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FROM CRISIS TO RESISTANCE: A CROSS-SECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF MUNSHI PREMCHAND'S RANGBHOOMI AND PAUL BEATTY'S THE SELLOUT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the emancipatory capacities of marginality by comparing Munshi Premchand's Rangbhoomi (1924) and Paul Beatty's The Sellout (2015). Using Sandra Harding's standpoint theory as an epistemological lens, it examines how the perspectives of subaltern protagonists—Soordas, the blind beggar defending his ancestral land in colonial India, and "Me," an unnamed African American figure satirically reintroducing segregation in a vanishing Los Angeles precinct—offer insights inaccessible to hegemonic narratives. Empirical close reading of these texts reveals how lived experiences of exclusion foster epistemic agency: Soordas's Gandhian resistance spotlights capitalist land dispossession, while Beatty's absurdist satire unmasks the limits of the so called "post racial" discourse. The analysis shows that marginalized standpoints not only critique the prevailing socio economic order but also generate alternative modes of knowledge rooted in communal resilience, irony, and performative resistance. These modes serve both as cultural critique and as potential blueprints for dialogic solidarity across time and space. The paper concludes that the counter hegemonic force of marginality—grounded in subaltern epistemic positions—can inform contemporary interventions in global social justice movements, illuminating new forms of literary and activist praxis.

KEYWORDS: Marginality; Standpoint Theory; Subaltern Agency; Rangbhoomi; The Sellout; counter hegemonic discourse, Cross-Cultural examination.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the literature, crisis is most often conceptualized as a moment of acute disruption—a "time of great danger, difficulty or confusion when problems must be solved or important decisions must be made" (*Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary*, 2020). It entails destabilisation that exceeds routine control mechanisms, frequently arriving with little warning and overwhelming the capacity of individuals or institutions to respond. Cultural scholars trace its etymology to the Greek krisis—a decisive turning point—underscoring its inherent potential for transformative rupture and choice. Sociologist Pitirim Sorokin diagnoses modernity as undergoing "one of the deepest and most significant crises of its life," in which Western capitalist society shows signs of systemic decline and transition to entirely new cultural paradigms (The Crisis, p.3). In a related vein, Reinhart Koselleck reconceptualises crisis not as a discrete event but as a prolonged historical condition of greater or lesser permanence, a transitional phase whose direction—progress or decay—is indeterminate and subject to contestation (Koselleck and Richter, p. 358). Such theoretical lenses help explain why crises are not unidimensional: they may stem from political realignments, cultural transformations, economic shocks, ideological shifts, or spiritual–psychological breakdowns. The consequences of socio-political crises for marginalised communities are multifaceted and enduring. For instance, as the Ghazipur farmer protest in Haryana reached its 100th day in early March 2021, weekly round-table negotiations with the Union government remained stalled, reinforcing the sentiment of existential threat among agrarian groups (Sukhpal Singh, 2021), The protest illustrated both the scale of disruption and the mobilisation of rural identity under crisis conditions. Munshi Premchand's *Rangbhoomi* dramatizes the Persian carpet weavers' struggle against industrial land-grab in colonial India, giving voice to caste-and-class-based marginality. Paul Beatty's *The Sellout*, in contrast, satirises post-racial America through the absurd reinstatement of segregation in a decaying Los Angeles neighbourhood. In both texts, crisis operates not only as socio-economic breakdown but as epistemic opening: the marginalised protagonists develop discursive and ethical agency precisely by inhabiting the liminal terrain that dominates tend to overlook.

Marginalization is understood here as the systematic relegation of individuals or groups to positions of diminished power and visibility within social, economic, cultural, or political structures. Such marginality deprives them of meaningful access to decision-making, social reproduction, or cultural recognition, not as a consequence of personal choice but through institutionalized exclusion and boundary-making. Peter Leonard offers a crucial typology in this regard—distinguishing between those who voluntarily detach from dominant social systems and those who are involuntarily marginalized, forced outside the mainstream of productive and reproductive activity (Leonard, p.15). These involuntary subjects remain socially peripheral, often confined to the margins of economic, ideological, or familial circuits. The consequences of such exclusion are deeply disruptive. Marginalized individuals frequently endure deteriorating mental health, characterized by anxiety, depression, social isolation, and diminished access to education and legitimate livelihoods. Yet these conditions also foster resilient survival practices—mutual aid networks, cultural and artistic self-expression, community mobilization, and political advocacy—that become forms of resistance and self-affirmation. From the standpoint of standpoint epistemology, as formulated by Sandra Harding, marginalization confers a unique epistemic privilege. Seen as "outsider-within" positions, marginalized perspectives illuminate the mechanisms of injustice that remain invisible to dominant frameworks, enabling more rigorous and socially responsive critique. Thought that begins with the lives of the oppressed thus advances what Harding terms "strong objectivity" (Harding, p.134)

In light of these insights, marginalization emerges not only as a condition of social and psychological deprivation but also as a potential epistemic site of insight, where alternative knowledge practices and counter-hegemonic stories are forged.

1.1. Research Methodology:

This study is grounded in Sandra Harding's Standpoint Theory, which asserts that marginalized social positions provide epistemic privileges unattainable from dominant perspectives—thereby enabling more comprehensive critique of power structures Building on this, Nancy C. M. Hartsock's feminist standpoint theory argues that women (and by extension, other oppressed groups) possess a historical-material consciousness analogous to Marx's proletariat, offering a strategic vantage for epistemic and political critique. Drawing from bell hooks' intersectional lens and her concept of the "oppositional gaze," this research foregrounds the antagonistic insights of Black and lower-caste protagonists as generative sites of knowledge and agency. Finally, Foucault's conception of

power/knowledge (i.e. that knowledge both shapes and is shaped by power relations) informs the textual analysis approach.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Munshi Premchand (Dhanpat Rai Srivastava, *July 31, 1880–October 8, 1936*) is widely recognized as a foundational figure in modern Hindi–Urdu literature. Born near Varanasi, his early education in Urdu gave way to a lifelong commitment to Hindi prose, through which he became known as the "Upanyas Samrat"—the Emperor of the Novelists—an honorific reportedly first bestowed on him by his contemporaries, including Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay. His work revolutionized the genre in both languages, introducing a realist aesthetic grounded in social consciousness and committed to exposing systemic injustice. Premchand's mature output is dominated by narratives that foreground the dispossessed rural populace, reflect Gandhian values, and critique colonial and feudal economic structures. Chief among these is *Rangbhoomi* (1924), where the blind beggar Soordas becomes a moral fulcrum: he embodies Gandhian satyagraha in his principled refusal to surrender his ancestral plot for an industrial tobacco plant. The novel powerfully portrays the intersection of caste impoverishment and British-era economic exploitation, while capturing the fraught tensions between indigenous tradition and industrial modernity. Critics—including Vinod Kumar—have observed that Premchand's fiction "gave new dimensions to the large corpus of Indian English fiction by introducing realism and social commitment," sensitizing readers to the lived realities of economic crisis, caste oppression, and gender inequality (Kumar, p. 85). His narrative voice remains consistently aligned with the underprivileged—from child widows in *Nirmala* to indebted peasant households in *Godan*—using accessible diction and rural idioms to foreground marginalized consciousness. Thus, Premchand's oeuvre—rooted in his own socio-cultural milieu yet comprehensive in its critique—serves not merely as literary expression but as sustained social commentary. *Rangbhoomi*, in particular, exemplifies his method of embedding Gandhian ethics within a realist village narrative, making visible the challenges faced by oppressed rural subjects and placing them at the centre of India's moral and political imagination.

Since the early 20th century, social and economic crises colonial land-appropriations, recurrent agrarian droughts, market liberalisation, pandemics—have persistently reshaped Indian rural society, inflicting severe distress yet simultaneously cultivating resilience among marginalised populations. Premchand's realist fiction dramatizes this continuum: chronic poverty, labour exploitation and caste injustice are not merely matters of income scarcity, but multidimensional deprivations rooted in hunger, illiteracy, ill-health and asset lessness—dimensions now formally recognized by the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) framework. Recent official data indicate that while India's headcount ratio declined from 29.17 percent in 2013–14 to 11.28 percent in 2022–23, a substantial population remains deprived across indicators including nutrition, schooling, sanitation and electrical access (Problem of Poverty in India, 2024). Despite progressive poverty reduction, emerging resilience studies—such as Krishna and Agrawal's longitudinal analysis in rural Rajasthan—demonstrate that this resilience is neither universal nor evenly distributed: structural position and historical exclusion continue to mediate vulnerability to crisis-induced setbacks. Thus, Premchand's fiction anticipates modern scholarship in framing poverty as multidimensional and crisis as both destructive and generative of communal agency.

Class inequality endures as a central catalyst in social crises, perpetuating structures of oppression and resistance across historical and cultural contexts. Karl Marx's foundational assertion in *The Communist Manifesto*— "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles"—locates society's development in ongoing contests between oppressor and oppressed across epochs (Marx, p.5). While Rangbhoomi is situated within a quasi-feudal colonial economy rather than a mature capitalist system, Marx's theory nonetheless illuminates the power dynamics between landowning elites and dispossessed labouring classes in the novel's setting. Sandra Harding's *standpoint theory* builds on Hegelian and Marxist traditions by emphasizing how subordinated perspectives—such as those of Soordas in Rangbhoomi—generate critical epistemic insight precisely because of systemic marginalization (Harding 1986). In *Rangbhoomi*, Premchand inveterately portrays Pandeypur as a microcosm of colonial-era class exploitation: a destitute blind Chamar beggar, Soordas, resists industrial appropriation of his ancestral land by a tobacco magnate, a conflict that starkly embodies class antagonism and moral resistance. Through Soordas's Gandhian steadfastness—his refusal to capitulate to land dispossession—Premchand critiques not only economic inequality but the legal and caste frameworks that sustain it. The opening lines vividly depict a working-class town characterized by stark socioeconomic inequalities, limited access to essential resources, and a legal system that often reinforces injustice as:

> A city is a site where the rich live and trade...area outside is a space for recreation and amusement. In the city's center…the poor are strangled in the name of justice. On the peripheries...found bastis, settlement of the poor one of which is Pandeypur in Banaras. The light of the city lamps doesn't reach there, nor do drops of water when the city is sprinkled, nor does the flaw from the city's waterworks. (1)

The excerpt vividly captures the bifurcated urban milieu of Pandeypur, Banaras, underscoring a spatial inequity in infrastructure distribution: peripheral settlements are systematically deprived of basic services such as electricity, running water, street illumination, sanitation, and educational resources. In contrast, inner-city zones remain well-serviced. This spatial divide is documented in studies of Varanasi, where only about 8 % of municipal wards have access to adequate household amenities while the majority fall below city-wide averages in electricity, potable water, and sanitation. In such peripheral hamlets—symbolic of Soordas's Pandeypur basti—residents experience not just infrastructural neglect but enforced marginalisation. This deprivation fosters illiteracy and disempowerment, reinforcing socio-economic vulnerability. Across Banaras, many urban households remain cut off from institutional welfare—a dynamic explored under the rubric of locational disadvantage and exclusionary urbanisation. Against this backdrop, Mohan Bhagwat critiques the current Western paradigm of education: he asserts that "the prevailing western thought about education is business-oriented", viewing India's education sector merely as a USD 3 trillion opportunity—an assessment prioritising profit over pedagogy (Bhagwat, 2022). At the level of literary interpretation, Jasvant Rathod (later paraphrased in critical commentaries) regards *Rangbhoomi* as a magnum opus that narrativizes peasant struggle with scope and depth comparable in essence—if not sheer volume—to *War and Peace* (Rathod, p.11). The novel portrays the peasant Soordas's fight against capitalist-industrial encroachment as emblematic of the larger struggle of India's agrarian masses, making the microcosm of Pandeypur a symbolic battlefield.

Caste-based discrimination continues to systematically exclude certain groups from full participation in social, political, and economic life. As Mason Olcott observes, "the caste system is a hierarchy of endogamous groups that individuals enter only by birth.... It differs from a class in its strict enforcement of permanent endogamy within caste groups" (Olcott, 1958, p. 648). This rigid structure perpetuates social stratification and denies marginalized communities access to fundamental rights, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and social exclusion. Thange Vijay Chandrabhan (2016) asserts that *Sevasadan* effectively illustrates the stratification of Indian society into multiple castes and sub-castes, offering critical insight into the socio-religious frameworks governing interpersonal and institutional relationships (p. 48). Similarly, Premchand's *Rangbhoomi* provides a powerful critique of caste-based exclusion, particularly the practice of untouchability. The narrative foregrounds the lived experiences of lower-caste characters such as Bhairo and Soordas, who face systemic marginalization—evident in scenes where Thakurdeen prohibits them from entering the temple, reflecting the entrenched norms of caste purity and social segregation.

> We don't know if he has even washed his hands and feet, or if he has come straight from there to Thakurji temple. There's no cleanliness left anywhere any longer… you shouldn't come like this to God's durbar. Do you bathe every day before coming here? Nobody accepts even water from your hands. Nobody allows a passi to touch even a pitcher of water. Bahiro, don't come here from tomorrow. (17-23)

Premchand's *Rangbhoomi* incisively critiques caste-based discrimination, particularly through the marginalization of communities such as the "Passi" (Premchand, p. 23). Thakurdeen's insistence that Soordas wash his hands and feet underscores the entrenched perception of ritual impurity associated with lower castes, reinforcing their exclusion from religious spaces. The phrase "even water from your hands" (p. 22) exemplifies the dehumanization of individuals like Bhairo and Soordas, reducing them to pollutants within sacred domains. This symbolic and literal denial of temple entry highlights how caste hierarchies are perpetuated through religious exclusion. Contemporary parallels persist, as Yudhvir Rana (2024) documents instances of caste-based religious discrimination, including the denial of shared utensils. Meanwhile, Jasvant Rathod (2022) notes public backlash over Premchand's representation of caste, including the burning of *Rangbhoomi* copies, reflecting ongoing tensions surrounding caste, representation, and social justice.

Recent incidents underscore the persistence of caste-based discrimination in contemporary India. As reported by Amisha Rajni (2024), a government school in Hyderabad suspended staff members for allegedly denying SC/ST students and their parents access to school premises, even during parent-teacher meetings. Such exclusion reflects the enduring stigma of untouchability and institutionalized caste bias. Mason Olcott (1958) contextualizes this within the structural logic of caste, describing it as a stratified system where "each [group] stands on the shoulders of the castes below it" (p. 648), reinforcing socio-economic inequality. In *Rangbhoomi*, Premchand explores how caste influences access to public and religious spaces, illustrating systemic marginalization through characters like Soordas. Ritika Khatri (2024) aptly states that caste in India is "inescapable... like air," often invisible to the privileged yet suffocatingly present for the oppressed. Complementing this perspective, Sandra Harding (1991) draws upon Nancy Hartsock's Marxian critique to suggest that marginalized groups, through their lived experiences, can challenge dominant ideologies and expose systemic inequities. Premchand's narrative thus not only foregrounds caste oppression but also aligns with intersectional critiques that examine the interplay of caste, class, and gender in sustaining social hierarchies.

Identity as a social construct often leads to crisis when individuals confront tensions between self-perception and the roles or stereotypes imposed by society. El Saadawi (1997) emphasizes that identity is a contested discourse, shaped by those in power: "Who decides, who labels me… we are so engrossed in defining our identities when they are changing all the time" (p. 118). In Premchand's *Rangbhoomi*, Soordas—a blind, lower-caste Chamaar—embodies this crisis. Marginalized due to both caste and disability, he faces systemic discrimination and socio-economic exclusion. His experiences highlight how imposed social identities can strip individuals of agency and dignity, reinforcing structural inequality through intersecting axes of caste, class, and physical ability. His struggle with an identity crisis is reflected in the following lines:

Sarkar, this is the only mark of my ancestors. How will I show my face to them if I sell it? Sahib, the muhalla-valas benefit a great deal from this land. There's not even a finger's worth of fodder anywhere. All the cattle around graze there. They'll have nowhere to go if I sell it. (19)

In *Rangbhoomi*, Premchand portrays Soordas's ongoing struggle for dignity, self-worth, and agency in a society that devalues him due to caste and disability. Despite his impoverished condition, Soordas owns ten bighas of ancestral land, which he uses for subsistence. However, this land becomes the target of capitalist encroachment when John Sevak, a Christian industrialist with strong political and administrative ties, seeks to construct a cigarette factory in Pandeypur. Backed by influential merchants and supported by municipal authorities, including Raja Mahendra Bahadur, Sevak orchestrates the forced acquisition of Soordas's land (Pratap & Singh, 2018, p. 923). The coercive land seizure is emblematic of the exploitative nexus between capital, political power, and colonial influence. Sevak embodies the ruthless ethos of predatory capitalism, where ethical concerns are subordinated to profit-making. His actions reflect a broader critique of industrial modernity, wherein individuals—particularly from marginalized communities—are reduced to expendable entities in the pursuit of economic gain. As Premchand suggests, capitalist success often relies on strategic manipulation, moral compromise, and the dispossession of the vulnerable. This dynamic resonates with Heinz Lichtenstein's assertion that "loss of identity is a specifically human danger, and maintenance of identity a specifically human necessity" (Lichtenstein, 1977, p. 78), highlighting how socio-economic structures threaten the individual's sense of self and belonging.

Soordas's interactions with upper-caste elites in *Rangbhoomi* further exacerbate his identity crisis. He is subjected to humiliation, systemic discrimination, and economic exploitation by landlords and dominant caste figures, which erodes his sense of dignity and self-worth. As Vinod Kumar (2015) notes, "To look upon men as beasts and to treat them as beasts is the motto of the business world. One cannot succeed to be a businessman unless one is cruel to his fellow human beings" (p. 112). This portrayal of dehumanization through economic and caste hierarchies is central to Premchand's critique of both capitalism and Brahmanical social order. Soordas's internal conflict—marked by resentment, shame, and helplessness—captures the psychological toll of intersectional oppression. Woodward (1997) expands on the concept of identity in modern contexts by emphasizing that identities today are shaped by a range of factors, including nationality, ethnicity, class, community, and gender. She explains that identity "gives us a location in the world and presents the link between us and the society in which we live" (pp. 1–2). This underscores the multifaceted nature of identity formation and its deep connection to social

structures. In contemporary society, communal affiliations—whether geographical, cultural, or virtual—play a crucial role in shaping one's self-perception and sense of belonging. These influences reflect the evolving and contested nature of identity in a globalized, rapidly changing world. Ankita Shukla in her recent article avers that,

Recent incidents highlight a growing issue: a woman was turned away from a pub in Gurugram for wearing a sari, and a man in Bengaluru was barred from a mall for donning a dhoti. These events reveal a deeper cultural divide in contemporary India, reflecting how some westernized Indians are disconnected from their own rich culture. (Shukla 2024)

Shukla's observations point to an ongoing struggle in India between embracing modern lifestyles and honoring traditional cultural practices, prompting reflection on identity, belonging, and cultural pride.

The concepts of power and resistance are deeply interrelated and have been critically examined across disciplines such as literature, sociology, and political theory. Resistance is often a direct response to power exercised in ways that marginalize, exploit, or dominate. When institutional or systemic power suppresses specific communities, it simultaneously gives rise to counter-forces that seek justice, equity, and transformation. As Harding (2004) argues, "marginalized groups possess unique insights into social injustices due to their outsider status" (p. 124), enabling them to challenge dominant ideologies and articulate alternative visions of social order. The assertion of resistance by such groups exemplifies their agency and resilience in the face of structural oppression. Michel Foucault's (1978) seminal work reconceptualizes power not as a possession but as a dynamic network of relations that exists only in interaction. His framework highlights three crucial points: first, power is diffuse and embedded within everyday practices and discourses; second, it is relational rather than centralized; and third, resistance is not external to power but arises from within it. This formulation positions resistance as a constitutive element of power itself, always present wherever power operates. Thus, resistance becomes a powerful mechanism for marginalized actors to contest hegemonic structures and reshape their lived realities.

Marginalized communities frequently utilize cultural identity, artistic expression, political activism, and communal solidarity as tools to resist hegemonic structures and dominant discourses. Through these strategies, they not only assert their lived experiences but also carve out transformative spaces for social change and empowerment. The present study explores how marginalized groups in both Indian and African-American contexts mobilize their experiences of exclusion to articulate resistance and reclaim agency. Renowned feminist theorist bell hooks (1990) conceptualize the margin not merely as a site of oppression, but as a locus of creativity and empowerment: "Margin is a site of creativity and power, where we recover ourselves, where we meet in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators" (p. 343). Her vision reframes marginality as a space of solidarity, enabling critical engagement with intersecting systems of race, gender, and class. In a similar vein, Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) define resistance as a contextually embedded, oppositional act: "Resistance is situated in certain time, space, and relations, and engages with different (types of) actors, techniques, and discourses" (p. 1). Such acts of resistance transform marginalization from a condition of passivity into an active, dynamic process of contestation and empowerment. By engaging in these practices, marginalized communities not only confront systemic inequalities but also contribute to broader struggles for justice, equity, and recognition.

Premchand's *Rangbhoomi* positions marginality as a potent site of resistance through the character of Soordas, a blind beggar who challenges colonial, capitalist, and caste-based oppression. His exclusion enables a critical perspective from which he confronts social injustice. Soordas uses his songs as tools of protest, urging the rural poor to awaken politically and reclaim their dignity. In doing so, *Rangbhoomi* reframes marginality as a source of moral authority and collective resistance.

Bhai, why do you turn your face from battle? The duty of the brave is to fight; to make a name in the world, why do you give up your honour? Bhai, …Why do you want victory, why do you worry about defeat? Why do you make ties with sorrow? Bhai, …. You have come to the Rangbhoomi to show your glory; why do you break the law of dharma? Bhai, why …face away from battle? (234)

In *Rangbhoomi*, Soordas invokes a sense of solidarity by addressing his listeners as "brother", establishing emotional proximity and collective purpose. His appeal underscores a moral imperative to resist injustice, urging individuals to uphold their *dharma* (duty) rather than succumb to fear or despair. Rejecting passivity, Soordas reframes resistance as both a personal and ethical obligation, symbolized by the call to step onto the *Rangbhoomi*—the battlefield of life—to affirm one's dignity and strive for justice

(Premchand, 1924, p. 234). His voice serves not only as a critique of social inaction but also as a catalyst for communal awakening. As Karan (2020) observes, "Soordas's plight serves as a powerful symbol of resistance against these exploitative forces," highlighting the complex intersection of caste, poverty, and disability (p. 3817). This aligns with Harding's (2004) feminist standpoint theory, which argues that marginalized groups, due to their outsider status, possess critical insights into structural injustices and challenge dominant epistemologies through their lived experiences (p. 134). Marginalized groups possess unique insights into social injustices due to their outsider status. By voicing their dissent and showcasing their hardships, they challenge the status quo.

Sophia's defiance of her mother's insistence on embracing Christianity serves as a powerful exploration of individual autonomy and personal conviction. Her resistance to religious conformity is portrayed in the following lines:

I cannot accept Jesus as the son of God and as my saviour, nor I can be forced to go and pray in church just because of my helpless situation. (42) No mama, ... I don't want to stay here another day. I won't give these people any more trouble. But I want to be sure of one thing. I won't be oppressed again, and there won't be any obstacles to my religious freedom? (49)

In *Rangbhoomi*, Premchand presents Sophia as a figure of intellectual and spiritual resistance. Her refusal to embrace Christianity, despite her mother's persistent efforts, underscores a strong assertion of personal autonomy and belief. By declaring, "you are being unfair to me" (Premchand, p. 49), Sophia appeals to emotional understanding, revealing the tension between personal conviction and familial expectations. Her repeated insistence that she cannot "stay here another day" (p. 49) further illustrates her defiance against imposed norms, making her resistance both a personal act and a broader rejection of conformity. The novel also illuminates how intersecting identities—class, gender, caste, and disability—shape the characters' experiences of oppression. Sharma (2019) contextualizes this within broader social reform, citing E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker's Self-Respect Movement as a pivotal critique of Brahmanical dominance and an advocacy for the liberation of the oppressed (p. 36). This intersectional approach echoes Sandra Harding's (2004) standpoint theory, which argues that forms of oppression—race, caste, gender, and class—interact to shape the lived realities of marginalized groups (p. 8). These groups, by virtue of their outsider status, possess critical insights into dominant social structures and can mobilize collective resistance (Harding, 2004, p. 134). Michel Foucault's (1978) assertion that "where there is power, there is resistance" (pp. 95–96) is especially relevant here, as it emphasizes that power inevitably generates opposition. The narrative of *Rangbhoomi* affirms this, portraying resistance as both a response to and a revelation of entrenched authority. Sophia's personal rebellion, along with the broader struggles of characters like Soordas, contributes to a multidimensional portrayal of resistance, rooted in individual agency and collective struggle.

Marginalization is a global phenomenon that transcends national boundaries, emerging from deeply entrenched socio-economic, political, and historical inequalities. As Bedolla (2009) argues, "economic, social, and political disparities persist in America even after de jure discrimination has ended" (p. 233), highlighting the ongoing legacy of structural exclusion. Paul Beatty's fiction, particularly *The Sellout*, offers a satirical yet incisive critique of such marginalization, with a focus on race, class, and identity in contemporary American society. Beatty explores how racial subjugation and class hierarchy intersect to shape lived experiences. In *The Sellout*, the protagonist Bonbon—a Black man raised in Dickens, a neglected and predominantly African-American neighbourhood on the outskirts of Los Angeles—embodies the struggle against systemic inequality. His marginalization is both racial and economic, rooted in the institutional neglect of his community and the internal contradictions of identity politics. Through Bonbon's interactions with a racially stratified society, Beatty critiques the illusion of post-racial America and exposes how marginality continues to be produced and maintained within neoliberal structures. The novel thus underscores how spatial, economic, and racial exclusions intersect, reinforcing broader patterns of disenfranchisement and socio-political invisibility.

We lived in Dickens, a ghetto community on the southern skirts of Los Angeles, and as odd as it might sound, I grew up on a farm in the inner city. Dickens, like most California towns except for Irvine established as a breeding ground for stupid, fat, ugly, white republicans and the Chihuahuas and East Asian refugees who love them, started out as an agrarian community. (27)

In *The Sellout*, Paul Beatty portrays Dickens—a marginalized, predominantly Black neighbourhood—as a site of structural neglect, using the unusual presence of a farm to symbolize self-reliance amidst deprivation. This contrasts sharply with affluent, white-dominated areas like Irvine, highlighting stark urban inequalities. The narrator's

remark that "a police state protects only rich white people and movie stars of all races" (Beatty, 2015, p. 43) critiques the intersection of race and class oppression in law enforcement. Critic Keshab Prasad Joshi, in his paper, references the novel's opening paragraph to illustrate "how the upper-class people are not giving space to Afro-American Black people. Black people are not taken as equal to the whites" (p. 15). Similarly, Sandra Harding argues in her article that "it is relatively easy to see that overtly racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist claims have the effect of insisting that the dominant culture is superior" (p. 131). This statement highlights how such prejudices are not isolated occurrences but rather part of a broader societal structure designed to reinforce the dominance of the ruling class while marginalizing alternative voices and experiences.

Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* delves into the complexities of identity formation, particularly within racially and socially marginalized contexts. The protagonist, known only as "Me," navigates an ongoing identity crisis shaped by personal trauma and the external pressures of a racially stratified society. His anonymous naming reflects the erosion of individual identity under systemic racism, while his actions—ranging from controversial social experiments to ironic political subversion—highlight the absurdities of race-based identity in contemporary America. Beatty constructs a protagonist whose fragmented sense of self embodies the struggle to reconcile personal agency with imposed social roles.

Like the entire town of Dickens, I was my father's child a product of my environment, and nothing more Dickens was me. And I was my father. Problem is, they both disappeared from my life, first my dad, and then my hometown, and suddenly I had no idea that I was, and no clue how to become myself. (40)

In Paul Beatty's *The Sellout*, the fictional town of Dickens functions as a central symbol of collective identity, significantly influencing Bonbon's personal sense of self. His upbringing, shaped by his father's unconventional pedagogy and the communal ethos of Dickens, provides the foundation of his identity. The erasure of Dickens from the map and the sudden death of his father disrupts this foundation, triggering a profound identity crisis. As Naik and Kumar (p. 3) observe, Bonbon becomes "identity-less" when Dickens disappears, signifying the collapse of both personal and communal anchors. Naughton (p. 448) further asserts that this loss deprives him of "a stable home, family, and some fixed authentic blackness," underscoring the inextricable link between place, kinship, and racial identity in the construction of selfhood.

In contemporary discourse, marginality emerges as a potent site of resistance, articulated through activism, cultural critique, and social movements that confront systemic injustice. In the United States, protests against police violence underscore the enduring realities of racial inequality and the urgent demand for structural reform. Resistance is increasingly understood as intersectional, shaped by overlapping dimensions of race, gender, and class. Echoing global calls for liberation, Che Guevara's assertion at the United Nations— "The final hour of colonialism has struck" (1969)—resonates with ongoing struggles for self-determination. Paul Beatty, through his incisive use of satire and irony, critiques entrenched racial politics and cultural stereotypes. In *The Sellout*, resistance is rendered through the protagonist's subversive and often absurd acts, which destabilize normative frameworks of identity and belonging. Beatty's narrative blends humor, historical reflection, and community dynamics to reveal the contradictions within American racial discourse. Through Bonbon's journey, marginality becomes a transformative space for resistance, provoking critical engagement with questions of power, race, and social identity.

Me's decision to restore Dickens, the fictional, predominantly Black neighborhood erased from official maps, represents a deliberate act of defiance against systemic erasure and cultural marginalization. By asserting, "I am bringing back the city of Dickens" (*The Sellout*, p. 100), and installing a new roadside sign (p. 93), the protagonist reclaims both physical and symbolic space for a historically neglected community. This act of resistance not only challenges the sociopolitical forces that perpetuate invisibility but also initiates a dialogue on race, memory, and spatial justice in contemporary America. As Ella Forbes (1993) notes, Black Americans have long demonstrated agency in resisting oppressive structures, from slavery to the Civil War, with their efforts forming "an indisputable part of the struggle for human rights" (p. 211). Similarly, Blackett (1986) argues that Black resistance "exposed weaknesses" in America's democratic ideals, highlighting the contradiction between the nation's founding principles and its continued endorsement of slavery (p. 389). Beatty's narrative thus aligns with this historical continuum of resistance, illustrating how reclaiming space becomes a radical political gesture—one that affirms the ongoing relevance of Black identity, community, and history.

Bonbon's emancipation of Hominy Jenkins serves as a powerful act of resistance, rejecting ownership, affirming Hominy's humanity, and defying the dehumanizing structures of society. This defiance is reflected in the following lines:

With this deed I hereby emancipate, manumit, set free, permanently discharge, and dismiss my slave Hominy Jenkins, who's been in my service for the past three weeks. Said Hominy is of medium build, complexion, and intelligence. To all who read this, Hominy Jenkins is now a free man of colour. (82)

Bonbon's rejection of the master-slave dynamic in Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* serves as a critical intervention against systems of dehumanization and racial hierarchy. By asserting, "You are not a slave and I'm definitely not your master" (Beatty, 2015, p. 77), Bonbon affirms Hominy's autonomy and challenges the legitimacy of historically rooted power structures. His use of legalistic rhetoric to emancipate Hominy symbolically disrupts dominant socio-legal frameworks, offering both physical and psychological liberation. This act is not merely an interpersonal gesture but a broader resistance to racialized systems of oppression. Through this disruption, Bonbon reclaims narrative authority and redefines identity and agency for Black individuals in a society that systematically denies both. As R.J.M. Blackett (1986) contends, "Afro-American history is strewn with veiled references to the many men and women who fought against slavery and discrimination," though their contributions often remain underacknowledged (p. 1). Bonbon's defiance, therefore, echoes a longer historical lineage of Black resistance, demonstrating how personal acts of liberation can engage with and critique broader cultural and political structures. Similarly, Sandra Harding in 1991, explains that,

Only through struggles we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained... struggle emphasizes the fact that standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement… differs from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by opening one's eyes. (127)

Harding asserts that recognizing social injustices demands active engagement and struggle. A true standpoint emerges through this process, in contrast to a passive perspective. This approach emphasizes the importance of lived experiences in shaping our awareness of and responses to social inequalities.

2. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MUNSHI PREMCHAND AND PAUL BEATTY:

This study employs the comparative analysis method to examine intersections and divergences between Indian and African-American literary traditions, focusing on the works of Munshi Premchand and Paul Beatty. Comparative analysis, as Remak (1961) defines, is "the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature and other spheres of human expression such as painting, sculpture..." (p. 1). Through this interdisciplinary lens, the research investigates how both authors engage with themes of marginalization, identity, and resistance, despite differing historical and cultural contexts. Premchand, writing in colonial India, foregrounds the socio-economic and caste-based struggles of the rural poor, whereas Beatty, situated in contemporary America, satirizes systemic racism and class inequality. By analysing their narrative strategies, character construction, and socio-political critique, this paper reveals how literature functions as a transnational medium for contesting oppression and articulating alternative identities.

Munshi Premchand's *Rangbhoomi* and Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* offer compelling portrayals of marginalized communities navigating structural oppression in distinct socio-political contexts—colonial India and contemporary America. Both authors foreground the lived realities of their protagonists—Soordas and Bonbon—who embody the broader struggles of their respective societies. Soordas, a blind Chamaar, reflects the entrenched caste-based hierarchies and economic exploitation under colonial capitalism. His character functions as a critique of the systemic injustices of both colonial rule and indigenous social stratification. Similarly, Beatty's Bonbon negotiates the lingering legacy of systemic racism and the contradictory nature of racial identity in the United States. Through satire, Beatty deconstructs cultural stereotypes and exposes the absurdities of racialized social norms, offering a critical lens on the persistent marginalization of Black communities.

Both novels examine identity crises as a product of sociocultural subjugation. Soordas's self-perception is shaped by his caste status and disability, leading to internalized oppression that he eventually resists through a moral and spiritual awakening. His appeal to communal duty and resistance resonates with Gandhian principles of non-violence and self-respect. In contrast, Bonbon's identity crisis is rooted in racial performativity and societal categorization. Beatty employs irony and absurdism to demonstrate Bonbon's subversive strategies in rejecting imposed identities and reclaiming agency. His attempts to redefine racial and communal narratives underscore the psychological toll of institutional racism and the necessity of self-authored identity.

Narratively, Premchand employs social realism to depict the socioeconomic hardships of rural India. His detailed environmental descriptions and introspective characterizations evoke empathy and foreground the moral complexity of resistance. The binary between the prosperous urban elite and the impoverished rural proletariat is starkly rendered to underscore class disparities. Beatty, by contrast, utilizes postmodern satire to confront contemporary American racial politics. His deployment of exaggeration and humor functions as a disruptive aesthetic, compelling readers to question normative racial ideologies and social hypocrisies.

Both Soordas and Bonbon operate as agents of resistance within their respective frameworks. Soordas's reclamation of ancestral land and steadfast adherence to non-violence represent a traditional, moralistic resistance rooted in indigenous ethics. Bonbon, however, engages in symbolic and provocative acts—such as manumitting Hominy and resurrecting the erased town of Dickens—that critique historical erasure and cultural disenfranchisement. Together, these characters exemplify different modes of resistance—one rooted in spiritual perseverance, the other in satirical subversion—yet both challenge hegemonic structures that seek to marginalize their communities.

2.1. Differences:

The divergent historical contexts in which Munshi Premchand and Paul Beatty write profoundly inform the thematic and narrative trajectories of their respective works. Premchand's literary production is situated within the socio-political milieu of colonial India in the early 20th century—a period marked by widespread agrarian distress, caste oppression, and the intensifying impact of British imperial rule. His narratives, particularly in *Rangbhoomi*, reflect a realist engagement with the struggles of the rural poor, emphasizing the urgency of social reform and collective resistance. Premchand critiques the exploitative structures of colonialism and indigenous hierarchies, advocating for moral awakening and socio-political transformation through characters such as Soordas.

In contrast, Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* emerges from a post-Civil Rights American landscape, where the rhetoric of equality often masks the persistent realities of racial marginalization. Writing in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism and systemic racial disparities, Beatty employs satire to interrogate the contradictions of race relations in contemporary America. His work critiques the limitations of integrationist narratives and highlights the enduring complexities of identity formation within a society that continues to commodify and stereotype Blackness. Whereas Premchand's realism seeks to mobilize empathy and reform, Beatty's postmodern satire exposes the absurdities of racial discourse and the failures of a supposedly post-racial society.

2.2. Social Relevance:

This study holds considerable social relevance through its critical examination of how human existence is shaped—and frequently contested—by entrenched socio-political and cultural structures. By undertaking a comparative analysis of the works of Munshi Premchand and Paul Beatty, the research foregrounds the universal concerns of identity, marginalization, and the enduring struggle for justice within societies marked by systemic inequality. Although situated in vastly different historical and cultural contexts—Premchand in colonial India and Beatty in contemporary, ostensibly post-racial America—both authors grapple with the lived realities of social oppression, exclusion, and the human quest for dignity. This study underscores how literary representations of social marginalization transcend geographical and temporal boundaries. Premchand's critique of colonial subjugation, caste hierarchies, and rural disenfranchisement complements Beatty's satirical engagement with racial stereotyping, structural racism, and urban disenchantment in late capitalist America. In both cases, literature functions as a sociopolitical lens that reflects and interrogates the crises of human existence. The relevance of this comparative framework lies in its potential to illuminate global social issues such as economic inequality, racial injustice, and the alienation experienced by marginalized communities. Furthermore, both Premchand and Beatty document the shifting social terrains of their respective eras—Premchand through his analysis of colonial domination and the inertia of traditional Indian society, and Beatty through his dissection of American racial politics and neoliberal ideologies. Ultimately, this study affirms literature's role as a powerful medium for critiquing social realities and inspiring critical engagement with ongoing forms of injustice and inequality across diverse contexts.

3. CONCLUSION:

In summation, despite their divergent cultural milieus and stylistic approaches, Munshi Premchand and Paul Beatty converge in their critical engagement with themes of marginalization, identity, and resistance. Premchand's *Rangbhoomi* articulates the entrenched caste and class hierarchies in colonial

India, exposing the systemic subjugation of Dalit communities. As M. Asaduddin (2019) observes, Premchand reveals how "Dalit inferiority had become embedded in the psyche of the members of the Hindu upper castes," resulting in pervasive mechanisms of both verbal and physical marginalization. Conversely, Beatty's *The Sellout* employs sardonic humor and satirical irony to interrogate racial stereotypes and expose the contradictions inherent in contemporary American racial discourse. According to Suman Lamsal (2024), Beatty's use of humor "serves to challenge and dismantle entrenched racial norms," transforming satire into a vehicle for sociopolitical critique. Both authors confront the processes by which individual and collective identities are constructed and contested within oppressive socio-political frameworks. Premchand's realist narrative strategies foster empathy through emotional depth and nuanced character development, while Beatty's strategic deployment of absurdity and parody renders complex racial issues accessible and provocative. Together, their works demonstrate how literature serves not only as a mirror of social realities but also as a catalyst for resistance, reflection, and transformation. Ultimately, the comparative analysis of these authors underscores the enduring relevance of literature in addressing global structures of inequality. Their contributions advocate for empathy, critical consciousness, and collective resistance as vital responses to historical and ongoing injustices. By bridging cultural and temporal divides, Premchand and Beatty exemplify the power of narrative to interrogate systemic oppression and inspire meaningful social engagement.

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