

Oppression, Resistance and Authority: Bourdieu's 'Cultural Capital' in Translated Indian Short Stories

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Abstract:

A society comprises of some norms and practices that contribute to a civilised living and they become culture over a period of time. Some cultural practices however are a veiled attempt and reinforcement of subjugation of a certain section of people. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how social and cultural norms sanctions some people to exercise their authority over others. In this context Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist has propounded 'Cultural Capital'- a theoretical concept that examines hegemony as a part of cultural norms. The selected short stories reflect everyday social hierarchies that are based on caste, class and gender leading to social exclusion of few. Using Bourdieu's concept, this article analyses four translated short stories that throw a light on how a section of people dominate others due to some cultural practices and the dominated are expected to obey, failing which results in social ostracization. Bourdieu's conceptual approach helps to understand the mechanism through which power is authorized and resistance is restrained. Since this practice is a culture, the class of society that is subjugated remains marginalised resulting in socio-economic disparity, along with class-divide and other issues related to it and the most prominent being dominance on one side and oppression on the other.

Keywords: Cultural Capital, Dominance, Marginalisation, Power, Society.

INTRODUCTION:

The age-old proverb, 'No man is an island' is apt for all times to come, because human beings thrive on companionship not only with fellow humans but with animals too, along with the bounties of Nature. As homo sapiens evolved with the advent of time, civilization came up and with that, the concept of society also came into existence, which resulted in a social protocol for dealings and transactions. However, there has been a wide spread prevalence of class distinction on the basis of power, financial status, resources, education, beauty standard et al. The section of society considered as 'superior' maintain their hegemony through social customs that perforce the dominated to accept their 'subjugated' position. These practices are responsible to create a perpetual class divide as it becomes a culture, so some sections of people remain marginalised and it's near impossible to come out of this social and psychological predicament. These customs are a collective consciousness and an individual has to suffer immense psychological and financial challenges to overcome their marginalised position.

The literary research always illustrates the role of literature in reflecting social structures in societies with strict hierarchies and demonstrates the complex relationship of class, caste, gender and power. So far, critics mostly used approaches like feminist theories, social realism, or psychoanalysis to study oppression. Ismat Chughtai's short story collection *Lifting the Veil* presents her use of narratives that resist patriarchal beliefs, promote marginalised voices and encourage social reforms (Kiran 2016, 59). Chughtai's short story

“Mother-in-Law” highlights issues of social realism and the female psyche as well as depicts the intricacies of familial relationships, especially between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in domestic space (Fatima and Mehrotra 2019, 906). Conversely, Dhabak (2020, 36) examines the subject of child marriage in Chughtai’s works through Islamic and feminist perspectives, studying how societal conventions and religious ideas contribute to marginalisation.

Shapiro (1986, 100) examines the artfulness of Premchand’s storytelling, highlighting how humour functions as a tool for social critique and commentary. The review on *Sitting Bee* provides an in-depth analysis of Premchand’s short story “Big Brother,” which focuses on the relationship between two brothers and exploring themes such as sibling dynamics, discipline, responsibility and education (Dermot n.d.). Similarly, Saxena (2018), in her article “Revisiting ‘Bade Bhai Sahab’: Premchand’s Endearing Short Story,” analyses the themes and characters within the story; emphasizing the elder brother’s strict discipline and sense of duty, contrasted with the younger brother’s carefree and playful nature. Saxena underlines how Premchand employs humour, wit and simplicity to address profound social issues, including familial relationships, the education system and societal pressures.

Chopra (2013, 2) explores themes of dissent and resistance in Dalit literature by studying selected short stories by Omprakash Valmiki. He examines how Valmiki’s narratives function as protest literature, opposing caste hierarchies and social injustice. Chitra (2016, 859) examines the application of Ambedkar’s ideology of social justice, equality and resistance to caste discrimination in Valmiki’s narratives. The work also emphasises literature’s function in fostering social consciousness and contesting dominant hierarchies. The themes of resistance and marginalisation in Valmiki’s collection of short stories that illustrate the difficulties of Dalits, represent oppression and injustices they endure (Sanjana 2017, 98). Valmiki’s narratives depict acts of defiance and resilience against caste-based discrimination, emphasising the socio-political realities of marginalised communities in India. To conclude, over the years, researchers have thoroughly investigated the representation of these power relationships, emphasizing issues like oppression, marginalization and the different ways society enforces control.

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between culture and power, uncovering how societal norms and traditions contribute to ongoing inequality. Nevertheless, much of the existing research focuses on specific aspects of dominance—such as gender inequality, caste discrimination—without fully considering the underlying cultural capital that upholds these power disparities. The present article examines the writings of notable Indian authors to illustrate how literature reflects social divisions and the conflicts over power and authority besides pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses in comprehending the interconnections between culture, social norms and power.

Cultural Capital in Indian Literature: A Bourdieun Perspective

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, is one of the prominent sociologists who studied and researched human beings’ association with others in a society. He’s written a number of books that are primarily in French and most of his works are translated into English. As is mentioned of Bourdieu (quoted in Navarro 2006, 16) that a second important concept introduced by Bourdieu is that of ‘capital’, which he extends beyond the notion of material assets to capital that may be social, cultural or symbolic. So ‘capital’ is not just an economical connotation, because in the sociological context as propounded by Bourdieu, it is a social positioning of individuals that puts them in a position which elicits respect and obedience. It is pertinent to mention, “Cultural capital –and the means by which it is created or transferred from other forms of capital–plays a central role in societal power relations as

this provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy” (Gaventa 2003, 9). Bourdieu argues that access to cultural capital is unequal and is further shaped by class, caste and gender; thus makes it a way to study social hierarchies, resistance, oppression and subjugation in literary works. Through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘Cultural Capital’, four Indian short stories, Munshi Premchand’s *Elder Brother*, Ismat Chughtai’s *Mother-in-law* and Omprakash Valmiki’s *Salaam and Dream*, reveal how cultural capital shapes the experiences of oppression and resistance within dynamic social structures.

Intersections of Culture, Privilege and Power in *Elder Brother*

Munshi Premchand is the most popular and prolific writer of Indian Literature in Hindi and *Bade Bhai Sahab (Elder Brother)* is a translated story. It’s a sensitive portrayal of siblings; two brothers in an Indian family. It is narrated by the younger one wherein he states, “My upbringing was solely his responsibility and for me, his was obviously the final word” (Premchand n.d.). Just in the second paragraph, the voice of ‘cultural capital’ is loud and clear. The elder one is to ensure the little one’s activities and his decision is not to be questioned; all because he is elder. And when the younger brother says, “How could I ever think of defying him?” (Premchand n.d.); it only proves the strong influence of the cultural practice that impelled him to be at a non-defiant position, irrespective of the fact that he isn’t wrong at all times.

As the story unfolds, we come to know of two brothers with five years of age difference and both as school-going kids. The elder one, in spite of being severe, stern and studious struggles to get good grades while the happy-go-lucky younger one whistles away to play-time and pranks and does better than his elder brother. But the younger one’s smart intelligence is brushed aside to the fact that he has an elder brother who is always right even if the latter happens to be the dumb of the two. At one instance in the story, it is mentioned that the elder one had scribbled something in the notebook which the younger one couldn’t decipher, nevertheless it is expected that the elder brother not to be questioned on it as mentioned in the story;

Many a times he wrote a single name several times over, or scribbled few sentences that didn’t make any sense to me. For instance, once I found the following etched in his notebook: Special, Ameena, brothers, because, Radheshyam, Mr. Radheshyam, one hour... At the end of this trail was the image of a man. I broke my head over this creation but failed to unravel the mystery. Nor did I dare to ask him. He was in the ninth standard; I was only in the fifth grade... how could I attempt to dissect such intricate stuff? (Premchand n.d.)

The elder brother possesses ‘cultural capital’ – a culturally sanctioned position of superiority and authority which entitled to rebuke and admonish the younger one. It is accepted by default that the elder sibling is the better one, come what may, which has placed him at a ‘higher pedestal’. The little one finds it a pain to stick to the strict regime of time-table that his brother set. He is always thinking of some or the other fun and frolic. But when the school result is out, he has proved his acumen as mentioned in the story, “The annual results were out. I stood first, he failed to clear. Now just two grades separated us. For a second, I was tempted to confront him right away.” (Premchand n.d.). Although the younger one is proved to be the better one, in fact he has check-mated his elder brother, yet has no courage to confront him.

Although at the end of the story, the underlying fondness between two brothers is uncovered and we realize the elder one doesn’t harbour any ill-will nor does have any malicious intention, it’s only that the elder one has to have an upper hand. He is obviously

the 'better one', it is his right to be right at all times.

Gendered Oppression in *Mother-in-law*

Ismat Chughtai is a well-known Indian author who has mostly written in Urdu language. Her short stories have presented a realistic picture of Indian society, highlighting socio-cultural conflicts, problems and oppression of women. The translated story *Saas (Mother-in-law)* deals with the life of typical Indian household highlighting the tussle between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The story begins with the shouting of mother-in-law who yells at her daughter-in-law to come down from the upper floor of the house. The mother-in-law scolds her daughter-in-law (bahu) for disturbing her siesta. "May God ruin her! mother-in-law cursed her bahu -daughter-in-law- who is playing kabbadi and having fun with the urchins of mohalla" (Chughtai 2018, 168). Mother-in-law shouts and gets angry over her daughter-in-law to prevent her from playing with neighbourhood kids.

Cultural beliefs and practices impart 'power' and 'authority' to certain people in certain situations, in personal, social and professional relationships. So, a person who is 'authorised' to exercise a dominant role over others in social relations, according to the cultural set-up is said to have 'cultural capital'. It is one of the ways in which power functions in social relationships. It is worthy to mention here that for Bourdieu power and capital mean the same, as he has quoted "capital or power which amounts to same thing" (Bourdieu 1986, 243).

In India, a married woman is under the control of not only her husband but also the entire in-law's family. The mother-in-law exerts control over her daughter-in-law as in Indian culture a mother-in-law is accepted as an authority to make all the decisions pertaining to younger women in the family, while a girl is taught from childhood to respect and obey the husband and other family members. A mother-in-law portrays the social and cultural authority of an Indian household in which she takes the responsibility of the newlywed woman.

In the story, the mother-in-law disparages her daughter-in-law relentlessly which the younger woman bears quietly. The older woman reprimands her daughter-in-law for her childish conduct as well as for not getting pregnant. She is enraged as her daughter-in-law does not take her seriously. Mother-in-law says, "Curse on your life. Why if you could give birth to a child, your life would have been worth something. You spelt ruin for the house the day you entered it" (Chughtai 2018, 169). The mother-in-law keeps reproaching her "bahu" (daughter-in-law) the whole day for her carefree attitude. She believes that her daughter-in-law's existence will only be worthwhile if she bears children. In Indian culture, giving birth to children is crucial for a woman to get respect in her husband's family.

The daughter-in-law, Bashariya, does not utter a word of defiance although she is dominated and humiliated. In addition, she is aware that it would do no good to raise a confrontation as her parents would have to suffer shame in society. When the daughter-in-law does not respond or feel sorry for her behaviour, mother-in-law uses her authority to threaten by saying, "If you go on like this by God, I will get a second wife for my son" (Chughtai 2018, 169). As the story progresses, it is seen that mother-in-law complains about the dowry she received as well as about the tasteless cuisine served during the wedding ceremony. She continues to complain about the low-quality dress her son received from his father-in-law. The mother-in-law kept on muttering to herself- 'What did the fellows give their daughter as dowry ...Ai, what wonderful gifts! Imitation bangles and chrome plated tops. And....' 'Well, what can I do about that?' The bahu was put off by this show of boorishness and stretched herself on the cot. 'And those aluminum...' intoned the crone as she yawned..... she continued with her interminable litany about the samdhan's gulbadan

pyjamas that were frayed at the bottom, the tasteless zarda served during the wedding feast and the wooden bed with moth-eaten legs that was given as dowry. (Chughtai 2018, 170) Culturally, the husband has complete authority over his wife. He has the power to both beat her as well as abandon her without any reason. In the story, the mother-in-law tries to control her daughter-in-law by threatening to tell her son Asghar everything, “Let that fellow Asghar come...” (Chughtai 2018, 169). When the daughter-in-law is offering water to her mother-in-law, her husband makes her fall down which drops water on the mother-in-law who hurls abuses on her and throws the heavy tumbler on bahu’s feet which hurts her.

Asghar too enjoys exercising his dominance which is culturally sanctioned and asks his mother’s permission to beat his wife. “...Shall I give her a good bashing? Asghar leapt up, planted a hefty blow on his wife’s back and then sat cross legged on the cot” (Chughtai 2018, 172). Even Asghar wants a new wife and said “Kick out the bitch Ammi, let’s bring another woman. This one...” (Chughtai 2018, 172). Although the daughter-in-law is repeatedly called shameless and cursed by both her husband and mother-in-law, she remains silent. She is aware that it would not be good to speak in this matter as she is not expected to raise voice against her husband and in-laws.

The mother-in-law has the power to order her son. Even when the mother-in-law chastises her daughter-in-law, she forbids her son from doing the same. When her son asks permission to beat his wife and to bring other women, the mother-in-law responds, “Beware! ... Listen, I’ll break your hands if you raise them to hit her again,” the crone spoke in support of her enemy. ‘You had a decent marriage. Did she elope with you that you’re treating her like this? ...’ (Chughtai 2018, 172). These words clearly indicate that the mother-in-law takes the daughter-in-law as her enemy and tries to suppress her but daughter-in-law has little power which is sanctioned by the culture.

At the end of the story the mother-in-law is murmuring in the kitchen. “Who could say what she was muttering? Maybe she was cursing her shameless daughter-in-law” (Chughtai 2018, 173). Although the mother-in-law does not like her daughter-in-law and tries to control her but she also knows that her daughter-in-law has come to her house because of a social bond of marriage which is culturally sanctioned. Therefore, the mother-in-law dominates and scolds her daughter-in-law while simultaneously defending her by prohibiting her son from getting remarried or beating his wife.

Culture, Caste and Forced Submission in *Salaam*

Salaam is a short story written by Omprakash Valmiki who, as a *Dalit*¹, had to endure a great deal of humiliation since childhood. The story *Salaam* is about traditions that ridicule Dalits, while educated Dalits attempt to rebel against these traditions. In accordance with this tradition, whenever there is a wedding in the Dalit family, the newlyweds must pay a visit to the household of ‘upper classes’ to salute them in exchange for money and clothing. The story reveals the tactics employed by the Ranghars, a privileged group in the society, to assert their dominance. This practice is an expression of respect and submission to the mighty Ranghars, who flex authority within the village. It is a cultural norm to expect that a ‘Dalit’ would show up for a salute, especially after they get married, and this practice has consolidated Ranghars' dominance in the entire village community.

Salaam narrates the tale of Kamal and Harish, who share a deep bond of friendship. Kamal

¹ Marginalised communities in India, also called Scheduled castes

is a member of a higher caste, while Harish is from a lower caste but educated. Kamal Upadhyay, who is a *Brahmin*², makes a trip from the city to the village to attend Harish's wedding, who is a *Bhangg*³. Harish's *Baraat*⁴ is not provided a respectable accommodation only because he is a Dalit. The village school headmaster promises the premises of the village school as accommodation but at the eleventh hour he goes missing and the *baraat* has to put up in a school verandah⁵ with no facility of water and electricity.

Kamal Upadhyay goes to a tea vendor in the early morning to have tea, as he desires to do so in the morning. The tea vendor, an elderly man, becomes conscious of Kamal's demeanor and refuses to sell him tea taking him to be a dalit because he is seen with Harish, stating:

He's a sweeper. He claims he's a brahman He has come to Jumman sweeper with the marriage party. Now you people decide. If he's a baaman, why has he come in a party of the sweepers? To drink urine? He's concealing his identity to get tea. I told him plainly-at Budhu's shop no tea for the sweepers-cobblers. Go look for it elsewhere. (Valmiki 2008, 3)

The story *Salaam* not only exposes the inhumane nature of casteism but also opposes the traditions and taboos established by the caste system. The practice of 'salaam' exposes the politics of these cultural strategies, which can be interpreted as a means of sabotaging the confidence of people considered as 'lower caste' and maintaining power structures in society. The story examines the nexus between casteism and feudalism. While the caste system is accountable for the denial of the fundamental rights of Dalits, feudalism is responsible for their oppression and exploitation. The dominant class develops norms and traditions that allow them to publicly humiliate 'Dalits'. The marginalised individuals, as a result of their limited access to education, economic opportunities, and basic necessities, consistently experience exploitation and neglect from individuals belonging to higher castes. Smith and Kulynych (2002, 157) claim that according to Bourdieu, the interplay of social capital plays a pivotal role in the perpetuation of existing class, power and status dynamics.

Jumaan, Harish's father-in-law, though a government employee is pressurized by the village elders to follow the tradition of 'salaam' as they are totally convinced and indoctrinated with this practice. The individuals have the belief that engaging in such behaviour does not result in harm, as they receive gifts from Ranghars in reciprocation for their act of reverence. The following lines show the beliefs of villagers who do not see any problem in these types of rituals:

The community elders were giving their own arguments to explain the propriety of the practice. 'It's an ancestral practice- it can't be given up in a day. They are big people. We'll have to go for salaam. And if you have to live in water, it isn't proper to make an enemy of the crocodile. And this also serves as a pretext for getting clothes, utensils as per tradition. (Valmiki 2008, 49)

The protagonist, Harish, demonstrates resistance towards this practice of 'salaam'. "Harish too had said plainly: 'I don't need such clothes or utensils. I won't go to the doors of strangers for salaam'" (Valmiki 2008, 49). He endeavours to critically examine the tradition upheld by the Ranghars, who employ these customs as a means of maintaining their social standing by compelling Dalits to continue the practice of 'salaam'. Harish expresses himself angrily, "Think whatever you like...I look upon this practice to be a conspiracy to crush our self-confidence. This ceremony of salaam must be stopped" (Valmiki 2008, 49).

² A person belonging to the priestly or scholarly caste in Hindu society

³ Manual scavenger

⁴ Wedding procession

⁵ Shaded outdoor spaces

The Ranghars begin to gather at the village *chaupal*⁶ as word spreads that Harish, Jumman's son-in-law, has refused to follow the practice of 'salaam'. His opposition strikes them as a threat to their authority, they send one of their henchmen to pressurize Jumman to adhere to the custom, which has been practiced since ancient times. Ballu Ranghar himself comes to Jumman and rebukes him and his wife by saying, "Jumman, why hasn't your son-in-law come for salaam so far? If it's your daughter's marriage, we too have our rights. Whatever is traditional will have to be practiced. Our womenfolk are sitting, waiting at home. Bring him over soon" (Valmiki 2008, 50).

Thus, the Ranghars expect that the Dalit community will exhibit respect towards them, thereby acknowledging the assumed superiority of the Ranghars. The upper caste members exert pressure on the father of the bride in order to compel Harish to conform to their expectations. They desire to maintain their position of authority without any potential challenges.

Hope and Exclusion in *Dream*

Sapna by Om Prakash Valmiki, translated as *Dream* by Chandrika Das, illustrates communal tension in a factory, built after clearing a jungle, as a heterogeneous group, directed by Shirodkar, constructs places of worship, specifically Balaji's temple. Conflict emerges due to caste prejudice as Rishiraj, who contributed in construction of the temple, protests the exclusion of Scheduled Caste member, Anil Kumar Gautam who also contributes in the construction work. This ultimately results in chaos during a religious event, demonstrating the intricacies of social hierarchy, wherein upper caste members exert dominance, using people from lower strata for menial tasks, yet considering them insignificant and excluding them from participation in religious ceremonies.

At the outset of the narrative, Gajanand Sadashiva Shirodkar, an officer with an array of talents, observes a vast expanse of undeveloped land that has required construction. His wife proposes the construction of a temple, as there is no place for worship in the colony. Shirodkar dreams:

...not just one temple, but also a church, gurudwara, mosque. Everything should be here. Under this unified culture imagine how it would be to hear the sound of a conch in the temple, *azaan*⁷ in the mosque and the bells of the church! ...indeed it will be an ideal place!" (Valmiki 2021, 118)

Although the notion of constructing a temple is noble, yet there are hurdles and disagreements because the committee overseeing the construction of the temple is divided into two groups and the one which has a stronger hold over the masses end up having their say. Natrajan's capacity to exclude dissenting opinions from the sub-committee indicates his exertion of authority within the community, accentuating Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital.

On the day of the installation of the idol, known as the *Pran Pratishtha ceremony*⁸, a dispute arises when Natrajan denied Gautam and his family from occupying the first row due to Gautam's 'Dalit' status. When Gautam enquires about the reason for sitting at the back, Natrajan mentions the social conventions that everyone should adhere to them during such religious rituals. Natrajan declares to angry Gautam, "You seem to have become angry. All these things are social. One has to abide by the social mores, otherwise the result of such actions remains unfulfilled... I was trying to explain it to you" (Valmiki 2021, 124). When

⁶ Community gathering place

⁷ Islamic call to public worship

⁸ A Hindu ritual of consecrating a deity's idol by invoking divine presence

Gautam insists on remaining in the first row with his family, Natrajan directs his associates to arrange the seats in *pandal*⁹ according to the status and strictly forbids the lower strata to occupy front seats.

Natrajan advises Rishi to move Gautam, a member of the Scheduled Caste and his family, to the back of the 'pandal' during the religious event. He substantiates this request by asserting that religious conventions and the shastras (Hindu scriptures) has mandated that persons of lower castes should not occupy the front seats during religious rituals. Their discrimination is shaped by societal constructs and people changes their way to look upon after discovering a person's identity as 'Dalit'. Motivated by hostility, upper caste exploits marginalised for their personal gain and never acknowledges their contributions. Ramlochan Upadhyaya affirms Natrajan's casteist sentiments, asserting that if Gautam wants to worship, he must construct his own temple, as no *shudra*¹⁰ should be permitted entry into this temple.

Natrajan exploits his cultural authority to rationalise the exclusion of Gautam, a 'Dalit', from occupying a front seat during the religious ceremony. While doing this, he refrains from employing physical force; rather, he talks about the authority of the religious scriptures to rationalise caste discrimination. Even the community recognises this as legitimate due to its alignment with established social and religious beliefs. It is stated about cultural power in 'Editor's Introduction' by Thompson;

For in the routine flow of day-to-day life, power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form, and thereby endowed with a kind of *legitimacy* that it would not otherwise have. Bourdieu expresses this point by saying that symbolic power is an 'invisible' power which is 'misrecognized' as such and thereby 'recognized' as legitimate. (Bourdieu 1991, 23)

In the above lines Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power denotes cultural capital which is used not through forceful means but through widely accepted symbols, norms and beliefs. This power becomes 'invisible' as individuals fail to recognise it as a way to control over them; rather, they perceive it as inherent or legitimate. This 'misrecognition' allows authority to control that seems just and unchallenged, despite perpetuating inequality. Similarly, in *Dream*, the caste system is legitimated not by violence but through culturally ingrained beliefs. The people present in the ceremony erroneously perceive this discrimination as conventional or justified due to its contextualisation. This permits the caste-based exclusion of 'Dalits' without explicit opposition, as it is taken as an integral aspect of the social order.

When the construction of the temple is complete, Natrajan is abruptly highlighting caste distinctions, which Rishi perceives as hypocritical. Rishi, however, challenges the logic underlying this caste-based prejudice. He says to Natrajan:

This knowledge has dawned upon you only today, that Gautam is a Scheduled Caste? When he was working extremely hard to build this temple, didn't you know that he was an S.C.? Why did you not say then that anyone who was an S.C. should not take part in the building of the temple, and should avoid sweating and working day and night? ... You should have thought about all this at that time. (Valmiki 2021, 125)

Thus, the interplay of power dynamics emerges as individuals exercise their 'cultural capital' and respond to it, resulting in either harmony or discord among them. This 'authority' gives the people 'power' which arises from cultural beliefs rather than legal sanctions; consequently, its application or misapplication varies due to numerous factors, including social and cultural settings as well as individual choices.

⁹ A temporary structure or tent set up for religious or social gatherings

¹⁰ A person belonging to the lowest caste in Hindu society

Gautam forbade Rishi to argue with Natrajan and other upper caste people as Rishi is distressed by the caste-based discrimination which they are encountering during the religious ceremony. Gautam proposes their departure, emphasising the futility of remaining in a same place where they are not treated equally. He feels disheartened and disappointed, believing that it is impossible to fight such embedded prejudice. Nonetheless, Rishi opposes it and says to Gautam;

No, Gautam. This is not your fight or mine... if you leave this place it will be difficult to continue the battle. After all, why should we go? The useless and uncivilised should go. How has this temple become theirs? Come with me... (Valmiki 2021, 126)

The above lines emphasise Rishi's resolve to address injustice and has advocated for equality, rather than withdrawing from the circumstance. He claims that the temple is a public property and none could stop Gautam, as he has also participated in its construction. By bringing Gautam to the centre of the canopy, Rishi symbolically asserts their entitlement to occupy that place, rejecting the oppressive rituals that seek to marginalise them. Rishi's act of resistance embodies a wider challenge to the established caste structures that determines who is regarded as worthy of respect and involves in social events. Rishi's actions underscore his dedication to equality and fairness, despite significant societal pressure to adhere to conventional customs and traditions.

Rishi's fury intensifies as he observes the community's denial of the prevailing prejudices and in a fit of unrestrained rage, he dismantles bamboo pillars that has supported the canopy which is erected for the temple's *Pran Pratishtha ceremony*. The formerly serene and organised religious event turns into chaos, as individuals escape in confusion, and the structure intends to represent unity and commitment disintegrates. Following it, Rishi and Gautam are taken into custody by the police for instigating a riot and causing property damage. This arrest illustrates the social effects of questioning deeply rooted customs. The authorities emphasise penalising those who has challenged the existing status norms rather than confronting the caste discrimination that instigates the conflict.

Natrajan, the key figure behind the prohibition of lower-caste individuals from the temple ceremony, ultimately escapes from any direct punishment for his actions. His authority, establishes on a basis of religious dominance and caste superiority, is profoundly challenged by the unfolding events and he successfully arranges his transfer to a different location, thereby evading additional entanglement in the community's disputes. The story concludes in the completion of the temple's *Pran Pratishtha ceremony*, which occurs silently and devoid of any planned display.

The story *Dream* vividly demonstrates how cultural power and authority, embedded in caste and religious norms, promote social inequality. Natrajan and the upper castes use their cultural power sanctioned by the society to rationalise exclusion, thereby legitimising their supremacy without resorting to physical coercion. This type of authority enables them to control the participation of people in the lower hierarchy within the community. Rishi's challenge to this power signifies a struggle against the invisible but firmly established caste hierarchy, yet the subsequent arrest of both Rishi and Gautam emphasizes the complexities involved in dismantling such cultural authority.

CONCLUSION

This study has employed Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' to explore the intricate intersections of power, marginalization and domination as reflected in *Elder Brother* by Munshi Premchand, *Mother-in-law* by Ismat Chughtai and *Salaam* and *Dream* by Omprakash Valmiki. We come to know how some cultural norms, values, customs and practices are responsible for perpetuating inequality and sustaining social hierarchies. The study goes

beyond conventional interpretations of these short stories as merely tales of oppression or marginalization but points out the strategies used by the particular section of people in society to dominate or suppress the others. These stories reveal how opportunities, relationships and identities are shaped by the presence of cultural capital or the lack of it which in turn sanctions authority and this reinforces hierarchies.

The wider implication of this research resides in its ability to interpret that understandably people are expected to adhere to social customs and practices. While it is true confirming to them provides identity and security, but if they are propelled by selfishness and a utilitarian attitude, the same cultural customs sabotage a person's dignity and aspiration, along with dominance of one group and oppression of the other. So certain social practices are corrupt but the tragic irony is it's like a maze-very difficult to come out from. Because it is a cultural practice everybody is expected to follow without questioning or doubt, it is near impossible to come out of this vicious circle through individual effort. Keeping this in mind the only solution is to 'be the change.' No doubt it is challenging but the only solution is to have that inner strength and compassionate wisdom not to give in to the unreasonable social dictates and at the same time not be a misguided rebel.

At last, this study makes a valuable contribution to the dynamic field of cultural studies, underscoring the necessity of interdisciplinary strategies for analysing power and inequality. It encourages a more thorough investigation of cultural capital as a theoretical tool, intended not only to understand social structures but also to highlight voices that challenge them. The literary works examined here demonstrate that literature serves not just as a reflection of society, but as a powerful medium that exposes the complexities of power, resistance and transformation.

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