of casteism being what “Ishvar intended”. With the aid of a religious discourse the party is smug about adherence to its malevolent manifesto for

religion is always seen as infallible and an authentic source of enlightenment. Consequently, Indians fall back on the propagation of Varna and Jat as documented in Bhagva Gita; hence a holy and inevitable rule presented by “Ishvar”. It is conspicuous that political hegemonic powers such as the Sena misuse the legitimizing myth of casteism to fulfil their heinous motives of oligarchy. This reflects Sahota’s insight into “the dangers posed by the rise of right-wing groups in India” (Roy “Nilanjana S Roy”) who rely on religious myths to “fan the flames of anger into deadly explosions of violence” (Roy “Nilanjana S Roy”).

While the novel sketches a crude form of Indian Varna casteism, the author draws a parallel narrative of its reversal. As a result, the depiction of Indian psyche is not sans a reformative mirroring. Throughout the novel, characters treat each other maliciously in the legitimized guise of casteism. However, Randeep and Narinder are not amongst them as both share food with Tochi contrary to the accepted act of letting Untouchables only eat leftovers of higher castes. Moreover, cultural needs example food can travel down the chain of hierarchy, not up as is evident when Tochi offers food to the Brahmin Narinder: “As long as you don’t mind eating leftovers” (423). This reflects the reversal of casteism as not only does a Brahmin Varna eat food with a Dalit, but also accepts it from him. This marks the first, rather only, smiling moment of Tochi in the novel. “He had such a quick, easy smile...” (423) which is never flashed earlier due to the harrowing pressure of the Transcendental myth of casteism which crushes him under its weight. Or for a split second he becomes the Brahmin Bestower or perhaps he feels good that he has served a Brahmin.

The epilogue of the novel acts as a seal of finality to denote the looming and unsurpassable influence of the metanarrative of Varna. The epilogue reintroduces characters in a flash forward style to depict a futuristic narrative that gives a closure to the

novel. Interestingly, the string of characters is woven in compliance to the hierarchy of caste. Narinder, the Brahmin representative is introduced first, followed by the Kshatriyas Randeep and finally the Vaishyas Avtar. All these characters, entitled to be in the Varna structure, reside in Sheffield with a vast vista of impending future. Ironically and alas, the Untouchable Tochi is mentioned last, as if ousted from Sheffield. The epilogue hurls him back to India, mirroring the design of fate in India which has an intricately woven tapestry of casteism. It is also ironic that Tochi's final residence is in proximity to the vast sea, mocking his confined existence at the behest of Varna and what "Ishvar (had always) intended" (55) for him.

Tochi fails to achieve a home in India or be accepted by the Host at Sheffield. His plight is redolent of Maki Kureishi's split and rootlessness depicted via animal imagery in "Kittens": "Snagged / by two cultures; which / shall I choose?" (Mahajan "The Dalit Subject"). Similar traces are resonated in Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands", who could not come to terms with the India of his personal experience and that of the evolved one he encountered later in life. The notion of a home got dismantled for each of the aforementioned resulting in being devoid of a foothold. The critical discussion of this text explicates the reason behind Avtar's devolution and apparent complacency as a justification provided by the grand mythological narrative of Indian heritage. It is evident through Coser and Dahrendorf's Conflict theory that Power is an individual trait but Authority is conferred by a status, position or honourary title. Authority is symbolic of a social organisation. Consequently, Tochi lacks authority but may be the bearer of Dahrendorf's version of Power. So can be Avtar and Narinder.

In addition to that, the novel is shown by the research to depict symbolic Quasi-Groups in the form of Indian Immigrants in Sheffield. Whilst Real Interest Groups take the form of Indian nationalists in the novel.

Conclusion

Sunjeev Sahota's novel is inferred to be a realistic depiction of persistent caste discrimination rooted in the Indian psyche. It is also an indictment of the malevolent notion which is merely imparted to sustain discord in society so that the hegemonic powers i.e. upper castes can relish all prerogatives conferred in life.

Research manifests the dwindling effect of casteism in India. It is noted that the rural areas still cling onto the Varna model unlike the intellectual urban dwellers but this "...does not mean that caste is illegal or has faded away" (Johnson "Jati: The Caste"). "Indians still often identify themselves by the community they belong to" (Johnson "Jati: The Caste") because the reins of Varnas have control over the collective unconscious rendering them to be prejudiced against the lower castes. Caste is of paramount importance as it "...may provide psychological support that people seem to need" (Johnson "Jati: The Caste") in order to justify their malignant behaviour as is contested in the research study. Albeit, "economists and political scientists are finding that caste is no real barrier to economic development or political democracy" (Johnson "Jati: The Caste").

By and large, the research objective is to prove that class structures are in a state of incessant flux only for the castes ranked in the Varna model, excluding the Dalit community. Moreover, humans are structured within by religion, money, morality and convention. All the aforementioned, blatantly or covertly, intimate and aid Varna casteism. Consequently, it is evident that humans cannot free themselves as they are not genetically, but socially withheld; dictated by the social mores of Varna discrimination and bigotry. The researcher contends that it is not a "different world that exists inside

England” (Mudge “Sunjeev Sahota”) but the same world of South Asian nepotism and caste conflicts hover as daunting shadows over the characters in the North of England.

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