



Nastaran Ahsan's Novel, "LIFT" Naming Process and a Call for Socio-political Reform

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Abstract-- This analysis examines Nastaran Ahsan's contemporary novel 'Lift' as a blunt sociopolitical critique of modern-day India, a nation caught between rapid modernization and traditional issues. The author uses the literary tool of characterization to portray a society struggling with the caste system, the erosion of rural traditions, and women's autonomy.

The central focus of the text is the unconventional characteristics of Naik Ram's Ahsan, a Dalit character whose name ironically symbolizes piety and kindness but who is portrayed as a means of treachery and deceit. Through them, the novel explores the complexities of "reverse discrimination" and the exploitation of India's reservation policy, using the metaphor of "lift" (elevator) to symbolize his unearned rise to power. In contrast, the character of Ajay Varma serves as the novel's moral compass, reflecting the "loss of one's moorings" as the Indian elite transition from traditional village life to a separate, urban existence.

This analysis further investigates the search for female identity through Mita, an independent woman who rejects the traditional roles of homemaker and child-bearer. Her eventual departure from India signifies the author's disillusioned view of a woman's ability to flourish within the existing social framework. Finally, the essay highlights the stark contrast between India's technological achievements such as its nuclear power status and the persistent realities of malnutrition, poverty, and social apathy. The text concludes that 'Lift' serves as a pastoral call for reform, urging readers to move beyond misconceptions and address the fundamental decay of the Indian social order.

Keywords-- 'Lift', Indian Literature, Sociopolitical Reform, Caste System, Characterization, Modernization, Dalit Identity, Female Autonomy.

I. INTRODUCTION

A Nation Brewing with Sociopolitical Issues: Backdrop of the Novel

Modern day India is a nation brewing with sociopolitical issues that threaten to broil over and acidify the nation with its ambitious drive. Moreover, India is a nation with an electrically charged air of change and modernization.

Needless to say, the modernized India is not the mirror image of a superpower such as America, regardless of prematurely succeeding at acquiring the technology and the intellect to possess nuclear weapons making it the sixth nation to do so in the entire world. India is in the throes of revolutionizing itself, from industrializing villages to taking bold steps to liberate itself from the backward, unenlightened traditions of the once rural India. Nastaran Ahsan, the author of the contemporary novel 'Lift', skillfully uses the literary tool of characterization in order to take a snapshot of the current environment of India.

II. THE CASTE SYSTEM

A blemish on the Indian cultural and sociopolitical history has been the caste system and its adverse treatment of the untouchables. An otherwise apparent observation regarding the case of untouchables is that it has been the root cause of the degraded and degenerating Indian social order.

For a long period of time, the Indian mindset exerted its entire energy at its disposal to construct a social order based on the principles of purity and pollution, inferior and superior, included and excluded, mental and menial labor, upper and lower castes. The caste system rusticated feeding, drinking, and social intercourse; it imposed evil religious disabilities, privileges of marriage, and choice of occupation to different sections. The hierarchy of caste fortified the shackles of slavery and subordination.

To support the claim of Caste System and Reservation Policy in India, the following table helps to give a descriptive analysis:

Category	Reference / Concept	Significance in the Text
Caste Hierarchy	Ambedkar, B. R. (1936). <i>Annihilation of Caste.</i>	Discusses the "shackles of slavery and subordination" mentioned in the essay.
Gender Identity	Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. (2003). <i>Feminism Without Borders</i>	Contextualizes Meeta's struggle against the "homemaker and child-bearer" trope.
Urbanization	Srinivas, M. N. (1966). <i>Social Change in Modern India.</i>	Explains the shift from "village rules" to city capitalization described in the text.



III. A BOLD UNCONVENTIONAL CHARACTERIZATION

Despite the sympathetic feelings that one may naturally acquire for the cause of Dalits or the untouchables, the novel dares to portray a Dalit character in the book as a source of treachery and deception. This stands in stark contrast to his counterpart who (quite arguably) is illuminated as the epitome of human kindness and moral ethics.

IV. NASTARAN'S VIEW

Nastaran Ahsan continues to claim that a woman cannot succeed in the society of India in its current treatment toward women. This is evident when Meeta leaves her home due to the fallout between her parents and herself over the issue of marriage. She eventually leaves her city for security measures, and ultimately the country for a faraway land where she flourishes and has the opportunity to cultivate and nourish her interests.

The author continues to explore other issues through her novel to paint a clear image of current-day India. Always serving as guidance and a voice of morality, the author speaks through the eyes and writing of Ajay Varma, who allegorically tries to get his fellow Indians to rise to the challenge of improving the state of their nation.

V. BLUNT AND FORTHRIGHT

Nastaran Ahsan is blunt in regard to the issues that she addresses. She is very clear and doesn't employ too many literary devices except the strong use of characterization. The author at times rampages about moral and ethic issues addressed by Ajay Varma, who at times tries to be the "ethical Bible" of India.

Nevertheless, the novel succeeds in critically examining the current state of India that many may overlook. Whether or not Nastaran Ahsan uses the novel as a pastoral to stand and preach from, the meticulous attention paid to the sociopolitical environment of India achieves the goal of informing its readers and jarring them from their misconceptions and stupor of apathy.

The intent of this essay has not been to provide the final word, but to suggest avenues of practical action and encourage further thinking. Given the wide range of methods and mechanisms for pursuing social and political change today, Indians have plenty of options to choose from; the only challenge may be finding the most productive activities on which to focus one's time and energy. But I leave that as an exercise for the reader.

Upon researching the cause of the current power clash, or the consequences of the rise of Dalits to power, one finds a plethora of research supporting the cause of the Dalits which successfully illustrates them as the goodness at the core of all mankind. For example, one text describes an arguably ruthless and corrupt politician as a leader and spokesperson of the minorities, successfully depicting her as a chivalrous saint in armor defending the victims against their suppressors.

VI. ON REVERSE DISCRIMINATION

Another text sheds light on the prejudice and hostility against the Scheduled Caste, claiming that it has not diminished. Bhagwan Das, a director of the Asian Centre for Human Rights and an Advocate at the Supreme Court of India, claims that through articles and letters published in international dailies, an impression is created that Scheduled Caste employees are mentally and morally inferior.

This might implement a seed of doubt in the minds of Nastaran Ahsan's readers that she too is a criminal in support of this hostile theory. However, it will prove to be a difficult task to insinuate Nastaran Ahsan as the inciter of hatred against the Dalits, since she spends equal energy focusing on a variety of other issues such as the search for female identity through the character of Meeta, the consequences of modernization in India, the political environment of Indian colleges and universities, and the rift between Muslims and Hindus.

VII. THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHARACTER

Nastaran Ahsan uses Ajay Varma as a vehicle through which the reader is exposed to the multi-faceted aspects of India's society. The author delineates how a Dalit character, Nek Raam, abuses the reservation policy for Scheduled Castes that allows him to get promotion or employment over possibly more qualified non-Dalit caste members.

Through Nek Raam, Nastaran Ahsan explores the nature of man that entices him to exploit and abuse policies or situations to his own advantage. Through Ajay Varma, we are introduced to Nek Raam. With Ajay Varma, the reader first falls in love with the sugar-coated surface of Nek Raam and is eventually introduced to the hypocrite lying within.



Based on Maslow's pyramid, a man's primary necessity and concern is food—feeding yourself, for which you need money. Following that line of thinking, as India modernizes, the life that was once centered on farms and village rules has now shifted toward the city where one can capitalize and profit from a variety of city benefits including education, health care, and most importantly, employment.

VIII. TRADITION AS A BARRIER: LOSS OF ONE'S MOORINGS

The eradication of tradition is explicit in the choices of Ajay Varma, for he chooses not to return after his studies to take up his responsibilities as a farmer and a landlord. Likewise, his son is more "modern" than himself; Ajay Varma likes walking in the open air and reminiscing about the fresh air of his village, while on the contrary, his son prefers driving in a fast-paced, air-conditioned car.

The novel ends with Ajay Varma meeting his only daughter-in-law clad in jeans and a shirt, who didn't feel it necessary to change into traditional clothes upon meeting her in-laws for the first time. Ajay Varma shifts to the city and spends his life going back home to his village during vacations. That too comes to a gradual halt as his parents pass away, serving as an emblem of the death of a legacy and the traditional India. His grand house in his village a house that was home to his ancestors meets its final fate as well: to be locked forever and eventually forgotten.

IX. WHAT HAPPENS TO WOMEN? STILL MAINLY A CHILD-BEARER?

Despite the fact that everything is changing and India is being modernized, the search for a woman's identity is still a challenge. The author explores this through the character of Meeta, a strong independent woman of the modern age.

Meeta is resolute and determined about pursuing her Ph.D degree and completing her thesis, a classic dissident against the traditional India which has dictated one and only role for a woman: the homemaker and child-bearer.

Unlike Seema, who is portrayed as the perfect wife of Ajay Varma perfectly content taking care of her in-laws, her son, and the needs of her husband Meeta is uninterested in marriage and refuses to accede to her role as decreed by society.

This is obvious when Meeta refuses to marry not only her lustful-arrogant suitor chosen by her parents, but also Rajeesh, who is a respectful, intelligent, dedicated colleague. Her refusal and failure to strike a compromise with her fiancé regarding her education and possible future employment terminates their engagement. Consequently, Meeta faces the cold and hurt faces of her parents and family instead of understanding and consoling.

X. NAMING CHARACTERS FOR THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Nastaran Ahsan uses the literary technique of naming her characters by using simple words that give insight into their personality. The name Nek Raam in Hindi means a person who is a pious, moral man possessing kindness ("Nek" means saintly or a benefactor; "Raam" is a name of a Hindu God).

Naming people in such a manner is very common in Indian culture, and it serves as a contradiction to the character that the reader comes to realize is a manipulator. Nek Raam wins over the readers and Ajay Varma through his servitude and polite behavior. The seeds of suspicion are first planted by Varma's pragmatic wife, Seema, who behaves coldly toward him, warning her husband against the "real" Nek Raam.

Later on in the novel, the reader comes to suspect Nek Raam for his involvement in the murder of a university Registrar, whose job he acquires soon after the death. Nek Raam is quite comfortable with using a "lift" (elevator) to climb up the stairs as opposed to Ajay Varma, claiming that one should not have to toil to achieve something when you can just as easily press a button. This appears to be his central philosophy, as we see him rise from a menial worker to the position of Vice-Chancellor of the University within a decade, while qualified non-Dalits wait for their promotions.

XI. PROBLEMS OF MODERNIZATION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION: EMPTY CLAIMS AND HOPES?

As India copes with the ups and downs of the Reservation Policy by challenging the traditional caste system, it is also in the midst of modernizing and industrializing. Where once you had to suffer a dusty ride of hours to get to your village, an auto-rickshaw can now take you there in minutes.



There are shining new buildings and lighted stores selling sweets and a variety of food, trying desperately to attract the attention of customers instead of just flies. However, poverty still reigns the land, even though the signs of the old ways are disappearing. As Ajay Varma goes back to his village, he notices the “hungry-eyed” look of the people and ponders the state of malnutrition and poverty that racks the land of a “modernized” India capable of achieving nuclear power status despite the scenario he sees before him.

XII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Nastaran Ahsan’s ‘Lift’ serves as a piercing sociopolitical critique that strips away the glossy veneer of a “modernist” India to reveal a core of persistent inequality and moral decay. Through the blunt tool of characterisation, Ahsan makes it clear that the nation has achieved the technological heights of nuclear power, but its social foundations are crumbling under the ancient weight of caste and the new complexities of industrialisation.

The novel’s power lies in its defying expectations – particularly through the character of the virtuous Ram. By juxtaposing his good name with his manipulation through reservation policies and the “lift” of deceit, Ahsan challenges the reader to look beyond superficial labels and academic research. This “naming process” highlights a wider cultural hypocrisy where symbols of piety are used to disguise opportunism. Meanwhile, Ajay Verma’s character represents the “loss of the peacocks” who serve as witnesses to the death of traditional heritage and the rise of a sterile, disconnected urban life.

As the analysis suggests through Maslow’s hierarchy, the shift from rural tradition to urban modernity is driven by the basic needs of survival and profit, yet this transition has left the most vulnerable behind in a state of “hungry-eyed” malnutrition.

Furthermore, Meeta’s character illustrates the author’s grim assessment of gender roles. Her need to leave the country to achieve success suggests that Indian modernity has not yet liberated women’s identity from the role of “child-bearer.”

Ultimately, ‘Lift’ is not simply a portrait of a nation in transition, but a rural call for reform. It challenges the reader with the “foolishness of indifference” by highlighting the stark contrast between India’s global ambitions and its domestic realities. The text leaves the reader with a final, inevitable exercise: to look past the “shiny new buildings” and address the systemic problems of corruption, reverse discrimination, and poverty that threaten to accelerate the nation’s future. Ahsan suggests that the path to real progress cannot be found simply by pressing the button on the “elevator” but rather through a difficult, collective return to ethical morality and social justice.

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