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CONSTRUING CASTE, MASCULINITY, AND INTELLECT IN MANU JOSEPH'S *SERIOUS MEN*

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Abstract

Intellect is an overlooked aspect in scrutinizing the effects of hegemonic masculinity in critical studies on men and masculinities. In postcolonial, liberalized, and post-modern India, it interacts with overlapping identities, primarily gender, to create a complex reality, particularly for the most underprivileged Dalits. The article examines the intersections of caste, masculinity, and intellect in Manu Joseph's novel *Serious Men* (2010), which underscores the gendered nature of politicized knowledge productions. Using the concepts of "hegemonic masculinity" and "global intellectual hegemony", the article analyzes the dynamics of caste and intellect in marginalised masculinities. The multiple gender subordinations of Dalit men are evaluated using "intersectionality" and the "power/knowledge" dichotomy. The article accentuates the anti-essentialist behaviour of non-hegemonic masculinities that challenge dominant masculinities.

Keywords: Dalit Masculinity; Hegemonic Masculinity; Global Intellectual Hegemony; Intersectionality

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Introduction

Manu Joseph's debut novel *Serious Men* (2010) explores the limits of Dalit[1] subversion of power and hierarchy in contemporary caste-conscious India. Ayyan Mani, the novel's Dalit male protagonist, works as an assistant to Arvind Acharya, the Brahmin[2] male director of the fictitious Institute of Theory and Research in Mumbai, while leading an ambitious life in the slums. He is a partially empowered Dalit, as he is an educated citizen of the globalized new India who is aware of his rights but struggles to attain them. He is deprived of respect and recognition from his Brahmin male superiors, as they regard him as the permanent underdog of the group due to his subjugated caste position. Ayyan's masculinity suffers from the lack of masculine honor, power, and public acceptance, which forces him to adopt subversive techniques to gain prominence in his casteist workplace. Caste as the institutionalized agenda of Ayyan's workplace conflicts with the intellectual hypocrisies of his high-caste superiors, which reformulates his subjugated Dalit masculinity. However, his fight to reconstruct gender identity complicates the give-and-take relationship between Dalits and Brahmins.

This article analyzes the intersection of caste, masculinity, and intellect in the novel that underscores the gendered nature of politicized knowledge productions. The existing explications have not analyzed the novel using a Dalit masculinity perspective under the lens of "hegemonic masculinity" and "global intellectual hegemony". The present reading of the novel examines the role of intellectual supremacy in the caste-enforced gendering of an Indian Dalit man. It further connects to his different identity degenerations and their consequences. Ayyan's reaction mechanisms are connected to broader socio-political situations of his Dalitism[3] that constantly fight Brahminism[4], which results in his liminal gender positioning.

The aspect of intelligence is vital to the plot line of the novel amidst the divisive forces of caste politics. Ayyan realizes the power of intellect in his casteist society and models his ten-year-old son Adi as a Dalit genius, mimicking Brahminical knowledge systems. He coaches his son to memorize difficult scientific ideas to fake intelligence in front of his teachers and friends at school. Ayyan's intention was to make the school authorities, the public, and through them, his Brahmin male providers believe that his son is an exceptional genius. He wanted the casteist world to allocate some power to him and his family through the worth of his son's intelligence. Ayyan carefully observed the happenings of the institute, read the files brought to the director, and learned the long history of Dalit suppression and struggle, to empower himself. The high caste (mis)conception of Dalit intelligence gets confronted by the introduction of the Dalit genius, which reflects the immoral use of scientific establishments to promote casteism.

The variety of performative masculinities in modern South Asia is examined in a few edited anthologies (Chakraborty 2011, 16; Chopra et al. 2004, 20; Dasgupta and Gokulsing 2014, 26). In the South Asian context, the politics of raced manhood played a pivotal role in the history of colonialism (Krishnaswamy

1998, 53; Nandy 1983, 23-27; Sinha 1995, 30). Indian masculinities are the amalgamation of the varied histories of the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras, and caste and religious identities (Sinha 2016, 27). Some studies draw a connection between the gendered histories of nationalism and colonialism and the violent, aggressive upper-caste masculinities of the Hindu right today (Banerjee 2012, 55; Chakraborty 16). Socio-psychological studies inquired about the normative matrices of family, society, social institutions, belief systems, and traditions that shape the psyche of the Indian man. In India, the normative perspective emphasizes societal standards and the examination of normative stereotypes/normative ideals that dictate what a man or woman should be or do (Kakar 1978, 155; Nandy 22). This view is unavoidable in understanding Jaatidharma[5], Sahadharmini[6], and Purushartha[7] as reflected in various classical writings on religion and culture in India (Chatterjee 2009, 170). The existential reality of caste is a continued phenomenon in Indian society, with Dalit men and women still being the most vulnerable (Chakravarti 2018, 152). Recent studies in anthropology and history have charted the development of Dalit masculinities in India from the colonial era to the present (Gupta 2018, 36; Jeffrey et al. 2008, 62). Dalit masculine subjectivity has remained ambiguous in its relation to hegemonic ideals of upper-caste manhood. Lack of education, a discriminatory labor market, a skewed criminal justice system, technologies of surveillance, and the deliberate othering by upper caste men and colonizers resulted in the systemic decimation of Dalit masculinity (Gupta 112). A study on gendered caste in the Thirunur village of Tamil Nadu observed the indirect response of Dalit men against the continuous emasculation by upper caste Mudaliars: "Even if Dalits could not beat up the Mudaliars in person, they dismembered the dead bodies of Mudaliars in crematoriums…inscribed by the Dalit men's desire to be masculine enough and an acknowledgement of their inability to do so" (Anandhi et al. 2002, 4399). A revisit to the same village revealed the life of Dalit men in relation to the power relations of caste, work, and masculinities. Years of socio-political changes helped them assimilate Dalit consciousness and Dravidian politics[8], to construct their identities and assert their rights through the revolutionary path of social transformation (Lakshmanan 2004, 1092). The notions of "caste body" and "outcaste body", and how masculinities of outcaste male bodies are represented in the writings of Dalit male writers have also received research attention.

Literary representations of Dalit masculinities are relational to gender identification, the social legitimacy of caste, the economic value of labor, and manifestations of maleness within family and community (Dhabak 2021, 114). Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) features a Dalit man named Velutha who becomes the object of upper-caste men's victimizing masculinist power and upper-caste women's gaze (Mittapalli 2017, 54). Karisal literature of Tamil Nadu notes that the traditional traits of masculinity are more expected from upper caste men, not from Dalit men (Ruban 2023, 86). In India, caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy, the organizing principles of Brahminical patriarchy in the "Dalit past", are to be deeply explored to expose the marginalised masculinities

in the "Dalit present" (Chakravarti 1993, 579-580). The hegemonic, complicit, and marginalised masculinities in the novel are constantly interacting, changing the conditions of mutual existence and altering the direction of their growth. The hegemonic masculine bloc conceals and discreetly obfuscates how patriarchal power and privilege are upheld by fusing hegemonic practices with marginalised or subordinated practices (Robertson et al. 2020, 158). The Brahmin men and Dalit men together maintain the patriarchal functioning of the institute, but the latter receive the least advantage as patriarchal and material dividends (Connell 2005, 79-80). In Indian English fiction, Dalit male characters are not generally portrayed as characters positioning themselves as gendered beings. *Serious Men* breaks this tradition by making Ayyan conscious of his marginalised gender identity. Prominent Indian English novels such as *Untouchable* (1935), *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Guide* (1958), *A Fine Balance* (1995), *The God of Small Things* (1997), *Sea of Poppies* (2008), and *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) reflected the realities of systemic casteism and its effects on bodies, minds, and cultures of Dalit men and women. The representation of caste-based issues was not always criticizing the discrimination altogether; some elite writers used it to reassert Brahminic domination. Paranjape identifies three major trends in the portrayal of caste in the Indian English Novel. The first one is the acceptance of caste through the affirmation of hierarchy, hereditary privilege, endogamy, and notions of caste pollution/purity, as evident in the novels *Indira Devi* (1930) and *The Princes* (1963). In the second trend, the social criticism of caste is executed with vigor through progressive and humanist novels, like those of Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya. With Raja Rao's novels as the best examples, the third trend has a middle-ground approach to caste with selective retention of hierarchical attitudes (1991, 2300).

Shashi Deshpande, who judged the 2010 *Man Asian Literary Prize* for which the novel was shortlisted, appreciated it for the genuine presentation of the new Indian Dalit man. She said: "Indian books written in English haven't yet approached the novel in the way Manu Joseph has done. He has spoken about caste. We are ignoring reality, but he has straightforwardly plunged into the mind of a Dalit man and has done it with style and panache" (East 2021, 1). Ayyan's indirect resistance to continued casteist domination is similar to the revolt of Balram, the protagonist in Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* (2008) (Yadav 2022, 5). Chandrashekhar compares Ayyan to Indra Sinha's character Animal from the novel *Animal's People* (2007), referring to Stacey Balkan's concept of the "postcolonial rogue" and maps the affective tensions between Ayyan's neoliberal Dalit masculinity and Acharya's Tamil Brahmin masculinity (2023, 2). The representation of anti-caste politics in the novel is inconsistent with Ayyan's critique of casteism, and it contributes to the novel's ultimate reactionary tendency (Yadav 13). Saxena analyzes the novel using Prasad and Kamble's concept of "Dalit capitalism". Dalit capitalists resist the Indian caste system using their newly gained purchasing power, whereas Ayyan tries to steal power that doesn't belong to him. He concludes that anti-caste movements cannot lean into

neoliberal governance, and anti-capitalist movements also need to acknowledge caste (Saxena 2021, 85). A comparison of the novel with Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) shows the docile, sympathetic Dalit man of British India in the latter and the liberated Dalit man of postcolonial, post-modern India in the former (Krishnan 2018, 54). Another study notes multiple levels of social exploitation of Dalits and the influence of capitalism, industrialism, and colonialism on the same (Ananthavalli 2010, 45).

This article discusses the role of marginalised masculinities and intellectual hierarchy in the novel in shaping a third-world caste-based hegemonic masculinity in India. Raewyn Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is clubbed with Branislav Gosovic's concept of "global intellectual hegemony" to analyse the dynamics of caste-based hegemonic masculinity. This article focuses on how Ayyan's subjugated masculinity conveniently blurs the borders of hegemonic masculine constructs to gain power and privilege. Ayyan's multiple gender subordinations are evaluated using Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of "intersectionality" and Michel Foucault's "power/knowledge" dichotomy.

Discussion

Dalit Masculinity, Marginality, and Resistance

Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality criticizes the practice of using single-axis analysis for inspecting the lives of women of colour that erases their intersectional experiences of domination (1991, 1244). Intersectionality combines the effects of the interlocking systems of oppression on the continually active multiple identities of women of colour. The method is useful in examining the gendered experiences of marginalised men since multiple factors affect their masculinity performances, but often gender hegemony generalizes the idiosyncrasies. Many critics suggest that power dynamics ingrained in social identities must be understood while interpreting gender (Collins 2000, 114). Intersectionality is one of the key axes around which the most recent work on literary masculinities revolves. Masculine identities attain their meanings in relation to time, place, sexuality, and race/ethnicity (Carrigan et al. 1985, 590; Morgan 1992, 29; Zinn 1998, 25). Intersectional factors can substantially nullify the status of masculinity for a man. Most works on masculinities and intersectionality are divided between the emphasis on gendered and ethnic identities, and the post-structuralist theories, suggesting the flexibility of masculine identities (Armengol 2020, 430). It seemed easy and effective for hegemonic men to subjugate and rule non-hegemonic men in their society after effeminizing or emasculating them. Western culture frequently manifests the representation of Asian men as feminized or homosexualized (Eng 2001, 16). The study of the "manly Englishman" and the "effeminate Bengali" highlights the guileful ways in which power relations enclosed in gender actively contributed to the relations of the ruling and its fruition in colonial Bengal (Sinha 35).

Likewise, Ayyan is emasculated by his Brahmin male superiors and subjected to serious caste-based and gender-based exploitation. The novel shows the relevance of the story of a Dalit genius in Ayyan's life and the probable effects of the same on his manhood. The dullness of his boring life and zero scope for future prospects of prosperity made Ayyan execute the clever plan of creating a Dalit genius out of his ordinary son. Ayyan's caste, religion, class, occupation, and living conditions can be connected to his masculinity performances to examine his marginalised social positioning. Ayyan, a staunch Ambedkarite[9] and a bold rational person, believed that rather than government policies, intellectual ascendancy might help Dalits climb levels of societal hegemonies. Ayyan adopts a caste-based strategy of misusing his marginalisation instead of the channels of social cohesion and social solidarity to acquire power and privilege. The novel depicts how power operates across castes and how masculinities are realised across castes. Hegemonic masculinity occupies the dominant position in a given pattern of gender relations that is the currently accepted strategy of a society to control its people (Connell 76-77). Masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend without the risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy are complicit to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 79-80). Marginalised masculinity stands in exact opposition to the hegemonic traits of masculinity. It is categorized as insignificant from the dominant masculine norms based on class, ethnicity, or status (Connell 80-81). Ayyan performs two different kinds of non-hegemonic masculinities to sustain his position in the gender hierarchy. Ayyan's masculinity is unstable, with its magnetism changing poles between marginalised and complicit masculinities, since he simultaneously resists and obeys the Brahminic patriarchy of his institute. Mukherjee and Jha note that the masculinity of a Dalit male is not a monolith as it constantly moves between the hegemonic and the marginalised gender constructs depending on the gender group he is interacting with (2022, 468-469). Ayyan's mischievous actions at the institute were calculated attempts to provoke the Brahmin men, whom he held accountable for his misfortunes. He celebrated abusing them secretly, reacting against their supremacy through thought-for-the-day quotes of the institute, and he knew that going beyond it would put him in danger. The counter-culture Ayyan establishes fails with adverse consequences on his masculine subculture when Acharya realizes that Adi is not a real genius. Religion functions in diverse ways to grow hegemonic gender constructs in higher social institutions using intellect as a deceptive medium. When Ayyan declared to Sister Chastity, Adi's school principal, that he was no longer a Hindu but a Buddhist, he attacked her colonial way of luring the lower caste Hindus to the fantasy of a better status in Christianity. Though she presented before him an alternative belief system that could give Adi a better education and future prospects, Ayyan realised that his identity there would be othered as the converted Dalit Christian man. Ayyan reminds his wife Oja that they are not Hindus: "Ambedkar[10] liberated us from being treated like pigs. He showed us how to renounce that cruel religion. We are Buddhists now" (Joseph 51).

Even when neoliberalism works to eliminate intersectional identity categories in the West (McDowell 2003, 58; Ward et al. 2017, 3), it complicates the functioning of caste and class in working-class communities in India. Factors like caste consciousness, prevailing material situation, and choice of work contribute to the making and breaking of Dalit masculinities in both private and public spheres (Lakshmanan 2004, 1088). Despite being an educated and well-employed Dalit in a globalised and liberalised environment, the disadvantaged identities imposed by society persist, constraining Ayyan's prospects for growth. Ayyan's individuality is a mixed mess of twisted Dalitism and working-class masculinity. He is not a pure Dalit man in its basic Indian sense. His Dalitism is unlike the conventional Dalitism that authentically tries to resist the casteist attacks on Dalits and reclaim their denigrated identities. He symbolizes a rising population of partially privileged Dalit men who misuse their subjugated position to achieve their illicit goals. They strive hard to construct a parallel hegemony to rebuild their submissive masculinities. Working-class masculinity, a category of marginalised masculinity, is characterized by embodiment, strength, and physical prowess. Ayyan, as a working-class man, exercised less power at his workplace, and as a resistance to this, he frequently adopted macho identities to mask his powerlessness. Ayyan represents protest masculinity (Connell 109), an advanced version of working-class masculinity that has a macho, laddish conduct. Such behaviour represents efforts at "making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power" (Connell 111) in response to marginalisation in most social domains. Ayyan, who has no assets but just his labor to sell, tries hard to disturb the Brahminic hegemony and get benefits out of it. Though his menial occupation is highly regarded among his Dalit peers, the capitalized academia ruled by Brahminical patriarchy looks down upon it as mere servitude. Traits of protest masculinity, like the claim to the gendered position of power, and the pressured exaggeration of masculine conventions (Connell 111), are executed by Ayyan in his Dalit-only domestic and peer group spaces. The peer group is investigated as the primary site for identity building amid the effects of rapid economic change and globalization, where a particular dominant form of masculinity is presented and policed (Frosh et al. 2002, 112; Jeffrey 2010, 476). Even when Ayyan was friends with the poor inmates of the "mother hell" BDD chawl[11], his inner world had long ago cut them and their illiterate affairs. Ayyan readily ignoring the friendly gesture of the school guard, and believing that they are not equals, clearly depicts his double standard. His farcical fellowship is a kind of invisible hierarchy he created to stand tall amongst them.

Dalit masculinity in action is not upgraded above serving high-caste men, and Dalit men are continuously ostracized from the knowledge repositories of upper castes. Ayyan's resistance is the result of an annoyed recognition of an othered identity. Social hierarchies burden Dalits with rules of caste discrimination to constantly remind them about their supposed inferiority. Dalit men, being the frontline receivers of caste oppression, lose almost all the privileges of being a man. Throughout the novel, Ayyan tries hard to secure a higher position in the

social hierarchy that is headed by the Brahminic patriarchy that rules almost all social institutions of the nation. His imminent urge to assert his non-Brahminic identity to the Brahminic power structures and to establish a complicit Dalit masculinity that favours his existence reinforces the notion that "identity continues to be a site of resistance for members of different subordinated groups" (Crenshaw 1297), with gender being one of the most volatile among them

Localization of Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity has its roots in the Western side of the globe, and the application of the same in non-Western scenarios comes with challenges. The Western reflexivity of analysing postcolonial, caste-informed, and culture-specific gender spaces maintains the monopoly of the white man's perspective of the entire world. Multiplicities in masculinity demand individual attention to each variant in its production and effect. The masculine potential or personal agency is not uniform or equal for all categories of men. The diversities demand more social constructionist accounts of masculinities that can identify gender productions (Brod 1987, 12). Scanning the scholarship of the concept in the global South, it is evident that the exploration through intersectionality is gaining sudden momentum, but the inadequacy of a concrete theoretical base is a notable limitation. Masculinity constructs can be analyzed at three levels: regional, local, and global (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 849). But the unique divergences of the hegemonic structure of masculinity in third-world nations can be better represented using multiple levels of analysis strategised by feminist studies. The micro (individual), meso (group), macro (structural), and global levels of analysis (Ferree and Hall 1996, 935) are to be employed without omitting the glocal outcomes and matches. The Indian male community is vastly dissimilar not only because of the visible diversities like region, culture, language, etc., but also due to myriad invisible and entirely local factors, of which inherent sectarianisms like religion, caste, class, and geography have prime importance. Internalizing these social factors and producing and reproducing them at individual levels according to situational needs is a complex and common phenomenon in India. Localizing masculinities is extremely tedious for India due to two main factors. The lack of exactness in masculinity classification and the presence of greater intra-group differences are the root problems. The "personal is political" approach and the "socially lived theorizing" trend popularized by feminism can be actualized in masculinities studies to bridge this research gap.

Serious Men explores different Dalit and Brahmin masculinities that are interrelated but not homogenous in expression due to the diverse intersectional factors. The novel portrays Dalit men's spaces with deprivation and negativity, while Brahmin men's worlds are glorified with high sophistication and ostentation. Multiple levels of gender analysis reveal the peculiarities in Ayyan's masculinity without limiting it to a localized patriarchy or marginalised masculinity. The continuous interplay of oppression and privilege in Ayyan's masculinity indicates

its multidimensional behavior (Hutchinson 2001, 287). At the micro level, Ayyan is an educated, working-class, middle-aged Dalit man who is frustrated at the institution of casteism, which he believes is the primary reason for his subjugation. He is a hypersexual male who dominates his wife, objectifies upper-caste women, and thereby promotes Dalit patriarchy (Guru 1995, 2549). His Dalit identity in his workplace and his subordinate job position are his identities at the meso and macro levels. Ayyan is a Dalit man in a post-modern, globalized, and liberalized India, located in a confused cultural environment. This indicates that the multiple identities that function, their level and range of performance, have local as well as global influences. Indian men are modernized global citizens and culturally rooted natives at the same time. The political landscape in conflict with the socio-cultural ideologies of the land makes Indian men exhibit a confused gender identity, changing dimensions constantly.

The Brahmin men and their varied masculinities can be studied in contrast with the Dalit masculinity of Ayyan to understand the localized nature of masculinity in India, with a myriad of factors making it a gender locale with unique features. Brahminical patriarchy denotes the caste-based patriarchy and power relations, aiming at inequitable gendered supremacy, purity, and privileges of upper castes in prevailing social, political, economic, and caste structures in India (Chakravarti 579; Ramberg 2016, 225; Arya 2020, 218). Brahmin masculinities of Acharya, Nambodri, and Basu function differently due to their different occupational statuses, even though their gender privilege is built on Brahminical patriarchy. Joseph presents Acharya as the most knowledgeable Brahmin in the story, even though he is domineering and abhorrent. His job position is a symbolic reminder of the modernized feudal landlord of caste-infested India. Nambodri, another senior Brahmin male scientist, fights with Acharya to get approval for his research project and to snatch the supreme power of the institute. Acharya denies Nambodri's request for the project, and Nambodri's masculine ego gets hurt. Basu, a powerful Delhi bureaucrat in the Ministry of Defence, had once perilously tried to establish control over the institute. Acharya declines Basu's proposal to reform the institute's management by belittling his educational qualifications. Acharya becomes the egalitarian Brahmin who saves Ayyan from public disgrace and this is similar to the politics of "White Savior Industrial Complex"[12]. Nambodri is presented as the casteist Brahmin who hates Dalitism, and Basu becomes the most privileged Brahmin in the lot, who is untouched by the pathetic plight of the Dalits. The three Brahmin male scientists who built their own hegemonic masculinities fought over the supreme authority of the institute, and Ayyan, who is not even included in the game, enjoys the fight of his enemies just like his forefathers did. The invisibility of Dalit men in localized patriarchies is evidently portrayed through this incident in the novel:

> From what Ayyan had heard of the battles of the Brahmins, it would be bloodless but brutal. They would fight like demons armed with nothing

> more than deceit and ideals – another form of deceit among men from good families (Joseph 105).

Intellectual Hegemony and the Confused Dalit Man

As per Gosovic, global intellectual hegemony (GIH) is the power exercised by dominant intellectual groups and institutions to shape the beliefs and attitudes of people around the world. The intellectual dependency of the global South on the global North, imitating their data and analysis, creates an intellectual totalitarianism that is pervasive yet unnoticed (2000, 448). Hegemonic men withhold information from dominated sections of society in order to maintain hierarchy without trouble. It is an effective way of controlling marginalised sections of men in a democratic nation like India. Foucault describes how institutions diffuse certain types of knowledge as a control mechanism (1980, 190). Ideas and institutions that produce and disseminate knowledge have significant effects on the gendered distribution of power. Ayyan, introducing his son into action to protest against the hegemonic men around him, as a caste-representing genius, has multiple implications. Thompson argues that information is the fundamental source of symbolic power, the authority enjoyed by cultural institutions like universities (1995, 17). The scientific institutions in India have been marked by so-called upper caste, Brahminic domination that is visible, and yet its profound impact on those from the so-called lower castes is continually denied (Sur 2011, 55; Thomas 2022, 138-139). When Ayyan functions well in the institution, Oparna, the only female scientist in the institute, appreciates him for being an efficient worker. Ayyan modestly replies that he is nothing in front of the great Brahmin scientists and that it was through their great discoveries that he learnt something. While performing complicit masculinity conveniently without disturbing the hegemonic patriarchal structure of the institute, he warrants his subordinate position. Ayyan tries to establish an intellectual parallelism with the Brahmin scientists of his institute but resists their casteist dispersion of knowledge in order to legitimize power for his Dalit manhood. He uses the information from the institute against his superiors in a subtle fashion of indirect attack without compromising his position. Here, factors like caste, gender, and intellect intersect unevenly and form a base for resurrecting Ayyan's Dalit masculinity. The global North dismantled and continues to neutralize the political and intellectual challenge from the South through intellectual hegemony (Gosovic 449). Society upgrades Ayyan's masculinity and grants him respect and recognition as the father of a Dalit genius. But the Brahmin male scientists doubt the authenticity of Dalit intelligence and insist on proving it before them. This reflects the continuing casteist tradition of Brahminic accreditation of knowledge backed by the nation's academic institutions, similar to the intellectual domination of the global North. The influence of Western ideas in international discourses, the spread of English as a dominant language of communication, or the dominance of certain academic disciplines or theories in shaping global discourse are some

ways in which intellectual hegemony functions (Gosovic 453). Ayyan uses an easy telephone-receiver method to get all the confidential information from his institute, showing his strategic surveillance of the authoritative disposition of knowledge to resist its domination. GIH can reinforce existing power structures and reduce the range of viewpoints and ideas represented in global discussions and decision-making. The masculine aristocratic structure of the institute, with zero representation of marginalised castes in power positions, limiting their influence to petty jobs, reaffirms the casteist character of social institutions. Ayyan considers the knowledge pursuits of Brahmins as their crooked attempts to create and stabilize power in the fast-changing political environment of India. Ayyan's actions remind us of the emancipatory struggles of the global south from the clutches of the intellectual totalitarianism of the global north. Ayyan's deceptive plan intertwines with the conspiracy of the Brahmin scientists that results in an ideological clash between Dalits and Brahmins. Foucault asserts that knowledge serves as the foundation for power and is used by it. On the other hand, power reproduces knowledge by shaping it to suit its own objectives (102-103). By knowledge, power (re-)creates its own spheres of action. Ambedkar observes that the intellectual class is the most influential class in a society that advises and leads the rest of the people (2014, 222). The phrase "Dalit genius" reflects the hypocrisy of social equality and the historical restriction of Dalits from knowledge acquisition. If a Dalit is a genius, he is called a Dalit genius, not just a genius. Whatever he achieves in life, the Dalit tag will be thrust upon him by the casteist society to maintain his submissiveness as an integral part of his identity. Ambedkar notes: "The Hindus wanted Vedas[13], and they sent for Vyasa[14], who was not a caste Hindu. The Hindus wanted an epic, and they sent for Valmiki[15], an untouchable. The Hindus wanted a constitution, and they have sent for me" (Zelliot 2010, 317). Upper caste men used lower caste men to expand their knowledge horizons, but eventually distanced them from accessing those intellectual domains. According to Foucault, discursive action by intellectual power creates the subject that it later exercises control over (113). Waman, the Dalit minister in the novel, appreciates Adi for his intellectual excellence and praises him as the future liberator of Dalits. Waman uses it as a political strategy to energize and unite Dalits. The intellectual supremacy of a Dalit motivates other Dalits to gain knowledge to better their life through the power of intellect. Due to his caste privilege, science was easily accessible for Acharya to build a manly grandness in him, but for the Dalits, the story was always about survival. Acharya explains how his caste privileges made his way to intelligence effortless. After Oparna's revenge ruins Acharya's professional reputation, he becomes a free man. Even after getting punished for committing a severe crime against the ethics of scientific research, he was not completely expelled from the institute due to his caste superiority. This would not be the fate of a Dalit man in the same position if he is proven guilty, even of a petty fault. The contrast in the life experiences of a Brahmin man and a Dalit man is not just about caste deciding their life paths; it is also about how caste

structures maleness. The vilification of Dalit men in the upper caste histories and knowledge repositories was intentional to justify male gender hierarchies.

Geography of Dalit Masculinity

Spatial formation of Dalit masculinity and its effects are novel areas of research in Indian masculinities studies. Spatiality concept of the late 20th century evaluates the relations between people, identity, places, and political and economic activity in a globalized world (Appadurai 1996, 42; Lefebvre 1991, 37; Massey 1994, 120). The postcolonial and post-industrial challenges, along with the changing economic structures, sideline caste-based masculinities in India to marginal spaces. The novel covers two contrasting spaces where Ayyan's masculinity finds its routes of evolution. His domesticity, the BDD chawl, which is filled with underprivileged Dalits, and his workplace, the research institute, where Brahmin men make and break rules for their own benefit. The chawl is situated in the Mumbai Worli Seaface, which is mostly populated by Dalits. Mumbai, the financial capital of the nation, is not uniformly accessible to all Indian citizens. Its magnanimity in the economic development of the nation is not helping the betterment of Dalits, for they are sidelined to live in the chawls that are constructed far away from the main city. Ayyan's presence is not considered anywhere above the limits of his caste geography (BDD chawl) until the world realizes that his son is a Dalit genius. The chawl in the novel stands for the British's pseudo-kindness of showing charity after decades-long plunder and murder through colonialism. Ayyan's manhood is contracted to the already shrunken domestic space, and his voice is unheard outside its walls. The postcoloniality of the nation controls and instructs the lives of all its citizens, and for Dalits, it is an external domination worsening their already dominated state, controlled by the internal hegemonies. Additionally, Ayyan's elite workplace is a constant reminder of his continued subjugation, and its Brahmin rulers are the modernized activators of gendered casteism. It explains Ayyan's pathetic living space and his powerful dream space. Unlike most of the Dalit men of the space who try to survive each day, Ayyan dreams of raising his living standards for the welfare of his family.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the true subaltern group made an identity out of its difference; all subaltern subjects that present themselves can know and speak themselves; to abstain from representation is not the intellectual's solution (2010, 40). Ayyan, who identifies himself as a subaltern man living in one of the most unwanted spaces in the global South, tries to escape the repressions of his space. In the novel, the British-built residence of the Dalits, Ayyan's attempts to raise his son as a world citizen by sending him to an English-medium school, and his efforts to dress up Oja like a sophisticated West-inspired Indian, are all indications of this influence. Ayyan's resistance to the Indian idea of hegemonic masculinity is rooted in rejecting their dicta while accepting alternatives. He accepted the Buddhist faith, the westernized way of living, and logical reasoning as the alternatives that countered the Indian knowledge

system. He ridicules the obsession of Brahmin scientists to justify all phenomena in science using Indian knowledge system. Orientalism is a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the great empires of the world, in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced (Said 1979, 14-15). Similarly, a Dalit man's masculinity is a created space imagined by the elites who use, reuse, and misuse it for selfish motives. The author of the novel belongs to the elite section in the Indian caste hierarchy, and his perspective on Dalitism or gendered caste cannot be taken as actuality. He cannot fully comprehend or copy reality himself without first-hand experience. Arguments by biological insiderism (Sollors 1986, 13) that only accept specific categories or ethnic groups to talk about themselves are relevant to the point that the representation of the dominated by the dominant may involve intellectual power politics. The one thing the Orient could not do was depict itself, and this was true from the very beginning of Western inquiry about the Orient (Said 283). Unless and until a Dalit man records his gendered experience of caste in India, not only will other accounts be considered secondary sources, but his absence will prove a serious gap in the research.

Female Influence on Male Dalitism

Masculinity is inherently relational to other social constructs, especially to surrounding femininities and masculinities. With the mutual influence that is ever-evolving, both men and women get positioned relationally to each other (Whitehead et. al. 2001, 13; Connell 43; Jackson 1999, 119; Philip 2022, 81). The novel has minimal space for the female characters, and they are looked at by all male characters as objects of desire and are othered as secondary beings. This problematic depiction of women in the novel by a male author with a male protagonist adds to the misogynistic approach of the narration. Historically, men were viewed as "success objects" in a reputation-based society, while women were viewed as "sex objects" (Sweetman 1997, 51). Joseph's creation of female characters without vigor and boldness, wholly dependent on their male lovers or husbands, devoid of access to the serious matters of life, unlike the male characters, turns out to be a strategy to glorify the lives of men as beneficial in comparison to the lives of women as mere existences. For example, Oparna, being the first female scientist in a male-dominated research institute in India, is nowhere gaining relevance in the plot like the male characters. Sexist humor, female objectification, and male gaze are indirect indicators of caste structures functioning through the medium of gender. The third chapter of the novel is dedicated to Oparna, but the title "Basement Item" itself shows the misogyny running through words. And, Oja, being an illiterate housewife, is locked to the traditional bondages of matrimony, domesticity, and child nurturing. These female characters make Ayyan question, validate, and restructure his marginalised masculinity.

Oja, whom Ayyan loves but controls under his masculine domestic lordship, appears to be the only woman who supports his inferior gender identity. She

obeys her husband like a conventional submissive wife who has no agency of her own. Ayyan often mansplains[16] to Oja the discriminatory society in which their family's existence is clearly insignificant. He loses authority over his wife when his lowly living status and hypersexual behaviour affect his marriage. He finds his wife trapped in an unhappy life because of him, and this accelerates his quest for an upgraded life. Ayyan feels not man enough when he fails to give her the comforts of a luxurious life. Ayyan constantly struggles to prove his worth as a responsible husband to Oja: "He wanted her to know that he was smart enough for this world and that he knew how to take care of her" (Joseph 90). He prepares Oja for the frequent parent-teacher meetings, quiz competitions, etc., at Adi's elite school to raise her standards to meet the high-class conception of elitism. As the protector-provider patriarch of the family, Ayyan makes sure that their conduct and social appearance conform to the hegemonic standards of their social institutions. Ayyan realizes the marginalised position of his illiterate, downtrodden wife among the modernized, smart homemaker wives.

Inside the institute, Oparna was always under the surveillance of men, both upper and lower caste, especially Ayyan. For Ayyan, she was "another high caste woman beyond his reach" (Joseph 29), and this marks the territories of caste and social disposition for a Dalit man. Ayyan's frequent walks on the Worli Seaface and numerous sexual encounters with prostitutes helped him quench lust, but high-caste women were always beyond his reach. The phrase "dark man" indicates Oparna's aversion to the Dalit male body: "Oparna burst into the anteroom and felt the full stab of Ayyan's calm scrutiny. She was wary of this dark man with his wide eyes" (Joseph 77). Before Ayyan got married, he had visited an infertility clinic to donate his Dalit semen to fair, childless Brahmin couples. He hoped to impregnate many high-caste women, thereby revolting against casteism through his long-dominated genetics. Ayyan's revolt to consciously impurify high-caste women was to take revenge by making elites more Dalit. Even while uplifting his marginalised masculinity, Ayyan chooses the subordination of women as the easiest and most appropriate way to achieve it. His revolt here is strictly personal, but by targeting women, he follows the patriarchal rule of punishing women for anything that goes wrong in a man's life. The understanding of how male subcultures that express resistance or opposition to social marginalisation can also reinforce or reproduce gendered and sexual hierarchies might then be analyzed by an intersectional, multidimensional approach (Jensen 2010, 18). Ayyan compares Oparna to Oja and draws out the intersectionality of caste in womanhood: "Oja Mani didn't even know that there was something called womanhood. 'Downmarket' was what women like Oparna would call her, even discreetly laugh at her perhaps if they met her" (Joseph 29). For Oparna, identity and existence were stable, but for Oja, individuality and agency were "unknown nothings"; she was marginalised to the extent that she didn't even bother about her selfhood. Ayyan realised yet ignored Oja's subordination to maintain his gender hegemony.

Dalit Fatherhood

Fatherhood is not an inherent quality, and it takes form according to the needs of the situation. The role of paternal characteristics and behaviors affecting children's development has been extensively studied in the field of child development (Bögels et al. 2008, 524; Lamb 2010, 4). Spatial, temporal, and cultural specificities make the functioning of fatherhood contextual (Henriksson 2020, 326). Ayyan's fatherhood is not presented as an ideal one, but a practical one for contemporary India. He teaches his son how to cheat in examinations and act smart in front of his teachers and classmates. Ayyan does all these to make Adi independent to survive the unjust world where a Dalit man has no space or position. He considers his son an extension of his Dalitism and fears a transfer of powerless masculinity that he got from his ancestors as a caste legacy. He trains Adi to climb the ladder of social hierarchy through hook or crook. His effort to gain publicity through his genius son shows his fatherly urge to conquer his unfulfilled dreams through his son. Father's presence in the life of children can be associated with different power dimensions, such as race (Coles 2009, 8; hooks 2003, 102) or youth (Siedler 2006, 25). Ayyan's life experiences have grave implications for the upbringing of his son. Adi, a normal schoolboy not appreciated by his classmates and teachers, receives great respect after acting like a genius. There, he experiences the reality of exercising power in social institutions. For Adi, Ayyan is a loving, smart, and cool father who is far different from the conventional, strict Indian father figure. He views his father as a superhero figure who solves all his problems.

Father presence or involved fatherhood may not always encourage gender equality; men may show interest in their children while opposing it also (Featherstone 2009, 2). Oja's motherhood is overshadowed by Ayyan's fatherhood throughout the novel. Ayyan deliberately avoided Oja from all his secret plans because he considered her an incapable, illiterate woman who didn't think beyond the closed walls of domesticity. Ayyan's Dalit masculinity is built upon Oja's submissive femininity, and his Dalit fatherhood gains prominence when juxtaposed with her ordinary motherhood. Ayyan creates an exciting world for his son, ensuring that Adi does not confine himself to modest aspirations akin to those of his mother. Without knowing the conspiracy plan, Oja worries about her son's abnormality, and that excites Ayyan. This father-son camaraderie can be analyzed as the strongest site for gender transfer, where the existence of a Dalit woman is trivialized in opposition.

Conclusion

Masculinity can be defined as an emancipatory practice or survival strategy when it comes to gender politics affecting marginalised men. Caste in India is not operating as a single entity that can alter gender conceptions with its own effect. It combines with multiple factors, and intellect is a disregarded one among them.

Ayyan's manhood is not a quest for emancipation or survival but a confused state of empowered protest. His association with the Brahmin men of the institute influences him to utilize the power of intellectuality to alter the hegemonic masculine structures that limit his male Dalitism. His unending attempts to gain respect, money, and publicity through the power of intellect do not result in breaking the hegemony but in making a new Dalit version of it. When social expectations of gender roles demand that he establish his manliness, social discrimination suppresses him from achieving it. Postcolonial, post-modern, and liberalized Dalit man's existence is perplexed among complicit, marginalised, and protest masculinities, which are exploited by hegemonic masculine powers to further strengthen their domination. The unique experiences of non-hegemonic masculinities and their influence on social transformations are explored in this article. Ayyan's gender roles as a Dalit male subordinate to a Brahmin man in an elite workspace, his working-class protest masculinity, his broken marriage, and his smart fatherhood are all negatively impacted by the introduction of intellectuality. The novel could have given ample space for the Dalit protagonist to present the vulnerabilities of his marginalised masculinity, but the narration focused on depicting him as a sex-obsessed misogynist who survives the day only through crooked means, thereby limiting his possibilities to justify his emancipatory efforts. The intellectual ascendancy he wished for disrupts and sometimes destroys the marginalised Dalit male identities he preserves as his social denomination. At the same time, it serves as a powerful tool for Dalit identity reconstruction that counterattacks mainstream production and propagation of knowledge.

Notes

1. The idea of Dalit identity originates from the Chaturvarnya system, the four-tier caste system in India based on occupations. Since Dalits are outside the caste system, they are the most exploited by other castes through different systems and hierarchies. Dalits are called Scheduled Castes (SC) in Indian legal terminology. The Sanskrit word Dalit translates to 'broken' or 'ground down'.
2. The term Brahmin/Brahman belongs to the highest priestly Hindu caste. They dominated other castes as they controlled the culture through religious rituals, education, and spiritual guidance. The Sanskrit word Brahmin, derived from Brahman, refers to the ultimate reality, the source of all existence.
3. Dalitism generally refers to the ideology or philosophy associated with the Dalit community in India, highlighting their history, experiences, and aspirations for social justice and equality. It encompasses rejection of caste hierarchy, assertion of self-respect and dignity, political and social mobilization, and cultural and intellectual expression.
4. The term Brahminism/Brahmanism refers to the religious and social practices associated with the Brahmin caste in Hindu society. Brahminism indicates the hierarchical structure of Indian society, where the Brahmin caste held significant power over religious and political affairs, thereby subjugating other castes, especially Dalits. History provides several instances where Dalitism existed in stark contrast with Brahminism.

5. Jaatidharma is a Sanskrit compound word that means the duties of a caste or the customs of tribes. It is made up of the words jati (caste) and dharma (duty).
6. Sahadharmini is a Sanskrit word that means a woman who performs the same dharma (duty) as that of her husband.
7. Purushartha is a Sanskrit term that means "object of human pursuit". This key concept in Hinduism refers to the four goals of human life, Dharma: morality, Artha: prosperity, Kama: pleasure, and Moksha: eternal liberation.
8. Dravidian politics is a political movement and ideology centered in Tamil Nadu, India, focused on social justice, linguistic identity, and regional autonomy. Emerged from the Dravidian movement, it aimed to uplift non-Brahmin communities and challenge the dominance of Brahmins and North India in the Madras Presidency.
9. An Ambedkarite is a follower of the philosophy and ideology of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a key figure in India's socio-political reform movement. It refers to someone who adheres to Ambedkar's teachings, which primarily focus on social justice, equality, and the eradication of the caste system. The term is often associated with the Dalit (formerly known as "untouchables") community and their struggle for liberation and empowerment. Ambedkarism is the ideology or philosophy associated with Ambedkar.
10. Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is a prominent Indian jurist, economist, politician, and social reformer. He is best known for his role as the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution and as India's first Minister for Law and Justice. Ambedkar upheld the ideals of social justice, equality, and the upliftment of marginalized communities in India.
11. Chawl is a large building divided into many separate tenements, offering cheap, basic accommodation to laborers.
12. Teju Cole, a Nigerian-American writer, invented the term "White Savior Industrial Complex" (WSIC) to explain how white individuals and institutions regularly play the role of "savior" in non-white environments, sometimes for their personal benefit rather than genuine help.
13. The Vedas are a large body of religious texts that originated in ancient India. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the texts constitute the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and the oldest scriptures of Hinduism.
14. Sage Vyasa is credited with compiling the Vedas and authoring the Indian epic *The Mahabharata*.
15. Sage Valmiki is considered the author of the Indian epic *The Ramayana*.
16. Mansplaining, a portmanteau of "man" and "explaining", refers to the patriarchal act of a man explaining something to a woman in a patronizing, condescending, or oversimplified manner, typically assuming that she lacks knowledge about the subject, even when she may be more knowledgeable than him.

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