

## **SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN MODERNIST LITERATURE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A significant departure from conventional narrative structures and an in-depth examination of the intricacies of the human condition characterized the rise of modernist literature in the late 19th and early 20th century. When one group of individuals in a society is treated unfairly and suffers disadvantages, this is referred to as social injustice. Significant social, political, and technological developments during this time led authors to address issues of social injustice, identity, and alienation. A variety of social issues that surfaced in the aftermath of World War I were addressed by modernist writers. This essay explores how, in response to the turbulent times of their day, modernist authors tackled social injustices such as racial inequity, gender oppression, and class inequality.

**KEYWORDS-** Class Disparity, Racial Inequality, Gender Oppression, Stream of Consciousness, Fragmentation, Repressed Social content

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Rapid industrialization, World War I, and changes in social mores all influenced the modernist movement. Sharp social disparities were brought to light by the disillusionment that followed the war and the growth of urbanization. In response to these shifts, authors used creative storytelling strategies to express their disapproval of social systems. Many authors in English literature have written extensively about these social injustices and evils, which are to blame for the general development of women and society.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Compared to earlier times, Modernist literature now enables authors to express themselves in the most inventive and imaginative manner. Novelists like Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad, and Henry James experimented with writing styles in the early 20th century by using changes in time and narrative point of view. Gertrude Stein investigated the potential for writing literary works that deviated from accepted referential and syntactical conventions. They believed that the rapid social change and the new generation that sprang from it could not be adequately reflected by the traditional forms of writing.

Prose experiments were also influenced by modernism in literature. Additionally, they incorporated individualism as a fundamental trait known as "stream of consciousness." James Joyce and Virginia Woolf are the authors who best exemplify this trait in action. Poetry examples include the works of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH**

Around the world, inequality is at the heart of political and economic discussions. In addition to other criteria including gender, age, origin, ethnicity, handicap, and sexual orientation, its effect is measured by income, wealth, or expenditure. The lottery of birth is the root cause of inequality since one's place of birth determines the resources and opportunities that are accessible to them. Eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and behaviours is the primary

goal. By examining identity and eliminating gender bias, it also contributes to a broader understanding of the world and the development of literature. More openness, diversity, and representation in the literary world have been made possible by the majority of female writers' challenges to social standards.

Ensuring fair treatment for all, encouraging positive interactions between the two groups, and changing how society views various issues. As per Aristotle's principle, "equals should be treated equally and unequals unequally," it implies.

## **INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL INJUSTICE**

The underlying source of social injustice is the structural inequity that exists within a society. A constitutional democratic state has confirmed distributive failure or preferred discrimination, monopoly capitalism, amassing corporatism, the caste system in India, racial discrimination in western societies, and exclusionary identity politics influenced by one nation-one culture theories of nationality formation in many global societies. In addition, inequality refers to the inability to obtain material advancements, objective accomplishments, and citizenship rights due to social discrimination and distinction based on social stationing. Injustice and inequality are the outcomes of a state's socio-political and economic policies. Exclusion in all its forms appears to be the main source of social inequality. Exclusion is inherently associated with unequal access to freedom, liberty, and justice. It is linked to identity politics and economic discrimination at the same time. Seldom do socially marginalized groups have the autonomy to make their own decisions. Marginalization leads to deprivation and lack of fair access to chances in life.

Social inequality in India is caused by a number of factors, including poverty, social marginalization, class inequality, racial inequality, gender oppression, and cultural prejudice. In terms of access to resources and skill sets, discrimination can take many different forms, from caste inequities to class and community differences.

These kinds of things can be found in Virginia Woolf's writings; she was among the first to use the stream-of-consciousness narrative technique to depict her characters' nuanced inner lives. Her work is also heavily influenced by other contemporary subjects, such as the war, devastation, and the importance of socioeconomic class. Some of her prominent works are *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To The Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1931).

## **THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE**

Fraser (2005) distinguished between three aspects of social justice, which are predicated on the idea that all people are created equal and that there should be no discrimination based on caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, or place of birth. It implies that there are connections between the various facets of justice. This serves as a framework to direct their comprehension of justice in the context of modern technologies.

**Redistribution:** This dimension is predicated on resources, such as social, health, and educational resources. Transferring income and wealth (including tangible property) from one person to another by a social mechanism like taxation, welfare, public services, land reform, monetary policy, and confiscation, divorce, or tort law is known as redistribution of income and wealth.

**Recognition:** Equal respect for various identities, genders, and cultures is the foundation of this dimension. A philosophy of social justice known as recognition justice places a strong emphasis on acknowledging the differences between subaltern communities and the dominant society as well as human dignity.

**Representation:** Equal participation in decisions that impact people's lives is the foundation of this dimension. The term "representation" describes how people, organizations, or concepts are portrayed or symbolized in a variety of mediums, especially art. This idea is essential to comprehending the communication and validation of identities and experiences, which frequently shape cultural narratives and society perspectives.

## **TYPES OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE FOUND IN THE SOCIETY**

1. Class Disparity
2. Racial Inequality
3. Gender Oppression
4. Stream of Consciousness
5. Fragmentation
6. Symbolism
7. Social Dynamic and Care
8. Repressed Social content

**1. Class Disparity:** This phrase describes how different classes within a society differ in terms of wealth, income, education, and opportunity. T.S. Eliot and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who explored the gap between social strata in *The Waste Land* and *The Great Gatsby*, are among the writers who have used this term in their works. Fitzgerald criticizes the American Dream, exposing the hollowness beneath wealth and social standing, while Eliot depicts a fractured society that reflects the disenchantment of the lower classes.

**2. Racial Inequality:** This speaks to a society's unequal distribution of wealth, power, and economic opportunity among races. Zora Neale Hurston, a member of the larger modernist movement, Langston Hughes, and foreground African American voices are among the authors who have used this word in their writing. Hurston's novels honour Black culture and address structural racism, while Hughes' poetry depicts the fight against racial oppression. Their writings promote social justice and contest the prevailing myths of their era.

**3. Gender Oppression:** This is referred to as oppression connected to a society's gender norms, relationships, and hierarchy. Gender oppression is defined as "unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power" by Webster. For example, Barnes examines sexuality and the limitations imposed on women, emphasizing the need for autonomy and acknowledgment, while Virginia Woolf uses her characters' internal conflicts to highlight her consciousness approach.

**4. Stream of Consciousness:** William James, a psychologist, originally used the term "stream of consciousness" in the *Principle of Psychology* in 1893. This technique highlights the protagonists' psychological battles against social norms while giving readers a true glimpse into their inner thoughts. Among the novels are:

*Ulysses*-James Joyce

*The Sound and the Fury* – William Faulkner

*The Waves*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the lighthouse*- Virginia Woolf

### **5. Fragmentation:**

Due to the shifting social, political, and cultural climate of the era, fragmentation first appeared in the early 20th century. The fragmented narrative form successfully conveys the

characters' social estrangement while reflecting the volatility of contemporary life and the complexity of identity. Prominent authors from the modernist era include Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and T.S. Eliot.

**6. Symbolism:** The green light in *The Great Gatsby*, which stands for unachievable dreams and societal boundaries, is one example of how modernist literature frequently used symbols to symbolize more significant social issues. Major literary examples include the following: a butterfly symbolizes change, a dog can represent devotion, red flowers signify love, a rainbow represents hope, a dove represents peace, and the colours white and black stand for purity, evil, and romance, respectively.

## **7. Social Dynamic and Care**

The dynamic of care and dependency is frequently examined in modernist writing, emphasizing the difficulties faced by those who are more susceptible. Works such as William Faulkner's *Sound and the Fury* and Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* show how interdependency affects human experiences by bringing to light the frequently disregarded themes of care and infirmity. Modernist writings have been re-examined in light of the #metoo movement, revealing the ways in which writers like as Virginia Wolf and TS Eliot tackled issues of patriarchal tyranny and sexual abuse. This viewpoint makes it possible to comprehend the trauma story in modernist writing on a deeper level.

## **8. Repressed Social content:**

Scholars contend that important social material is frequently suppressed within modernist narratives, in contrast to previous criticisms that declared modernism apolitical. For example, Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* serves as an example of how social historical components can be identified via Marxist analysis, exposing the social critique that underlies modernist art.

## **SOME WAYS TO GET RID OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE OR SOLUTIONS TO SOCIAL INJUSTICE**

A holistic strategy that addresses the underlying causes and strengthens underprivileged communities is needed to address social injustice. Even if the path to justice could be difficult, there are a number of viable methods that could help bring about constructive change.

With systematic disparities ingrained in many facets of society, social injustice is widespread. Putting in place all-encompassing, long-lasting remedies that deal with the root causes of social injustice is essential to fighting it successfully.

## **MODIFICATIONS TO POLICIES AND LEGAL REMEDIES**

Fighting social injustice requires passing and upholding legislation that upholds human rights, encourages equality, and guarantees equal opportunity. A more equitable society can be achieved by policies that eradicate discriminatory practices, encourage diversity and inclusion, and address economic inequities.

## **ACTIVISM AND GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS**

Activism and grassroots movements have been essential in promoting social change. People and communities that are directly impacted by social injustice frequently spearhead these movements, organizing to oppose repressive structures and fight for their rights. Through grassroots initiatives, social injustice is brought to light, encouraging others to support the cause. Activists can exert pressure on institutions and call for significant change by planning demonstrations, rallies, and neighbourhood gatherings. Additionally, grassroots

movements give underrepresented voices a forum, enhancing their experiences and promoting unity among many communities.

## **EDUCATION'S FUNCTION IN FIGHTING SOCIAL INJUSTICE**

One effective strategy for eliminating social unfairness is education. Encouraging equitable and inclusive educational systems can enable people and communities to fight against prejudice and stand up for their rights.

Fostering empathy, comprehension, and cultural awareness requires education. We can foster a sense of social responsibility and motivate future generations to actively pursue social justice by educating pupils about the historical and current challenges of oppressed communities.

In order to guarantee equal access to high-quality education, educational institutions must give underprivileged students resources and support. By tackling the structural obstacles that impede educational chances, we can create a more egalitarian society.

## **CONCLUSION**

The societal inequities of their era were brought to light in large part by modernist writers. They questioned the current quo and gave voice to underrepresented groups with their creative narrative approaches and in-depth examinations of gender, race, and class. Their work is still relevant today and continues to spark conversations about human rights and social justice. The fundamental tenets of modernism are honesty in expression, simplicity, and logic, which establish a new liberation from limitations.

Even though modernist authors frequently emphasize individual subjectivity, their writings also touch on more general social concerns, pointing to a nuanced interaction between the individual's and society's experiences in the contemporary period.

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