

## A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CASTE SYSTEM IN MUNSHI PREMCHAND'S *DELIVERANCE*

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### Abstract

*Munshi Premchand's short story Deliverance (Sadgati) portrays the theme of the caste system during the pre-independent time. Dukhi, the protagonist of the short story remains a dejected and down casted figure through the central part of the story. He remained a tragic character and had to bear the brunt of his low caste. The upper class continues to take advantage of his poor and simplified nature. The theme of untouchability is also poignant in this short story. Many questions arise while dealing with the caste system with no clear-cut answers from the writers and observers.*

**Keywords:** *untouchability, caste, upper class, clear-cut and pre-independent*

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*Deliverance* (*Sadgati*) is a sad and downhearted story written by Munshi Premchand in the year 1931. Satyajit Ray completed the film version of the sad story on Indian television in 1981.

In their roles as colonized artists (Premchand writing in a pre-independent India and Ray filming in a post-independent India), both Prem Chand and Ray exhibit the same compulsion to show how colonialism and racism are structures which promote what Edward said so eloquently defines as “ the difference between familiar ‘us’ and strange ‘them’”.

- Darius Cooper 15-20

We come across the pitiful state of Dukhi from the opening to the end of Premchand's short story “*Deliverance*”. Dukhi became a guinea pig in the hands of the upper caste society. His tragic downfall does not have any remorse for anyone around society. Dukhi's worst treatment does not feel any light to humanity.

Dukhi, the tanner wanted to visit Pandit Ghasi Ram's house to set a date for his daughter's engagement. We find they are in a dilemma as there was no cost to seat for Pandit ji.

“They don't lend us even fire for lighting, and you expect them to lend us a cot! If I ask for water at the house of a Kaistha, I won't get it. No question of getting a cot.”

Right from the first section of the story, we find that Dukhi and his wife Jhuria were deprived because of their low caste. Still, they have to bear the harsh reality that the evil society engraved upon them.

In the second section of the story, we find Panditji listening to Dukhi's words and showering lots of tasks:

And take the broom and sweep the door. The sitting room hasn't been plastered for many days. Plaster it with dung. By then I shall finish my food, then after resting for a while I shall come. And yes, chop this log of wood into small pieces. And there're four sacks of straw in the field. Bring those also and put them in the hay store.

We can understand how many tasks and responsibilities Dukhi has to bear within his own head. He had to undergo the herculean task of listening to his master at the cost of his love for his daughter.

Dukhi rushes into the house of Panditji for fire. Upon entering the house, the priest's wife was furious as to why a tanner could have entered the house and spoke the following lines:

“How can a chamar enter a brahmin's house!”

To everyone's surprise, she even threw burning wood towards Dukhi. In the words of Sargent Shriver,

“If education does not create a need for the best in life, then we are stuck in an undemocratic, rigid caste society.”

In the third section, we find, Dukhi has not eaten anything since the morning and Panditji provokes Dukhi to cut the wood with his axe. He is bound to follow Panditji's command.

Dukhi picked up the axe once again. He forgot everything. His stomach was beginning to touch his back. He had eaten nothing the whole day, for he hadn't got time for this. He was unable to stand up, yet he argued with himself: He's a brahmin, and if he fixes an inauspicious day, all will be ruined. That's why people respect them. Everything depends on them.

We find Dukhi tired and exhausted and had relinquished by now. Dukhi was dead and nobody could touch Dukhi's body as he was a tanner and here caste plays a major role in the short story.

In the fourth section we found Panditji was the person who had to drive the body of Dukhi out of the village without even touching the dead body of Dukhi.

Panditji took out a rope. He made a loop at one end slung it round the corpse's feet and pulled it to tighten it. It was still dark. Panditji caught the rope from the other end and began to pull the corpse. He dragged it out of the village. Then he came home and bathed, recited the prayer to goddess Durga and sprinkled the Ganges water all over the house.

Premchand chose Dukhi as a character to show evil dominates society like people like Pandit Ghasi Ram. In spite of doing everything for the higher caste people, the lower caste people bear the brunt of not getting a proper burial for their death. Premchand voices out the character of Dukhi, the sufferings and the atrocities he had to face and ultimately striking the last blow of death. “The subaltern cannot speak” is a famous concluding speech

from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak from the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and it is aptly indicated in this short story itself.

Caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of the mind. The teachings of the Hindu religion are the root cause of this disease. We practice casteism and we observe Untouchability because we are enjoined to do so by the Hindu religion. A bitter thing cannot be made sweet. The taste of anything can be changed. But poison cannot be changed into nectar.

- B.R. Ambedkar 1-5

The above lines are the mind-boggling speech by B.R. Ambedkar in the year 1935 and it is still effective in the present generation. His words rumbled around the audience and created a massive impact on the youths of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Every year we do celebrate Ambedkar Jayanti for the stalwart on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April.

In a report of a lecture delivered in Oakland on Monday, March 19, 1900, Swami Vivekananda delivered his message about caste in the following lines:

In brief, this caste system had grown by the practice of the son always following the business of the father. In course of time the community came thus to be divided into a series of classes, each held rigidly within its own boundaries. But while this divided the people, it also united them, because all the members of a caste were bound to help their fellows in case of need. And as no man could rise out of his caste, the Hindus have no such struggles for social or personal supremacy as embitter the people of other countries.

-The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 8/Notes Of Class Talks And Lectures/The People Of India 13-16

"Out there in the fields, jackals and vultures, dogs and crows were tearing at Dukhi's corpse. This was the reward for a life-time of devotion, service and steadfastness."

These are the concluding lines of the short story 'Deliverance' by Premchand. After undergoing a massive service done by Dukhi, he is reportedly torn down in the fields by animals and birds. How come this is the reward for Dukhi's life? Does caste bifurcate a human being and is treated with extreme offence? Does there lie no humanity beyond the caste and creed of a person? Can anybody take an act of revenge for Dukhi's death?

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