
APARTHEID AND HIDDEN-APARTHEID: A STUDY OF *KAFFIR BOY* AND DALITS IN INDIA

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Abstract: The caste-based discrimination in India is often termed as “India’s hidden apartheid”. However, apartheid is an Afrikaans term meaning “separation” used in South Africa for the policy initiated by the Nationalist Government after 1948. It literally means “apartness”, “the state of being apart”, “separation”, “segregation”, “separateness”, and in the South African context it means racial discrimination. The study compares the caste-based discrimination in India with apartheid in South Africa citing precedencies from “*Kaffir Boy*”, a text written by Mark Mathabane and examples found at large in the Indian scenario. The present paper also tries to investigate how legal system of segregation and discrimination in South Africa is equal to the illegal but still socially prevailing system of discrimination against Dalits in India.

Keywords: Apartheid, Caste-system, Discrimination, Racism.

Introduction: Apartheid had always been a device for separating and dividing the people of South Africa in order to facilitate the domination and exploitation of the majority (the blacks) by the minority (the whites). To trace the meaning of the word “Apartheid” one has to look into the history and culture of South Africa. Since it is an Afrikaans term meaning “separation” used in South Africa for the policy initiated by the Nationalist Government after 1948, it literally means “apartness”, “the state of being apart”, “separation” or “separateness”, and especially in the South African context it means racial discrimination. On the other hand, in the Indian context a similar meaning can be traced in the word “Dalit”. This word has its roots in Sanskrit where the root \sqrt{da} means ‘to split’, ‘to crack’, ‘to break’. Therefore, Dalit has come to mean things or persons who are “cut”, “broken”, “separated”, “segregated” or “marginalized”. To quote a controversial statement of the Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh (27 December, 2006) which makes a comparison between discrimination against Dalits in India and the apartheid in South Africa: Dalits have faced a unique discrimination in our society that is

fundamentally different from the problems of minority groups in general. The only parallel to the practice of 'Untouchability' was Apartheid in South Africa. Untouchability is not just social discrimination. It is a blot on humanity.[1]

It is no out of place to mention here that cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of millions of people in India have been justified on the basis of caste. The conditions and the situations faced by the 'Untouchables' in India had been the same as the condition of the 'Blacks' in South Africa during colonial rule. Nevertheless, caste discrimination against Dalits in modern India is still rampant. It is both a social fact and a political reality. It is also interesting to note that in South Africa, laws had been made by the government in order to spread discrimination as well as segregation and in order to suppress black people whereas in India, laws have been made by the government in order to stop discrimination as well as segregation against a section of society, the so called 'Dalits.

I Apartheid In South Africa:

(i) The term 'Apartheid': According to the political correspondent of the Nationalist newspaper *Die Burger*, an Afrikaner writing under the pseudonym "Dawie", on 26th March 1943, the word "apartheid" was used for the first time in a leading article in *Die Burger*. In this article, reference was made to the "Nationalists" policy of apartheid. The next use of the term was again in an article in *Die Burger* on 9th September 1943, in which mention was made of the recognized Afrikaner standpoint of apartheid. The first use of the term "apartheid" in Parliament was made on 25th January 1944 when Dr. Malan, who was the first Prime Minister of the Apartheid regime, in his republican motion described the nature of the republic which he envisaged *inter alia* as follows: To ensure the safety of the white race and of Christian civilization by the honest maintenance of the principles of apartheid and guardianship.[2]

Guma quoting Dawie in his book said that the word gained currency slowly, but shortly after the war the word became generally used especially because it was taken over untranslated into English political terminology. Naturally, this created a stir. There is no reason why a word in translation, such as, e.g. 'separation' could not have been used. Again to borrow words from Dawie, the intention would have been, "most probably to suggest, by the use of a foreign word in the English language, something foreign and ominous, something so bad that there was no word at all in English for it!".[3] He attributes the adoption of the word

apartheid to some sort of hostile motivation by “the English”, naturally regarded as unsympathetic to Afrikaner aspirations. Today, words like “Boer” and “Trek”, apartheid has become an international word and these words “Boer” and “Trek” have been found to be untranslatable in most languages because they have a specific South African or Afrikaans connotation.

(ii) The Vertical Growth of ‘Apartheid’: The word “apartheid” has no single specific meaning and this could be the one of the reasons why it has been found to be untranslatable. In fact, to this day, there has been no agreement as to what apartheid does mean exactly. To Dr. Malan, who first used it, it obviously meant something which in the first place would present the safety of the white race and of Christian civilization. The adumbration of the apartheid policy was the work of a special commission which had been appointed by the Nationalist Party and whose conclusions were embodied in a pamphlet issued by the Head Office of the Nationalist Party shortly before the end of 1947. It said, “the policy of our country should encourage total apartheid as the ultimate goal of a natural process of separate development”. Nationalist Party leaders of South Africa again stressed that the separation was not the same thing as discrimination and every national group was entitled to the basic right of self determination and they felt that South African population was not integrated and it could never become an integrated whole. Separation or apartheid was a must in order for the development of the nation.

(iii) Laws in Apartheid South Africa: South Africa had a long history of apartheid and colonialism. People always express doubts about the shocking truth of racism in South Africa. Nowhere else today is racialism so blatantly and unashamedly embraced, so brutally imposed and enforced. The system of apartheid comprised of several laws, which were made in order to spread the domination of white race and the superiority of the whites over blacks. The suppression was done sometimes hegemonically and sometimes by force. The government segregated education, medical care, houses, and other public services, and provided black people with services inferior to those of white people. Segregation was seen everywhere including parks, public beaches, park benches, toilets, buses and other public services. The sign boards of “whites only”, “non-whites only” were seen everywhere. A brief overview of some of the laws which were existing during apartheid in South Africa are as follows:-

(i) The Asiatic Registration Act of 1906: it required all Asians to get

registered and carry passes.

- (2) **The South Africa Act of 1910**: this enfranchised whites, giving them complete political control over all other race groups.
- (3) **The Native Land Act of 1913**: it restricted the amount of land available to black farmers to 13% and aimed at regulating the acquisition of land by natives.
- (4) **The Urban Areas Act of 1923**: this act introduced residential segregation for the blacks.
- (5) **The Colour Bar Act of 1926**: it prevented any black from practicing skilled trades.
- (6) **The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949**: this act prohibited marriages between people of different races.
- (7) **The Immorality Act of 1950**: it made sexual relations with a person of a different race a criminal offence.
- (8) **The Population Registration Act of 1950**: it registered all people according to race.
- (9) **The Group Areas Act of 1950**: it assigned racial group to different residential sections. Each race was allotted its own area, which was used in later years as a basis of forced removals.
- (10) **The Pass Laws Act of 1952**: it was a system designed to segregate the population. The black population was required to carry pass books with them when outside their designated area.

II Caste System In India: Just as 'apartheid' in South Africa, segregation or untouchability has been present in India also in the form of caste system. Diachronically speaking, untouchability has its roots in India's caste system. Caste system in India is often described as the longest surviving social hierarchy which is more than 1500 years old. It is a system of social stratification, which is now also used as a basis of affirmative action. Caste denotes a traditional system of rigid social stratification into ranked groups defined by descent and occupation. Caste system is regarded as the ancient fact of Hindu life. The *Manusmriti* (or "Laws of *Manu*") [4] is also known as *Manav-Dharamsastra* [5] and it is the most important and earliest metrical work of the *Dharamsastra* textual tradition of Hinduism. *Manusmriti* comprises codes of Hindu life. They are based on the teachings of *Vedas* [6]. *Manu* in the second chapter of *Manusmriti* proclaims --whatsoever *dharma* (duty) is proclaimed for anyone that is all directed in *Vedas*. Further, he said that *Veda* is the supreme authority. Now it is clear that the content of *Manusmriti* has its base in

Vedas.

(i) The four Varnas: *Manu* in his book talks about four *varnas*[7]: the *Brahmin*, the *Kshatriya*, the *Vaishya*, and the *Shudra* and while propounding the doctrine of *Chaturvarna*(four divisions), he takes the help of the ninetieth Hymn of the tenth *Mandal*(section/chapter) of *Rig-Veda*[8]known as *PurushaSukta*[9].While giving the origin of *Chaturvarna*he said that the *Brahmin* was his mouth, the *Kshatriya* was his arms, the *Rajanya*or the *Vaishya* was made by his thighs and the *Shudra* sprang from his feet. He presents a view by saying that for the prosperity of the world the Creator from his mouth, arm, thigh and feet created the *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra* and in order to protect the universe He, assigned separate duties and occupations to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet. To *Brahmins*, He assigned teaching and studying (the *Veda*), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting of alms. To *Kshatriyas*, He commanded to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the *Veda*). The *Vaishyas*, He commanded to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the *Veda*), to trade, to lend money, and to cultivate land. Only one occupation the lord prescribed to the *Shudras*, to serve meekly the other three castes. *Manu* stated man to be purer above the navel than below, so the purest *varna* is to be the *Brahmins* who sprang from his mouth.

(ii) Caste-system as a regulation of social conduct: The introduction of caste system in India was an effort to develop a society free of vices by regulating its conduct. Caste system introduced by *Manu* is not just a social structure but it was meant to create a society in accordance with *Dharma*. Duties were assigned for each and every caste for the upliftment of the society. If a *Brahmin* is not observing his duties was treated like *Shudra*. It can be proved with an example cited in *Manusmriti*. *Shukalina* who was the son of a great sage *Vasistha* was a *Shudra*. But with the passage of time caste system purely becomes descent based. Dr. K. Jamnadas in his article, "*ManusmritiDahan Din*" written that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar publically burnt the book *Manusmrition* 25th December 1927, because he regarded the book as the creator of the caste system in India and it was a remarkable day for all Dalits.

(iii) The Present Scenario: Synchronically speaking about the situation of Dalits, it is not out of place to mention here, that, even today it stands worse than it was before. "Untouchables" or "Dalits" are subjected to

violence, especially in rural areas, their women are raped, and their land stolen. Dalits perform the most dangerous and odious forms of labour in Indian society including that of manual scavenging (removing human or animal waste) or performing low-end 'dirty' wage labor in tanneries. In rural areas, Dalits have segregated houses; they are not allowed to enter the temples or the houses of the people of the upper caste. They have separate wells. They are not permitted to draw water from common wells and hand pumps. Separate utensils are used to serve them in many tea and food stalls. Dalit children are made to sit at the back of the classroom. Though India ranks second in world population, nonetheless, the Indian masses reside in rural areas more than the modern cities. The majority of Dalit population also find their abode in rural sectors.

III The South African apartheid vs the Indian Hidden Apartheid

Discrimination in Indian socio-cultural matrix weaves itself across all walks of life. The caste-based discrimination in India is often termed as "India's hidden apartheid". It dominates in marriages, housing, employment and general social interaction, division of labour etc. These are generally enforced through the threat of social ostracism, physical violence, economic boycotts and honour killings. Some instances of this practice of segregation as well as discrimination against the people of South Africa viz a viz Dalits in India are placed below:

(a) **Houses:** The segregation in residential areas was seen in **South Africa** during apartheid, where, under the Urban Area Act of 1923 and the Group Area Act of 1950, residential segregation was introduced for the blacks and they were assigned specific homeland called Bantustans. In "*Kaffir Boy*", Mark Mathabane shows residential segregation in South Africa. A sign board reads:

WARNING: THIS ROAD PASSES THROUGH PROCLAIMED BANTU LOCATIONS, ANY PERSON WHO ENTERS THE LOCATIONS WITHOUT A PERMIT RENDERS HIMSELF LIABLE FOR PROSECUTION FOR ONTRAVENING THE BANTU (URBAN AREA) CONSOLIDATION ACT 1945, AND THE LOCATION REGULATION ACT OF THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG.

The above message can be found written on larger-than-life signs staked on every road leading into Alexandra, where I was born South Africa. (3)

Modern **India** faces a similar situation. Most Dalits in rural areas live in segregated colonies, away from the upper caste residents. Dalits are

forbidden from using the water sources and toilet tanks used by non-Dalits. They are not allowed to enter the houses of the upper caste Hindus. Dalits in rural areas live in segregated colonies away from the upper caste Hindus. In a specific case from the Villupuram district in the state of Tamil Nadu, villages have segregated Dalit colonies, basic supplies like water are also set apart and medical facilities and the better thatched houses exist exclusively in the upper caste colonies.[10]

(b) **Ill-treatment from Police:** In **South Africa**, during apartheid, police raids were rampant in tribal homelands. Blacks were beaten up and humiliated in the hands of police. Some instances from the novel “*Kaffir Boy*” are placed below:

Sirens blared, voices screamed and shouted, wood cracked and windows shattered, children bawled, dogs barked and footsteps pounded. I was bewildered; I had never heard such a racket before. I was instantly seized by a feeling of terror. (7)

“What’s the matter, Mama?”

“Peri-urban is here.”

“Peri-urban!” I gasped and stiffened at the name of the dreaded Alexandra Police Squad. To me nothing, short of a white man, was more terrifying; not even a bogeyman. (8)

I glanced at the window; it was getting light outside. I saw two black policemen breaking down a door at the far end of the yard. A half naked, near hysterical, jet-black woman was being led out of an outhouse by a fat laughing black policeman who, from time to time, prodded her private parts with a truncheon. (12)

Dalits in **India** faces the similar situation. They are always targeted by the police for a number of reasons. According to the NHRC (National Human Rights Commission) the police often target entire Dalit communities to violent search and seizure operations in search of one individual.[11] They may also be perceived by the police as inherently criminal.[12] Dalit communities are tortured in police custody because they cannot afford to pay police bribes.[13] They are also likely victims of police misconduct because they are rarely informed of their rights and are not able to afford bail.[14] The government officials acted as agents of the *Ranvir Sena* (a private upper-caste militia) and turned a blind eye to their killings of Dalits, in the eastern state of Bihar.[15]

According to an article in *Frontline* magazine, several Dalits were arrested on suspicion of murder and they were held at the Thiruthuraipoondi and

Thirukkalar police stations in Tamil Nadu between May 10 and May 16 in 2003. In a statement before the Tamil Nadu State Human Rights Commission, the group of Dalits described the abuse they suffered at the hands of the police. As reported by *Frontline* Magazine in 2003, the statement included the following account: The people alleged that they were beaten up and humiliated. The police used abusive language against the complainants, called them by their caste name, beat them with *lathis* (batons), and kicked them, they said. When one of them asked for water, a police officer asked for a bucket of water, dipped his shoes in it and asked the person to drink it, a statement said. Another victim complained that when he asked for water a police officer urinated into his mouth.[16]

(c) **Treatment of Women:** As clear from the above instances given in (a) and (b), women always face both gender and caste/race discrimination. Apartheid and Colonialism had a major impact on women since they suffered both racial and gender discrimination. Oppression against **South African** women was different from discrimination against men. They had very few or no legal rights, no right to own property and no access to education. They found it very difficult to get a job but many African women worked as agriculture workers or domestic workers though wages were extremely low.

On the other hand, Dalit women in **India** are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and rape by the police and upper caste men, since the sexual abuse of Dalit women is used as a tool to punish Dalit communities as a whole.

The case of Mrs. Lebra has been an eye-opener: She was accused of stealing her upper caste neighbor's jewelry. When she was called in by the police for questioning, the police officer began molesting her daughter. When she tried to stop him, he grabbed her hair, pushed her down into the ground and raped her.[17]

The practice of *devdasi*, in which a girl, before reaching the age of puberty, is ceremoniously dedicated or married to a deity or to a temple, continues in several southern states including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. *Devdasis* usually belong to the Dalit community and it literally means 'female servant of God'. Once dedicated to God, the girl is unable to marry, forced to become a prostitute for upper- caste community members, and eventually auctioned into an urban brothel.[18]

(d) **Civic and Basic Facilities:** During apartheid, blacks were deprived

of their civic and basic facilities in **South Africa**. They were not allowed to enter “white only” areas. Segregation was seen in everywhere, such as in public beaches, park benches, buses, cafes, restaurants, theatres etc. Various sign boards like “Whites only”, “Dogs and Blacks Are Not Allowed”, “Whites Only Beaches”, “Whites Only Buses”, “European Only”, “Non-European Only” etc. are seen in the novel also. Mark Mathabane writes in *Kaffir Boy*:

The zoo gatekeeper was a short white man with a fat face. Beaming, he told us that the zoo was all ours for the day because whites seldom came in great numbers on Tuesday. There were handful of Whites entering through the “Whites Only” turnstile we went through the “Non-Whites only”, but once inside, whites and blacks walked along the same paths to see the same animals. “Why do they bother putting the bloody signs up if black and white people end up mingling once inside?” (203)

Thus my consciousness was awakened to the pervasiveness of “petty apartheid”, and everywhere I went in the white world, I was met by visible and invisible guards of racial segregation. Overtly, the guards, larger-than-life signs that read, European Only, Non-European only, White only, Non-Whites only, SlegsBlankes, SlegsNie-Blankes-greeted me, and led me as a blind man would be led to the door. I should enter through, the elevator I should ride in, the water fountain I should drink from, the park bench I should sit on, the bus I should ride in, the lavatory I should piss in.

The invisible guards, however, did not greet me as conspicuously to orient me about my place in life. Instead, remarks such as “You’re in the wrong place, Kaffir”, “We don’t serve your color here, Kaffir,” “Who do you think you are Kaffir?” “Are you mad, Kaffir?” told me it was still the guards of Jim Crow talking. (201-202)

The situation is more or less the same in **India** against Dalits. Discrimination and segregation against Dalits is seen in civic and basic facilities. Their access is denied in public offices and other public services such as transport, hotels, restaurants, cafes, theatres and parks. According to the a survey on *Untouchability in Rural India*, it is found that Dalits entry is denied to *panchayat* offices in

some 14.4 percent of the 499 villages surveyed.[19] They are excluded from or receive discriminatory treatment in private business, including tea shops, barber shops, village shops, and cinemas.[20] Dalits were denied

entry into police stations in 27.6 percent of villages surveyed.[21]

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17. Human Rights Watch. Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India's Untouchables, p.3.
18. Alex La Guma, Apartheid: A Collection of Writing on South African Racism, p.24.
19. -4 Alex La Guma, Apartheid: A Collection of Writing on South African Racism, p.24-25.
20. Manu: In some Hindu Traditions, Manu is a title accorded to a progenitor of humanity.
21. Manav-Dharamshastra means a branch of learning which includes human religious and legal duties.
22. Vedas: They are a large body of texts originating in ancient India. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the texts constitute the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and the oldest scriptures of Hinduism.
23. Varnas: It is the term for the four broad ranks into which traditional Hindu society is divided.
24. Rig-Veda is a sacred Indo-Aryan collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns.
25. Purusha-Sukta is a hymn of the Rig-Veda dedicated to the Purusha, the "Cosmic Being".
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30. NHRC Report, Section vi, p.116.
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