

**Analysis Of Caste Based Discrimination In Kali's Daughter: A Novel By Raghav Chandra**

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**Abstract**

This paper presents the contemporary Indian society where caste based discrimination is one of the evils. Many changes have been occurred but the unequal treatment on the basis of caste is still exists. It is described by Raghav Chandra in his novel Kali's Daughter that we have not done much work for the true development of the country. The lower castes of India is still facing indifferent situations even at the Indian Administrative Services training academy, Mussoorie – one of the prestigious training academies of the world. A Dalit girl who experiences brutality and cruelty in her childhood and teenage; even in her adulthood also when she is undergoing IAS training. She explores and learns many things in the academy and the foreign countries. She gets humiliation and dishonor by the upper castes, but she chooses the road to clemency. She feels privileged after doing life giving act. She refuses her seniors and colleagues and presents the real image of India at the United Nations. In brief, the paper ends with few suggestions could be done in the direction of the eradication of the caste based discrimination in India.

**Keywords:** Caste, discrimination, upper, lower, Indian, humiliation.

**Introduction**

Many reformers protested against the social evils such as *Sati Partha*, *Child Marriage* and *Widow Remarriage* and they got success too. The Caste System, is one of the evils in Indian Subcontinent, is not ended yet. When it is challenged by the victims of this unjust system, the challenge and protest is subdued by the Upper Caste Hindus. Rather it (Caste System) was protected by the upper castes. The radical change came in view when Dr. B. R. Ambedkar took this issue on international level. He demanded equality and liberty and separate electorate for the untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar defended the untouchables on every front. Consequently, the Upper Castes agreed on equal treatment of the untouchables

who were exploited for centuries. In independent India, it is announced from the Red Fort that everyone is equal in front of law and deserve respect. No discrimination on the basis of the caste, color, sex, language, sect, creed etc. will be entertained. It was only announcement because, as we know, it is India, there are mere words not actions. In a research on the topic of Caste & Untouchability, Luigi sx states: “Laws can help check atrocities if those entrusted with the enforcement of the law implement them. But Government officers dominated by upper caste people lack the will to enforce the law (164).” After constitutional reforms the caste based social discrimination is not decreased, in contrary it is aggravated. We saw, and can see, many incidents of discrimination, unequal treatment, abuses, heinous crimes, riots, skirmishes and fights on the basis of caste is happening across the country .

From 1947 to 2019, there are a plethora of changes had occurred throughout the world in general and India in particular. We human being had sent our space probe (a robotic spacecraft that does not orbit earth, but instead, explores further into outer space) into interstellar, we made virtual world, Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) and many more. But no major changes happened into the caste based discrimination. We are living in an age of Digital India but we don't know how to respect each and every person and we cannot behave on equal terms with a labor, a sweeper, a toilet cleaner and a scavenger. Because all these professions (profession is exaggeration, in fact these are mere menial jobs) were done by the Untouchables for centuries and in present also. Therefore, it seems uncanny because Indians – Indians Politicians and Dignitaries – are boasting that our country is great and incredible. But, in reality, the worst social system exists in this country in the world.

To abolish and diminish this disease – caste system – many changes have been done on the level of law, instead of the changes the caste based discrimination is proliferating day after day. In 2019, we are debating on this evil, this means something left to do and there is still much work to be done. The real picture of modern India particularly at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), where the brilliant minds of India reside, is presented in *Kali's Daughter: A novel* by Raghav Chandra. The harsh and cruel reality of Indian society is depicted.

We can say that this is not the first novel which describes about caste based discrimination because many writers described it in their writings such as Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and many more, but their efforts were not able to change the attitudes of the narrow minded upper castes (so called savarnas). Another thing is that which surprises a lot, we are wiring on this theme of caste based discrimination in New and Clean

India of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. Indeed, the discrimination, on the basis of caste, does exist in our society and in our minds. It cannot be ignored, therefore, it is essential to write on this theme.

## Raghav Chandra

Raghav Chandra, a retired IAS officer, was secretary to the Government of India. He holds master's degrees in Mathematics and Public Administration from Delhi University and Harvard University respectively. He writes and lectures about inclusive growth, management and sustainability, and has been published widely. He has authored two novels – *Scent of a Game* (2014) about wildlife hunting (esp. tiger poaching), management and conservation and *Kali's Daughter* (2019) a novel about caste and courage. He is the Director of the Bhopal Literature and Art Festival. The review is very apt:

“Raghav Chandra is superbly adept in holding a mirror to our society, bringing into focus, with unnerving clarity, all our hypocrisies, racism and deeply embedded casteism (ii)” - Sumit Mullick, author and Chief Information Commissioner of Maharashtra.

## Kali's Daughter: A Novel

The *Kali's Daughter* is a depiction of prejudiced and hypocrite society. The novel presents the story of a Dalit girl named Deepika Thakur, the protagonist. She passes the All India Civil Services Examination and goes to join the training at LBSNAA, Mussoorie. There she meets many young persons who also trainees there; makes friends among the trainees. She likes and loves two batch mates named Aman, high caste and Vijay, a Dalit like her. She remembers her past life, her ill-treatment by the upper castes in school and college. She learns many things and enjoys a lot at the academy but she finds caste based discrimination in the academy too. She experiences that few batch mates don't behave in good manner. In the final days at the academy, she faces discrimination and humiliation by the Aman's mother, who had come with her husband to attend final ceremonies. Mrs. Acharya, Aman's mother, asks Deepika about her caste and surname origin. Deepika feels disrespect and humiliation subsequently, she makes distance with Aman. Another side Vijay shows full respect and love towards Deepika, consequently their love for each other grows

up. But they have to fall apart after completion of their Foundation Course (FC) and special trainings and postings at different places. In the final chapters of the novel, Mr. Acharya suffers from a severe disease and their family doctor recommends to go a Doctor Moya in Barcelona, Spain who had specialized in disease modifying therapy and alternative remedies to resuscitate normal functioning without attendant risks. Finally, there in Spain, Deepika helps to a great extent of Acharya Family and donates her blood for Mr. Acharya and saves his life. Deepika feels privileged and the life-giving act is a symbol of victory for Deepika and people of her community.

The novel starts with a prologue and depicts the worried and anxious protagonist at the United Nations. She has to present the UNHRC Report. The entire story goes on in the flashback. The novel ends with an epilogue where she has done what she could have done. The protagonist is a courageous and bold girl, who never gives up. But the society compels her to feel inferior and timid. This is all because of her low caste birth. Her father changes his family's surname from Chamar to Thakur. The new high-sounding surname (Thakur) is suggested by Ranjit Singh, a veterinary officer. The officer suggests this because surname can avoid first layer social discrimination. He tells to Premkishan, Deepika's father: "We Indians boast that we invented zero and astronomy. But, the truth is quite different. Our great Indian head is stuffed with two big things: *Gobar* and *Jaat* (17)."

### **Caste-Based Discrimination**

This is the reality of Indian society that Indians are concerned with the caste. In India, people can change their attitude suddenly when they come to know the caste of someone. It is described by Omprakash Valmiki in his autobiography that once he and his wife were returning from Jaipur to home by train. They were sitting in their compartment with another couple. They were conversing passionately since then the train had started, but after sometime another woman asked Valmiki's wife *kon jaat ho*(Which caste)?. Immediately, Omprakash Valmiki answered Valmiki Jaat. After this instance, stillness spread throughout the compartment and nobody had spoken a word until the last station because the other couple was Rajputs. This is the mindset/attitude of upper castes (so called *Savarnas*).

The attitude of the upper castes towards the lower castes is oppressive and exploitative in nature because the upper castes do not want to improve the conditions of

lower castes. In the novel, at LBSNAA one high caste trainee tells another trainee:

“‘What’s common to both Dalits and Boobs?’  
‘They both stick out?’  
‘Close’, said Rajesh with a smile. ‘Think!’  
‘No idea at all’.  
‘God created both – ONLY TO BE PRESSED’ (104).”

This is the mindset of the educated upper castes towards the Dalits. They think lower castes are only to use, to exploit and to oppress.

Aman, one of the two lovers of Deepika, introduces Deepika to his family in the final days at the academy. At this moment, Deepika encounters the brutal face of sophisticated people and fake intellectuals. Aman’s mother speaks well in the beginning but she is eager to know about Deepika's caste because she cannot allow a lower caste girl into their home and kitchen. She asks again and again about Deepika's high caste Thakur family. Dialogue between them states:

“‘So are you all Rajputs from ...?’  
‘No Ma’am.’  
‘But you all are Rajputs?’  
‘Not Rajputs Ma’am.’  
‘Bhumihars from Bihar?’ The Bhumihars were a land-owning class from Bihar who had very Rajput-like surnames, Thakur being one of them.  
‘No Ma’am’ (209).”

This is apparent that the upper castes are caste conscious and they cannot move a step ahead without asking the caste. It is enough until the asking about caste but the discrimination on the basis of caste is not reasonable.

## **Mercy, Dignity and Hope**

Raghav Chandra gives a kind of self dignity in the character of Deepika

Thakur. When Mr. Acharya falls ill, then Deepika does help Acharya family by donating her blood for Mr. Acharya and saves his life. “She expressed her sympathy and smiled to herself at the incredible powers of fate ... This was her turf, her moment. Advantage Deepika Thakur! (288)” She had done that thing nobody could have done for the Acharya family. Mr. Acharya shows respect to her, “You’ve done more than any of us could have done for all of us (325).”

In the epilogue, Deepika presents the report. That having been said, we accept that caste has been and is still a very major social problem in India. It will take a long time and collective effort by all Indians before India can overcome social discrimination and come clean.

“THE FACT IS THAT SOMEBODY WHO HAS NOT FELT PAIN SHOULDN’T TALK ABOUT IT (330).”

This statement applies correctly on the upper castes of India. They haven’t felt sufferings on the unreasonable basis. They are becoming more brutal rather changing their attitude towards the lower castes. It is fact that Dr. B.R.Ambedkar plays a great role making life better for the Dalits.

Deepika says:

“I’m inclined to agree with Vijay. If Ambedkar hadn’t been so Outspoken about the *Manu Smriti*, nobody would’ve known how cruel we Hindus have been. Imagine, prescribing cutting off of tongues and pouring molten lead into the ears of Dalits who recited or heard the Vedas.’ (300)”

In this novel, the novelist not only portrayed the image of damned society, alongside he hinted at few steps and ways could transform the society into a friendly and lovely one. “Was clemency not the sweetest revenge in itself? (317)” The mercy is good for everyone. We know what Alexander Pope says in *An Essay on Criticism*, “To err is human; to forgive divine”. We should not take revenge doing tyranny on the helpless. If we can help one

another, then we could make check on the spreading enmity between the high castes and the low castes. As Mr. and Mrs. Acharya say to Deepika:

“‘Applause to you, for being successful in helping us, Deepika (324).’

‘Welcome to our *parivaar*’, ‘Have home meals with us each day you are here’, ‘You can come over at any time’, ‘We’ll wait for you (325).’

‘We mustn’t let our past or the thoughts of our future affect our lives in the present (326).’”

This was the attitude of Mrs. Acharya after getting help – life giving help – from Deepika.

As we know that in the present time every one is not casteist and people has been started to change their attitude, but not a major change has happened. In the novel, Aman Acharya is not a casteist person and he understands and respects the life of Deepika Thakur. The demand of time is that Indians have to change their mindset, they have to leave pride and prejudice and hypocrisy. As Indians are experts in imitation, they had imitated the fashion, eating etiquettes and living styles of the Westerns but not the mentality. Therefore, we should imitate the liberal, open and positive mentality of the Westerns.

In the novel, it is stated that we do not need to conquer the Moon and the Mars and to grab a permanent place in the United Nations Security Council. At first we need to conquer domestic poverty and inequality. The need to provide safe drinking water to poor *bastis* where women stand in the line for hours.

“In the logo of the Clean India Campaign, the lens of Gandhiji’s glass be replaced with the human rights lens? (307)”

“Charity begins at home. Before we embrace the world we should embrace those who live in our country (307).”

It shows miser and pitiable condition of India. Therefore, it is illogical and untruthful to make a confident statement that there is no longer caste based discrimination in India.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we cannot deny that caste based social discrimination is no more in India. We have to understand the plight of the lower castes that how they had suffered and exploited for centuries. Now, in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have achieved and won many things; in this series we have to eradicate the exploitative caste system. The contemporary reality of Indian society is depicted by Raghav Chandra is not appreciable but he has portrayed what is going on inside the society. *Kali's Daughter* is a very apt novel in presenting the harsh reality of our contemporary society. We could make change in this image of society through adapting new positive ideas. Indeed we are the only, can propagate liberty, fraternity and equality into our society.

“*Kali's Daughter* exposes the curse of India – the caste system – which needs to be challenged in all its aspects, if India has to make its mark in the twenty-first century. Enriched by Raghav's vast experience in bureaucracy, this thought-provoking novel, lucidly written, has contemporary relevance. The author understands of the nuances of caste discrimination in life and in bureaucracy is commendable. The novel is a masterpiece, a must-read' – Ajit Kumar, Ambassador and Former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations in Geneva (Chandra i)”

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