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Story is Society: A Sociological Interpretation of Narrative Literature on Understanding of Caste, Class, Gender and Red Light Areas

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ABSTRACT :

Narrative literature, in addition to being an aesthetic art, is a deep social document that contains and mirrors social reality. This paper aims at understanding the sociology of literature, which will be the key to understanding persistent and interconnected social stratifications in Indian society, such as caste, class and gender in a highly marginalized form of space – Red Light Areas.

It is based on the fact that “stories are mirrors to society” as well as sites of resistance. Conventional sociology uses statistics, numerical data and survey reports to understand poverty, casteism and gender inequality but lacks the subjective and emotional experiences of oppression. Narrative literature compensates for the deficiency. A novel, a short story and/or an autobiography gives ethnographic insight into how untouchability is felt, how hunger forces migration, how patriarchy regulates women’s bodies – things which cannot be expressed by numbers alone.

The paper is divided into three sociological stages. Firstly, it analyses the representation of caste, class and gender in the Indian narrative literature. By using literary texts like Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan*, Bama’s *Karukku*, Premchand’s *Godaan*, Mahasweta Devi’s *Draupadi* it tries to understand how caste is presented in the form of graded humiliation, how class is explained as exploitation related to the ownership of means of production and how gender is defined as patriarchal control over labour, sexuality and domesticity. The theoretical base is taken from the Sociological Imagination theory by C. Wright Mills, who talks about the connection between the private troubles and public issues; class and status theory by Karl Marx and Max Weber; caste as division of labourers view by B.R. Ambedkar and G.S. Ghurye; feminist sociology of Simone de Beauvoir and Sharmila Rege on Brahmanical patriarchy and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s Intersectionality theory.

Secondly, and most importantly, the paper analyses sociology of Red Light Areas, going through their evolution from the ancient times to the present. In the Ancient Period, prostitution existed as an institutionally recognized institution in the form of Nagarvadhu system like Amrapali and Devadasi system where women had an artistic recognition and were regulated by the state law such as Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*. They were not spatially segregated and stigmatized as they are today. The Middle period consisting of Medieval period and the Colonial period represents a crucial turning

The Middle Period includes the Medieval and Colonial era, which is another important turning point. Due to the development of feudalism, the temple women have been increasingly sexually exploited by landlords and priests. Under British colonialism, the Red Light Area has emerged officially. The colonial administration established special zones “Lal Bazaars” or “Chaklas” for British soldiers such as Sonagachi in Kolkata, Kamathipura in Mumbai, and G.B. Road in Delhi. These zones were governed by the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868. The combination of famines, the Permanent Settlement, and the closure of local industries made poor peasant women, widows, and lower caste women move to cities and join these areas for livelihood. This period turned sex work into criminalized, segregated and stigmatized profession.

Nowadays Red Light Area is an intersection of caste, class, and gender. The studies show that the population consists predominantly of economically disadvantaged, Dalit, tribal, and minority members experiencing the oppression based on caste, class, and gender aspects. The structure has evolved to brothel-based, street-based, home-based, and online/app-based variants. The analysis touches upon the current legal paradox in India that sex work is not an illegal activity according to the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act [ITPA], 1956; however, running a brothel and solicitation are illegal. Another important point is the landmark Supreme Court judgment in 2022 which recognized the sex work as a professional activity. The paper also mentions rights-based movements such as Durbar Mahila Samanwaya

Committee [DMSC] in Sonagachi advocating that “sex work is work” and focusing on health, education, and anti-trafficking activities. Another issue is the decreasing number of traditional brothels because of the real estate pressures and technological progress.

Finally, from the intersectional perspective, the paper claims that the Dalit woman in a Red Light Area experiences much more oppression than Dalit man and upper caste woman. The Dalit woman’s body becomes a place of intersection of caste impurity, economic exploitation, and patriarchy.

It could be concluded that the “story is indeed society”. In order to understand the social stratification of India, one has to know the stories, including those from the dark alleys of Red Light Areas. The literature not only reflects the reality, but also serves as a great instrument for social criticism and consciousness-raising. In this regard, it is recommended to incorporate literary texts as primary sociological materials and to use human rights and public health approaches instead of the moral policing approach to the Red Light Zones.

Keywords: Literary Narratives, Sociology of Literature, Caste, Class, Gender, Red Light Zone, Sex Work, Intersectionality, Dalit Feminism, Social Stratification

INTRODUCTION

The relation between human society and literature is inseparable. Since the dawn of civilization, man has tried to express his social experience, his sufferings and struggles through stories. Whether in the oral form of folklore and myths or in the written form of novel and short story, narrative literature has always served as the repository of collective memory of society. The eminent sociologist Lewis A. Coser has rightly remarked that literature is a social product reflecting the social, economic and political structure of society. In the context of Indian society that is heavily stratified on the basis of caste, class and gender, literature can never be neutral. Every story carries the ideologies, values and contradictions of its time. So, to understand Indian society in depth, it is necessary to understand its stories. The present research paper attempts to understand the Indian social structure through sociological study of narrative literature with special reference to the most marginalized section of society, that is the women of the red light area.

The present research is conducted using the Narrative Review Method. Unlike systematic review which is based on quantitative data and statistical analysis, narrative review is qualitative in nature where past literature including novels, short stories, autobiographies and sociological theories are critically analyzed and reinterpreted to generate new understanding. In narrative review, the researcher does not conduct any primary fieldwork but interprets past works to establish various themes. According to Baumeister and Leary, a narrative review serves the purpose of linking various studies on diverse topics for reinterpretation and theory-building. For this particular research paper, narrative review is the most suitable method because caste, class and gender are not laboratory constructs measurable in terms of numbers but lived experiences, which are best captured by stories. Secondly, the red light area is a very stigmatized and sensitive space where direct data collection is not easy, so literature serves as the source of authentic insider voices and human experiences which cannot be provided by official data. Thirdly, the aim of this paper is to link sociology and literature, which is possible through qualitative analysis of narratives.

The need and significance of studying story as society are highly pertinent in contemporary times from three perspectives. The first is academic need. Sociology in India has been relying on western theories and concepts till date. Indian narrative literature contains indigenous sociological information from Premchand to Manto to Bama which can be used in developing Indian sociological thoughts. The second is social need. Despite constitutional guarantees and legal equality, caste discrimination, class exploitation and gender violence still persist in Indian society. Red light area is the perfect example of where all the three come together. The third is human rights need. Indian sex workers are usually regarded either as criminals or victims, but never as workers or citizens with dignity. Thus their portrayal in literature defies the dominant moral discourse and introduces the human rights discourse. Therefore, this research study is important as it not only humanizes the marginalized groups but also proves that literature is the best tool for sociological imagination described by C. Wright Mills.

The present research paper is constructed upon the foundation of four research questions on which the whole study is based. The first research question is about the working of narrative literature as a social document. The second research question is related to the portrayal of caste, class and gender in Indian narrative literature. The third research question is about how intersectionality i.e. caste + class + gender leads to formation and persistence of red light areas in India. And the fourth research question is about the portrayal of sex worker from ancient period of nagarvadhū to modern sex worker in literature and law. On the basis of the above research questions, the following objectives of the research have been established. The first objective is to show the interrelationship between sociology and literature. The second objective is to analyze the caste hierarchy, untouchability and Dalit assertion in literature. The third is to analyze class struggle and poverty as portrayed in narrative literature. The fourth objective is to understand gender, patriarchy and gendered labor through literary narratives. The fifth objective is to apply the theory of intersectionality for understanding triple subjugation of Dalit women. The sixth objective is to trace the sociology of red light area from ancient era of Devadasi system, medieval and colonial era of Lal Bazaar and Sonagachi to modern era. The seventh objective is to critically examine the red light areas in classics like Srikanta, Sevasadan and Manto’s stories. And the eighth objective is to critically analyze the legal

Perspective of law and human rights including ITPA, Supreme Court judgment of 2022 and DMSC movement.

The nature of the research is qualitative, descriptive and analytical through narrative review. The data sources of this research include both primary and secondary sources. Primary literary sources of data consist of novel and short stories such as *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand, *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki, *Karukku* by Bama, *Godan* and *Sevasadan* by Premchand, *Srikanta* by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, and selected short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto and Mahasweta Devi. Secondary sociological sources of data include theories of Karl Marx on class, Louis Dumont on caste, Sylvia Walby on

patriarchy and Kimberle Crenshaw on intersectionality. Legal sources of data include Immoral Traffic Prevention Act of 1956 and Supreme Court judgment of 2022 in the case of Budhadev Karmaskar and report of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee and National Human Rights Commission report on devadasi system. The method used for analysis is content and thematic analysis of these narratives.

The whole paper is structured into sixteen thematic sections ranging from literature as social documents to the conclusion that story is a critique of the society from the point of view of poverty, caste, patriarchy and trafficking. However, there are some limitations of this paper. It is based on secondary literary sources rather than primary field interviews with sex workers due to various reasons. Furthermore, the research focuses on Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Urdu literature while regional literature from North East and South India is not covered in this paper.

2. The relationship between sociology and literature

Sociology and literature represent two different approaches to the study of the same reality — human society. Sociology examines society by means of theory and empirical research, while literature does so through imagination and narrative. The relationship between the two is both historical and methodological.

In the past, early sociologists had a strong interest in literature. Thus, Karl Marx employed Balzac's novels to explain class struggle, Emile Durkheim made use of primitive myths in order to understand religion, and Max Weber referred to Tolstoy's works when trying to comprehend capitalism. This demonstrates that literature was sociology's initial data source. The formal discipline known as the Sociology of Literature came into being through the work of Georg Lukács, Lucien Goldmann, Diana Laurensen and Swingewood.

There are three ways in which literature may be understood. The first is the theory of literature as a mirror of society, according to which literature reflects the economic, political, and cultural structures. For instance, Premchand's *_Godaan_* is an example of a work that reflects the agrarian crisis in 1930s India. The second is the idea of literature as a product of society, meaning that a writer produces literature as a member of a particular caste, class, gender, and historical period; it is the writer's habitus that determines both what is written and what is censored, a concept known as the literary field by Bourdieu. The third is the view that literature acts as a shaper of society—literature does not merely reflect society but also creates social consciousness; Manto's stories concerning prostitution or Bama's *_Karukku_* on caste are examples of works that influenced public debate and led to reform.

The main point of discussion is whether literature can function as sociological evidence. Positivist sociologists claim that fiction is not fact, while interpretative sociologists maintain that fiction shows meanings, values, and lived experiences which statistics fail to reveal. C. Wright Mills' concept of the sociological imagination resolves this issue by showing how a personal problem in a story—for example, a Dalit student being humiliated in *_Joothan_*—is linked to the broader social issue of the caste system.

Sociology offers concepts such as caste, class, patriarchy, and intersectionality, while literature provides stories which make these concepts come to life and become visible; in this way, the two together give us a full understanding of society.

3. Caste in Literature: Untouchability and Dalit Literature

As B.R. Ambedkar rightly observes that "Caste is not a division of labourers but division of labourers among themselves based on hierarchy of inequalities". Narrative literature represents this hierarchy of inequality as everyday experience of humiliation.

For instance, Mulk Raj Anand's *_Untouchable_* depicts untouchability as a ritual of pollution. Here Bakha, the sweeper, experiences spatial segregation outside the village, denial of access to water, temples, compulsion to do scavenger work. The author himself belongs to an upper caste and writes from a sympathetic Gandhian reformist perspective where untouchability is seen as a sin.

Dalit literature is different from the above literature in its ideological outlook. It is characterized by an uncompromising attitude and rejection of pity and demand for rights. For example, *_Joothan_* [leftover food] by Omprakash Valmiki and *_Karukku_* [Sharp double-edged leaf] by Bama are autobiographies. While the former represents school humiliation and economic exploitation by begar labour; the latter explains that caste consciousness persists even after conversion through separate benches and cemeteries of Dalit Christians.

From Anand to Valmiki and Bama is significant shift from outside sympathy to Ambedkarite resistance through education and writing.

4. Caste Hierarchy and Social Exclusion in Rural Literature

Caste becomes ideology as well as an economical and spatial system of exclusion in the organization of village communities. The features of a caste system cited by Ghurye, viz. hierarchy, pollutions and purity, endogamy, occupation, food and social restrictions, are embodied in rural literature.

Bama's *Karukku* describes how in the village, like in town, Parayars live in a street of their own, have no access to the common wells and temples and are denied even the benefits of Christianity. The lower strata of the social order are forced to work for the upper class and are not allowed to sit on chairs

or benches in the presence of the upper class.

Premchand's *Godaan* also explains the combination of social and economic class hierarchies embodied in the village society. Hori, though not a member of the Scheduled Castes, belongs to a lower peasant class and remains dependent on the upper classes for his social and economic well-being.

Rural literature testifies that the village is not an ideal state and Ambedkar was absolutely correct in stating that the village is a harsh reality of untouchability and a den of social casteism.

5. Dalit Literature: Struggle for Identity Assertion

Dalit literature isn't just about being a victim, it's about fighting back and being proud of who you are. Some critics in Marathi say it's literature that's written by Dalits, about Dalits, and with a Dalit mindset – it rejects the old ways of thinking about class and says everyone deserves to be treated with dignity. The goal is to take the things that used to make Dalits feel ashamed and turn them into something to be proud of.

In the beginning, Indian literature showed Dalits from the perspective of upper-caste reformers. For example, Mulk Raj Anand's book "Untouchable" and Premchand's "Godaan" portray Dalits as helpless victims who need help from above, like a Gandhi or a modern toilet – the main character is waiting for someone like Gandhi to come and save them. However, Dalit literature is different from this upper-caste view. The writings of Omprakash Valmiki, like "Joothan", Bama's "Karukku", and Sharankumar Limbale's "Akkarmashi" mark a significant change. When it comes to asserting their identity, Dalits do it in three ways. This change in literature is important because it shows how Dalits are taking control of their own stories and identities, rather than being portrayed by others. The old way of portraying Dalits as helpless victims is being replaced by a new narrative that emphasizes their strength and resilience. By writing their own stories, Dalit authors are able to challenge the dominant upper-caste view and present a more nuanced and accurate picture of their experiences.

Firstly, in naming. Joothan (the leftovers thrown at the Dalit) is Valmiki's chosen name; similarly, Karukku (the sharp double-edged leaves of the palmyra tree) is Bama's. Both convert pain into a weapon.

Secondly, in the choice of language. Dalit writers eschew Sanskritised Hindi or Tamil and write in their own dialect, using abusive terms and oral idiom. It is a question of linguistic capital (Bourdieu).

When we look at the stories they tell through their autobiographies and novels, we can see how important education was to them. For Ambedkar, education was a powerful tool in his battle against the caste system, and he believed that it could help free the masses from oppression. In the three novels, education is shown to be a double-edged sword – on the one hand, it's a place where Dalits are often humiliated and discriminated against, but on the other hand, it's also a means of empowerment and liberation. For example, Valmiki faces humiliation at the hands of his teachers, while Bama decides to leave her convent school as a way of resisting the caste-based ideas that are embedded in Christianity, and instead, she chooses to assert her identity as a Dalit. Through these stories, we can see how education can be both a source of pain and a source of power for Dalits.

Thus, Dalit literature's real struggle is not for acceptance in the Indian literary mainstream but for creating a separate aesthetic and political space in the name of Ambedkar's ideas of equality and annihilation of caste.

6. Understanding Class in Literature: Poverty and Exploitation

In simple terms, when we talk about social class, it's about how people relate to the things that produce wealth, like land and money. Some people own these things, while others only have their labor to offer. A guy named Max Weber also said that class is about status and power. If we look at stories and writings about poverty, it's clear that being poor isn't just something that happens to individuals because of bad luck. Instead, it's often the result of a system that favors those who already have wealth and power, leaving others to struggle. This idea is supported by many writers who show how poverty is connected to the way society is structured, rather than just being a personal problem.

Here's a rewritten version of the input in a more human-like writing style, inspired by the provided human samples: The classic Indian novel, *Godaan* by Premchand, is a powerful portrayal of class exploitation. At its center is Hori Mahato, a small peasant who owns a tiny plot of land, but his meager surplus is constantly being siphoned off by the wealthy elite – the Zamindar, the moneylender Datadin, who also happens to be a Brahmin, and the priest. Hori's dream of owning a cow, a symbol of status and respect, remains elusive, as he is crushed by the weight of debt, rent, and religious taxes. His downward spiral into poverty is a stark illustration of the three mechanisms of exploitation identified by Marx – rent, interest, and surplus extraction. As the story unfolds, Hori's struggles ultimately lead to his demise as a landless laborer, a poignant example of the proletarianization of the poor. Through Hori's tragic tale, Premchand sheds light on the harsh realities of class struggle and the ways in which the powerful prey on the vulnerable, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and exploitation.

Similarly, in Bengali writer Manik Bandopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi*, the fishermen community of the Padma river is a fishing proletariat. Fishermen like Kuber own labour and skill but boats and nets are owned by Hossain Mian, the capitalist. The fishermen risk life in the river, but profit is taken by the owner. Their poverty forces them to accept risky loans and migration to Moynadwip island.

Class in literature also shows alienation. Hori is alienated from his own labour, his cow, and finally from his village. Kuber is alienated from the river he loves.

So, research shows that being poor isn't because someone doesn't work hard enough. Take Hori and Kuber, for example – they work really hard, but they're still poor. This is because the system is unfair and some people own more than others. Also, poverty can be passed down from one generation to the next, as seen with Hori's son Gobar, who moves to the city for work but still struggles with the same class issues. This idea was talked about by Oscar Lewis in his concept of the "culture of poverty", where poverty becomes a way of life that's hard to escape.

7. Class Struggle: Bourgeoisie vs Proletariat in Literary Story

Karl Marx said that the history of our world is basically a story of different groups fighting with each other. On one side, you have the rich people who own things like factories and land – these are the bourgeoisie. On the other side, you have the working people who don't own much, just their ability to work – these are the proletariat. When you read stories and novels, you can see this fight playing out in the daily lives of people living in villages and cities. It makes the idea of class struggle more real and easier to understand.

In Premchand's *_Godaan_*, class struggle is not a slogan but lived as debt and domination. Hori Mahato represents the small peasantry becoming proletariat. The bourgeoisie is represented not by one person but by a bloc – Zamindar, Thakur, Brahmin moneylender Datadin, and Pandit. They control land, credit, religion, and panchayat. Hori needs loan for his daughter's marriage, for bullocks, for taxes. Each loan takes his land as mortgage. When Hori's son Gobar elopes with Jhunna, the panchayat fines Hori heavily – an example of how superstructure punishes proletariat. Gobar later migrates to Lucknow and becomes an industrial worker, shifting from agrarian to industrial proletariat, showing Marx's process of primitive accumulation.

In the story *_Padma Nadir Majhi_*, we see a big difference between the fishermen and the man who owns the boats, Hossain Mian. Mian has all the things he needs to catch fish, like nets and boats, and he also has money. On the other hand, Kuber only has his ability to work, and he has to do it in the dangerous Padma river. Mian tells the poor fishermen that if they come to live on Moynadwip island, he will give them some land, but really he just wants them to work for him cheaply. This is a classic example of how some people in power try to trick others into working hard for them by promising them a better life, when really they just want to get richer themselves. It's like they're saying, "Hey, if you work hard for me, you might be able to move up in the world," but really they're just taking advantage of them.

Literature also shows class consciousness. In *_Godaan_*, Bhola and other peasants start realizing they share same exploitation, though they do not yet form a union. In *_Padma_* novel, fishermen's gossip, songs, and anger express embryonic class consciousness.

Thus, literary stories prove that bourgeoisie maintains power not just by economic control but through ideology, religion, and law, and proletariat's struggle is daily survival, migration, and slow awakening.

8. Understanding Gender in Literature: Patriarchy and Female Subordination

Patriarchy, as defined by Sylvia Walby, is a system of social structures where men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Narrative literature captures how this system operates through family, marriage, sexuality, and labour.

In Indian stories, we see how women become who they are, not just born that way. Take Ismat Chughtai's book *_Lihaaf_* for example. The main character, Begum Jaan, is married to a rich man, a Nawab, but he doesn't care about her. Instead, he's interested in young boys. Begum Jaan's own desires are ignored, just because she's supposed to be a good wife. So, she finds comfort with her maid, Rabbo. This story shows how society tries to control what women want and how they express themselves. Even the author, Ismat Chughtai, got in trouble in 1944 for writing about these kinds of things. They said her work was obscene, just because she was honest about women's desires. This just proves that society, especially men, try to dictate what women can and can't write about, especially when it comes to their own desires and feelings.

Here's a rewritten version of the input in a more human-like tone, inspired by the provided reference human samples: In Mahasweta Devi's powerful stories, *_Draupadi_* and *_Bayen_*, we see how patriarchy is deeply connected to the state and caste system. Take the character of Dopdi Mejhen, a tribal woman who's part of the Naxalite movement. She's captured by soldiers who think they can break her by gang-raping her, hoping to extract information about her husband. But Dopdi's response is nothing short of remarkable. Despite being naked and bleeding, she stands tall and challenges her captors, saying "you can't clothe me again." In that moment, her body, which society has tried to shame and silence, becomes a symbol of resistance. Similarly, in *_Bayen_*, we meet Chandidasi, a Dalit woman who's labelled a witch because she breastfeeds dead children. But the truth is, she's just a hardworking woman who's tasked with burying dead bodies in a morgue. Her reproductive labor is stigmatized and twisted into something sinister, showing how patriarchy often seeks to control and shame independent women by calling them witches. These stories highlight the ways in which patriarchy seeks to oppress and silence women, but also how women like Dopdi and Chandidasi resist and challenge these systems of power.

Premchand's *_Sevasadan_* shows how marriage market commodifies women. Suman is married without consent to an older man, then thrown out for attending a social function. Without economic rights, she enters courtesan life.

Thus literature shows patriarchy controls women's sexuality through marriage, labels their labour as impure, and punishes their desire, yet women resist.

9. Gender-Based Violence and Female Resistance in Literature

Feminist sociologists argue that gender-based violence is not individual crime but a tool of patriarchy to control women's body, labour, and mobility. Narrative literature shows three forms of this violence – physical, sexual, and symbolic.

Ismat Chughtai's *_Lihaaf_* shows symbolic violence. Begum Jaan's husband, the Nawab, marries her for status but denies her sexual needs and uses her as showpiece. Her loneliness, excessive massages, and obsession with the quilt are results of marital neglect – a form of emotional violence where female desire is made invisible. When Begum finds intimacy with Rabbo, society calls it obscenity. The 1944 obscenity trial itself is patriarchal violence against a woman writer speaking about female sexuality.

Mahasweta Devi's *_Draupadi_* shows direct state-sexual violence. Dopdi Mejhen, a Santhal tribal woman, is arrested under suspicion of being a Naxalite. She is gang-raped by police jawans throughout the night in the name of interrogation – “make her, do the needful”. The state uses rape as weapon to break tribal resistance and to shame a woman who dared to fight. Mahasweta subverts this. The next morning, Dopdi refuses to wear clothes to cover her torn body. She stands naked in front of Senanayak, blood on thighs, and says – “You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed.”

Her naked body becomes resistance, not shame.

In *_Bayen_*, Chandidasi is branded a witch because she worked in a morgue burying dead children. When her own breastmilk dries, patriarchal village says she feeds dead children. Violence is social boycott, separating her from her son and husband.

Thus literature shows women are punished for desire, for rebellion, for labour, but their resistance transforms violence into agency.

10. Intersectionality of Caste, Class and Gender in Literature: The Conclusion

Caste, class, and gender aren't things you can pull apart and look at separately. Sociology makes that pretty clear, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality puts a name to it: a Dalit woman deals with three kinds of oppression, all tangled up—her caste, her poverty, and her gender. If you want to see this play out in real life, Indian literature lays it right out in front of you.

Look at Mahasweta Devi's *_Draupadi_*. Dopdi Mejhen catches it from every side. She's a woman, sure, but she's also Santhal—a tribal the state labels as a “criminal.” She's poor, so authorities yank her off the street with zero hesitation. As a woman? The violence gets sexual; the police use rape as punishment. Her body ends up as ground zero, where caste, class, and patriarchy crash together. And when Senanayak, the upper-caste officer, tells his men to “do the needful,” he isn't just flexing his muscle as an officer—he's pulling rank as an upper-caste man and as a man, period.

Bama's *_Karukku_* brings the same intersections but spins them differently. She's a Parayar, an untouchable Christian woman. In her village, upper-caste Hindus shove her community onto separate streets, and in the church—her own supposed sanctuary—the nuns and priests do the same thing, just in the name of Christ. On top of that, as a woman, Bama has to bite her tongue and stay in her place. Her answer isn't submission—it's fighting back, using education and writing as tools, connecting Ambedkar's message with a feminist spark.

Then there's Dhaniya in Premchand's *_Godaan_*. She's lower peasant class, dirt poor, and a woman with no power in her village. When her son brings home a pregnant Jhunja, the panchayat—the local caste council—slaps her family with a fine, and Dhaniya is left standing up to both the caste elders and everyone blaming her as a woman.

So, you're not looking at a “simple rural community” here. Stories like these prove how village life in India splits along caste, class, and gender lines, just like M.N. Srinivas and generations of feminists have been saying. Raw numbers and data sheets can't capture this; that's what literature does best. If you really want to understand how these forces shape lives, you need to see the knots, not just the threads—and literature hands you that messy truth.

11. The sociological value of narrative literature as a tool for rural studies is significant.

Narrative literature isn't just fiction. Lewis Coser argued that literature is a representation of social reality and is treated as secondary data and embodied documentation in sociology. Novels and short stories are crucial for rural studies as they overlook everyday exploitation, emotions, and informal power in government statistics and surveys.

Literature's first and foremost is a portrayal of rural life. While the Census reports the number of peasants who have land, Premchand's *_Godaan_* recounts Hori's emotions when his cow dies, Dhaniya's argument against moneylender, and how a peach loses their sense of right due to debt. Clifford Geertz characterized it as a dense description that surveys cannot provide.

The literature records the words of those who do not write history.... *_Karukku_*, a narrative series created by Bama, and paired with testimonial stories such as *_Draupadi_* of Mahasweta and the bare bones of Ismat Chughtai, are examples of autobiographical and testimonial narrative. According to Gayatri Spivak, literature has emphasized the possibility of subalterns speaking out, but they are silenced by formal archives.

The literature exhibits a consistent and dynamic nature.” M.N. The topics discussed by Srinivas included Sanskritization and westernization. Hori’s son, Gobar, expresses his desire to become a prominent farmer in Sanskrit and also transitions to industrial work in Lucknow in *‘Godaan’*. This passage is full of both depictions of this dynamic family man. Before sociologists theorized, this dual process is evident in literature.

It is advantageous for sociology teaching purposes. Hori’s transformation into landless laborers is more accurately understood by students as a proletarian version of Marx than through the definition itself. They are more able to understand patriarchy through Dopdi’s rape than by abstracting the idea.

12. What is the relevance and significance of rural and Dalit narratives in today’s contemporary world?

Agricultural and caste issues in traditional narratives are not historical, but rather present-day realities. Hence, the study of these texts holds significant sociological value in contemporary India.

First, the agrarian crisis continues. The story *‘Godaan’* (1936) by Premchand features Hori’s death as a debtor without land. Why? Over 10,000 farmer suicides per year due to debt, crop failure or lack of MSP remain in the NCRB data by 2025. Mechanized trawlers and climate change in the Padma and Arabian Sea have caused small fishermen to become less abundant, as demonstrated by Manik Bandyopadhyay’s book *‘Padmak Nadir Majhi’* which depicted fishermen being dependent on boat-owners. Additionally, Through literature, we can link the old zamindari exploitation to new forms of corporate farming and contract labor.

Second, caste atrocities continue. *‘Karukku’* and *‘Joothan’* were examples of cases where Dalits were subjected to beatings and segregation for their rights. The NCRB 2022 report states that manual scavenging is still illegal in 2013, but SC/ST crime has increased by 1.2%. Scenes in Rajasthan villages where Dalits groom are not allowed to ride horses resemble those described by Omprakash Valmiki 30 years ago.

Third, tribal displacement is accelerating. Mahasweta’s *‘Draupadi’* displayed state aggression towards tribals for forest land. “. Hasdeo Arand, Chhattisgarh and Niyamgiri, Odisha are experiencing tribal displacement due to mining, which is a common practice in these regions where the state supports the bourgeoisie’s development efforts.

Despite the growing prevalence of custodial violence and moral policing, gender violence in popular literature like *‘Lihaaf’* and *‘Draupadi’* remains relevant.

Ultimately, rural narrative literature is both present and not necessarily past.’ It offers sociological imagination, as described in C.

13. The Limits and Assessment of Using Narrative Literature in Sociological Analysis:

Narrative literature, while valuable to sociology, has some limitations and should be used critically, as cautioned by both literary critics and sociologists.

First, of course, authoritarian bias and the middle class.’ The. Urban and well-educated urban writers are the main authors of famous rural novels.... The leader of the empire was Kayastha, and the other two were Manik Bandyopadhyay, both belonging to the upper-caste Bengali community. They experienced the lifestyles of the village but were not peasants or fishermen.regular. Despite being sympathetic, their representation is from an external perspective. Gayatri Spivak contends that speaking on behalf of the subaltern instead of allowing them to speak is a risky choice. Therefore, we must compare upper-caste writing to Dalit autobiography such as Bama’s *‘Karukku’* and Omprakash Valmiki’ where both writers belong to the same cast.

Over-emphasizing of emotions and exalted artistic expression are the second limitation.... The use of tragedy in literature has aesthetic merit. The depiction of Hori’s death in *‘Godaan’* and Kuber’s despair in the film demonstrates great emotional investment. Sociology needs objective data. By relying solely on literature, we may witness only marginalization and neglect to acknowledge the significance of rural cooperation, jajmani solidarity, and village unity as described by M.N. Srinivas and S.C. Dube.

Third, lack of representativeness. The novel narrates the tale of Awadh, a village and comrade in *‘Godaan’*, and East Bengal fishermen in Padma. We are unable to generalize the situation across India from one narrative. Large sample surveys and comparative studies across states are necessary for sociological generalization.

Fourth, time gap. The majority of rural classics dates back to the 1930-1980 period. Green Revolution, Panchayati Raj and the migration and mobile phones have brought about changes in this village. If you read old books, the picture may appear outdated.

Thus, triangulation is best when done through the literature, field studies, NSSO data, and census.

14. Sociology of Red Light Area – Ancient Era: Nagarvadhu & Devadasi System.

Sociology on prostitution in India was not initiated by the British. Ancient sacred prostitution is the starting point of its existence.

Nagarvadhu Concept:

Nagarvadhu was the bride of Vaishali and other ancient cities, known for her exceptional beauty and talent. Amrapali in Vaishali was Nagarvadhu. She was not authorized to wed a single man, but her role in it was intended to serve the wealthier and more powerful elite of the city. This was a sociological institutionalization of female sexuality for the pleasure of the city, and male entertainment of elite status. It demonstrates how women's bodies are owned and controlled by the patriarchal society as public property.

Devadasi System:

In South India and Odisha, young girls of Dalit and lower-caste were entrusted with the duty of serving God in temples as Devadasi, which was practiced from the 6th century onwards. Jagannath or Yellamma was the god they were married to for religious purposes, but temple priests and landlords made them sexually accessible. Devadasi was considered by Jan Breman and Ambedkar as a form of religious authorization for caste abuse. In the name of bhakti, upper-caste men engaged in sexual activities with girls from lower castes.

G.S. The occurrence is not voluntary, as per Ghurye and feminist historians, but rather a consequence of structural coercion. Dalit families were impoverished and devoted their daughter to the temple, believing that failure to do so would result in divine curses. In the absence of dedication, girls were prohibited from marrying and had no choice but to perform chores, cleaning, or sexual acts.

Rather than a brothel, the ancient red light area was actually occupied by the temple and royal court. Prostitution was sacred, not stigmatized. The combination of caste, class, and patriarchy resulted in the development of the first form of sexual work that was not chosen but instead imposed upon women, which later became an inspiration for the medieval Lal Bazaar.

15. The sociological study of the Red Light Area during the Medieval/Colonial Era, including Lal Bazaar, Kamathipura, and G.B. Chakla (in Bengal). Road

Colonialism and feudal decline were the reasons behind the modern red light area, not an extension of ancient tradition.

During the Mughal and early British periods, two new terms were introduced:

Lal Bazaar And Chakla.

The sale of sex to British soldiers and traders was possible through Lal Bazaar. Chakla meant licensed brothel area.

Sonagachi, Kolkata (Oldest in Asia):

Started in 1850s. Fort William was erected by the British East India Company in Calcutta after the Battle of Plassey. Countless unmarried male soldiers arrived without any family connections. British established a separate sex market for soldiers near Chitpur to curb the number of local Bengali women of upper-caste who were raped by militants and other non-indigenous people. The expulsion of poor lower-caste girls and women from Sati and widowhood, who were prohibited from remarriage, was enforced in this area. To safeguard soldiers from STDs, the British granted license, collected taxes, and conducted weekly health checks under the Contagious Disease Act 1864, despite their claim that this was a necessary evil.

Kamathipura, Mumbai:

Following the initiation of cotton mills, it developed from the 1850s. Mumbai was in dire need of Konkan and Deccan men who could provide low-cost labor. Non-married male laborers resided in lodges. Labourers in brothels were encouraged by British and mill owners to ensure worker safety. In addition, Devadasi girls from Karnataka and Marathwada, which were in drought, were trafficked to this area. The area was named after the Kamathis – Telugu workers who were the first to settle there.'

G.B. Road, Delhi (Garstin Bastion Road):

Developed during the 1920s when New Delhi was established as an imperial capital. The city. To serve British officers, clerks, and later railway workers, the British established a red light area near Ajmeri Gate.

The red light area was utilized by the colonial state to exert urban control, racial segregation, and revenue extraction, as examined by Veenastica Oldenburg and Ashwini Tambe from a sociological perspective. This reverted to the commercial, organized prostitution that was originally an act of sacred Devadasi exploitation.

16. Sociology of the Red Light Area – Modern Era: Structure, Causes and Changes.

The contemporary red light district is not solely a place of dishonor, but also embodies societal norms, regulations, and economics comparable to those of villagers. Sociologists such as Ashwini Tambe and Shahid Perwez have examined its internal stratification.' The highest-ranking official in this hierarchy is the Gharwali, a former prostitute who has taken ownership of the brothels and takes control by taking fifty percent of revenue. The regular sex workers who have established themselves as reliable clients and enjoy relative safety are situated beneath her. The new girl or Chukri, who was frequently subjected to debt bondage, is situated at the bottom and has to repay between one and two lakh rupees that were paid by Gharwali to the trafficker. Children and male servants are at the bottom, while clients include migrant laborers, truck drivers, and lower middle-class men. Sociological factors are responsible for the high rates of sexual work initiation. Additionally, Women are the primary concern in poverty and feminizing poverty, as per the statistics of NSSO, with over 70% of prostitutes being from SC/ST and OBC families who face pressure to work due to their father's death or

illness. The second category, caste-related communities, consist of Devadasi (Bayresh), Nat, Perna, and Bedia (Namdulla). False love is the third type of trafficking, where a lover boy deceives villagers into marrying them and then proceeds to sell them to brothels in Mumbai, Delhi or Kolkata. The fourth category of women who are victims of domestic violence often seek refuge in the brothel network, fleeing from abusive families. Rapid changes are occurring in the characteristics of red light areas today. The physical size of brothels areas is decreasing due to real estate pressure and police raids, but sex work is expanding online through mobile phones, WhatsApp, and websites. Following COVID-19, a significant number of workers transitioned from working in brothels to using the flat-based and home delivery systems. In Sonagachi, the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) movement is a manifestation of the growing trend where prostitutes are organizing and demanding labor rights, health protection, and dignity, asserting that they are workers and not victims.

17. The Red Light of Narrative Literature (Srikanta, Sebassadan, Manto's Story)

The red light area has been portrayed in narrative literature as a place where sin is not present, but rather it is an environment that allows for exploitation and human suffering, which official reports cannot critique. One of the earliest examples of a humanized sex worker in Indian literature is the character of Rajlakshmi in Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Srikanta* (1917–33). Instead of portraying an immoral woman, Rajlakshmi is presented as a Bengali widow from an impoverished family who were forced into prostitution due to being betrayed. Her true identity is uncertain. The prohibition of widow remarriage in society, which is associated with the veneration of pure wife, leads to the creation of prostitutes, as Sarat Chandra shows. She still has love for Srikanta and challenges the dichotomy of Sati and malevolent woman created by patriarchy.

Premchand's *Sevasadan* (1918) uses Suman's story as a direct sociological reference to middle-class hypocrisy. The daughter of Kayasth – the poorest girl in her family – Suman is married to an old man who has a dowry problem. She enters the Kotha of Bholi after being humiliated by upper-caste women who defy her authority and do not respect her husband, leading her to leave home due to lack of luxury. Women are not only lured into the red light by lust, but also denied dignity and economic security, as demonstrated by Premchand. The novel concludes with Suman establishing a sanctuary for the offspring of prostitutes, advocating for reform rather than punishment.

In Saadat Hasan Manto's stories, like *Hatak*, *Thanda Gosht* and *Kali Shalwar* (India), we are shown the brutality of the colonial red light area of Bombay and Lahore. In *Hatak*, Sugandhi has become an exploiter and believes that she is only valuable to her fellow slaves. Additionally, there are other depictions of her in the movie. The female body is the ultimate battlefield, as demonstrated by Manto with respect to partitioning and poverty and male violence. Manto differs from romantic novels in that it portrays sex workers as laborers who are exploited by pimps, police, and society. This is an important aspect of the genre. Through the use of stories as society, all three writers demonstrate that prostitution is not a moral failure but rather influenced by caste, poverty, and patriarchal double standards.

18. The legal and human rights perspective on ITPA, Supreme Court decision 2022, and DMSC movement.

India's legal system for red light areas has shifted from moral punishment to recognition of rights, which is relevant for sociological studies. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, ITPA 1956 is the primary law that was passed after India signed an international convention to prevent trafficking. India's law contradicts the idea that women can legally sell sex in private while brothel keeping, pimping, soliciting in public, and trafficking are prohibited. The sex worker is treated as both a criminal and abused victim due to the sociological grey zone created. ITPA is a patriarchal law where police arrest women in brothels, not clients or traffickers. Why?

Budhadev Karmaskar vs State of West Bengal's Supreme Court Judgment in May 2022 marked a significant turning point. The Court's initial ruling was that sex workers have the right to dignity as per Article 21 of the Constitution. It was also ordered by the Court that sex workers should not be harassed, arrested or verbally abused; children of prostitutes should never be separated from their mother because she is engaged in sexual activity; and journalists are not to report on their movements during raids. UIDAI was directed by the Court to provide Aadhaar cards without discrimination, and sex work was also acknowledged as a profession. The human rights perspective was overshadowed by the moral reform perspective.

The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, established in Sonagachi in 1995, achieved a legal victory after battling it for years. DMSC was started by Dr. Smarajit Jana, which aimed to prevent HIV infection, was the first union of sex workers in India to have 65,000 members. DMSC's slogan is "Sex work is work, we demand workers' rights, not rescue and rehabilitation." They are against NGOs that conduct forced rescue raids and send workers to correction homes. The proposal calls for boards of self-regulatory action that would enable sex workers to identify trafficking victims and report actual minors.

Conclusion

The thesis of this research paper is as follows: "Story is Society". Through the sociological analysis of narrative literature, this research has tried to show how Indian society cannot be understood by numbers, censuses, and official government documents alone. To comprehend the experience of caste humiliation, class exploitation, and gender subordination, one must know its story – particularly those stories which emerge out of its most invisible and voiceless spaces such as Red Light Areas.

The analysis has been undertaken in three interconnected stages.

First, the research established that narrative literature is a very legitimate and powerful sociological document. The selected literature texts include: *Mulik Raj Anand's *Untouchable**, *Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan**, *Bama's *Karukku**, *Premchand's *Godaan** and *Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi**.

These literary texts are not mere imaginative constructs. They are ethnographic records of social stratification. Literature records what C. Wright Mills refers to the 'connection between private troubles and public issues'. For example, a single Dalit woman's insult is not a private issue. It is a public issue of caste system. Similarly, the poverty of a farmer is not his/her destiny. It is a public issue of class relations.

Second, the research mapped the sociology of the Red Light Areas from the ancient times till today showing how it is not an isolated immoral island but a creation of history and social structure.

The *Ancient Period* witnesses the existence of sex work in an institutionalized manner. Nagarvadhu System represented by Amrapali and Devadasi system are related to art, temple service, and state regulation in the case of Kautilya's Arthashastra. In this profession, women enjoyed certain artistic freedom and economic independence, and the profession was not ghettoized geographically.

The *Middle Period*, including Medieval Era and the Colonial era, is the crucial point where the meaning and nature of sex work undergoes total transformation. With the arrival of feudalism in the medieval period, the Devadasi system gets corrupted. Here, temple women became victims of sexual exploitation at the hands of landlords and priests. However, the most important transformation happens under the reign of *British colonial administration*. It is the colonial state that creates the modern Red Light Area. To cater to the needs of medical control of the British soldiers, the colonial state creates the designated, segregated zones named "Lal Bazaars" or "Chaklas". Sonagachi in Kolkata (Asia's oldest and largest), Kamathipura in Mumbai, and G.B. Road in Delhi are the colonial creation of India.

These were governed by the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868 where women were registered and tested as carriers of diseases. At the same time, colonial economic policies such as Famines, Permanent Settlement of 1793 and collapse of indigenous industries resulted in pushing poor peasant women, widows and lower caste women to move to urban spaces and join these sectors for their survival. This era saw sex work being regulated to become a highly stigmatized, criminalized and spatially ghettoized occupation.

In the *Present Period*, the Red Light Areas are a combination of caste, class and gender. Various field studies have shown that these are made up of individuals who are from poor socio-economic background, Dalit, Tribal, OBC and minorities. Thus, it is clear that the entrance into this occupation is not a choice of an individual but a result of structural forces. It is a diversified sector including brothel-based, street-based, home-based and online/application-based which results in the gradual decline of the former due to property pressure and technology.

In addition, the legal paradox is studied in this sector. As per the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act [ITPA] of 1956, sex work is not an illegal activity but brothel-keeping, pimping and soliciting are illegal activities resulting in constant threat of harassment by police. Recently, the Supreme Court of India passed the judgement in 2022 in *Budhadev Karmaskar vs State of West Bengal* wherein it was acknowledged that sex work is a dignified profession. Rights-based movements such as Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee [DMSC] in Sonagachi has defined a new discourse of "Sex Work is Work" with emphasis on health, HIV prevention, education of children and anti-trafficking.

Third, and most importantly, with the intersectionality framework of Kimberlé Crenshaw and Sharmila Rege, it can be concluded that intersectionality gives rise to most severe form of oppression. A Dalit woman in Red Light Area faces triple oppression. She is oppressed as a woman by patriarchy, as a poor individual by class exploitation and as a Dalit by caste hierarchy. Her body becomes the intersection point of all these oppressions such as caste impurity, class exploitation and patriarchy. She is discriminated against by upper-caste clients, police and mainstream society as well as patriarchy of her own community. Mainstream feminism which excludes caste and Dalit politics which exclude gender cannot understand her plight.

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