

The Interconnectedness of Humanity: English Literature's Role in Combating Social Discrimination and Fostering Global Unity

*Dr. Navninder Kaur, Assistant Professor, Desh Bhagat University, Mandi
Gobindgarh, Punjab, India*

Abstract

The principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*—"The world is one family"—highlights the inherent interconnectedness of all humanity, urging global solidarity and social justice. English literature has long been a vehicle for addressing social discrimination and fostering unity by shedding light on the struggles of marginalized groups and critiquing societal injustices. From the early works of Charles Dickens, which exposed the plight of the poor in Victorian England, to the evocative poetry of Maya Angelou, which highlights racial and gender inequalities, English literature consistently challenges the status quo. Literary figures such as William Blake, Derek Walcott, and Arundhati Roy have used their works to deconstruct oppressive systems, urging readers to embrace a shared human experience over societal divisions. Through compelling narratives, these authors promote a collective vision of a just, inclusive world where social discrimination has no place. This paper explores how English literature, across three centuries, has persistently acted as a moral voice against social injustice and a force for human unity. Through a critical analysis of William Blake, Derek Walcott, and Arundhati Roy, the paper illustrates how literature has adapted to shifting historical contexts to challenge oppression—from industrial-era class exploitation to colonial legacies and modern democratic abuses of power. These authors, rooted in different geographies and centuries, collectively affirm the enduring capacity of literature to unite humanity through empathy and resistance. It asserts that literature not only reflects the social fabric but also serves as a catalyst for progressive change, urging humanity toward the interconnected, equitable future embodied in *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

Key words: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, English literature, social discrimination, global unity, social justice, marginalization, racial inequality, gender inequality, cultural solidarity, progressive change, equality, systemic injustice*

Introduction

Literature has long functioned as more than a creative or aesthetic endeavour. Across centuries, it has served as a moral force—an urgent, expressive tool that writers have wielded in their resistance to injustice, inequality, and exploitation. English literature, in particular, offers a rich and varied tradition of voices that speak not only to their immediate social

conditions but also to broader, universal experiences of the human condition. This paper explores that literary continuum through the works of three remarkable writers: William Blake, Derek Walcott, and Arundhati Roy. Though separated by centuries and continents—eighteenth-century England, twentieth-century postcolonial Caribbean, and contemporary democratic India—their writings converge in a shared ethical vision and commitment to truth-telling.

The paper begins with William Blake, whose poetic voice arose during the turbulent period of the Industrial Revolution. Blake's verse captures the social and spiritual cost of mechanization, urbanization, and unregulated capitalism. His works, such as *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1789–1794), challenge the moral blindness of industrial society, particularly in their treatment of children and the urban poor. Yet Blake's protest is not rooted in direct political rhetoric; rather, he channels resistance through symbolic prophecy and spiritual imagery. His critique of the “mind-forg'd manacles” (Blake 27) underscores the psychological bondage inflicted by institutional authority. In this way, Blake laid a foundation for the ethical function of literature—not simply to describe, but to awaken and transform the moral imagination of the reader.

Building upon this tradition in a radically different historical and geographic context, Derek Walcott's poetry speaks from the wounded heart of the postcolonial Caribbean. Writing in the mid-to-late twentieth century, Walcott confronts the cultural dislocation and fractured identity caused by centuries of imperial domination. His poem *A Far Cry from Africa* articulates a personal and political dilemma: the struggle of belonging to both the colonized and the colonizer. “I who am poisoned with the blood of both,” he writes, “Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?” (Walcott 18). Here, the poet's internal conflict mirrors the larger trauma of postcolonial societies attempting to reconcile their indigenous heritage with the imposed language and values of empire. Unlike Blake, whose critique targets industrial capitalism, Walcott's resistance lies in reclaiming hybridity as a source of strength. His verse not only laments historical violence but also gestures toward a poetic space where cultural contradictions are held in tension rather than erased.

The trajectory of literary dissent continues into the present through the voice of Arundhati Roy. Known for her bold critiques of caste, patriarchy, and the failures of modern democracy, Roy uses both fiction and non-fiction to amplify the narratives of those traditionally silenced by mainstream discourse. In *The God of Small Things* (1997), she exposes the brutal consequences of transgressing caste and gender norms in a rigidly hierarchical society. Her nonfiction, particularly *The End of Imagination*, confronts the co-optation of democratic ideals by neoliberal and nationalist agendas. “There's really no such thing as the voiceless,” she asserts. “There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard” (Roy, *Field Notes* 8). Roy's work reaffirms the writer's role as a public intellectual, one who refuses to look away from structural injustice. While her literary style may differ from Blake's mysticism or Walcott's lyricism, her moral urgency and defiant compassion bind her to the same lineage of ethical writers.

By weaving together the voices of Blake, Walcott, and Roy, this paper traces a historical and thematic trajectory that demonstrates how English literature has consistently responded to the injustices of its time. The choice of these three writers is not incidental but deliberate—reflecting not only a wide geographical spread (Europe, the Caribbean/Africa, and South Asia) but also a shared moral vision that transcends time and place. Whether they confront the horrors of child labour, the legacies of colonialism, or the betrayals of modern democracy, these authors collectively affirm literature's power to bear witness, provoke conscience, and foster empathy. In doing so, they illuminate literature's enduring role as a transhistorical force for social justice and global unity.

William Blake: Visionary of the Industrial Age

To begin the exploration of literature as a moral response to systemic injustice, one must turn to William Blake, whose poetic voice emerged at the very heart of the Industrial Revolution. Living in late eighteenth-century England, Blake bore witness to a rapidly transforming society marked by urban expansion, mechanized labor, widening class divides, and the exploitation of children in factories and chimneys. Rather than respond through political treatises or social commentary alone, Blake wove his resistance into deeply symbolic and emotionally charged verse. His poetry—especially *The Chimney Sweeper, London*, and *Jerusalem*—exposes the moral failures of his time, particularly those sanctioned by religious and state institutions.

Blake's critique is rooted in a powerful contrast between innocence and experience. In *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1789–1794), he juxtaposes the untainted voice of the child against the corrupted, institutionalized world of adults. In *The Chimney Sweeper* (Innocence), the child dreams of salvation and angelic rescue, offering a moment of hope. However, in its companion piece from *Songs of Experience*, that same hope is stripped away. The speaker remarks bitterly, “And because I am happy & dance & sing / They think they have done me no injury” (Blake, *Experience* 11-12). The irony here is devastating: the child's joy is used to justify his exploitation. This emotional tension becomes Blake's form of protest—a poetic witness to the hidden cruelty within a supposedly civilized society.

Another example of Blake's visionary justice appears in *London*, where he walks through the city and records the misery inscribed on every face. “Marks of weakness, marks of woe,” he writes, describing the “mind-forg'd manacles” that imprison the spirits of men and women (Blake, *London* 4, 8). These are not physical chains but ideological ones—formed by religious dogma, political control, and social norms. Blake's choice of the word “manacles” is significant: it suggests that people are not only oppressed, but made complicit in their own bondage through internalized beliefs. By exposing this mental captivity, Blake challenges readers to awaken to their condition.

Even more explicitly, Blake's *Jerusalem* articulates a vision for national renewal. In this poem, he asks, “And did those feet in ancient time / Walk upon England's mountains green?” (Blake, *Jerusalem* 1–2). While often misread as patriotic, *Jerusalem* is better understood as a

call to reclaim a just and divine society—a “New Jerusalem”—that stands in opposition to the “dark Satanic Mills” of industrial England (8). The mills are not only literal factories but symbols of a mechanized system that crushes the soul and defiles nature.

Through such works, Blake becomes more than a poet; he is a prophetic figure who refuses to separate art from ethics. He calls upon imagination as a radical force—not as escapism, but as a path toward moral clarity. His condemnation of the Church, the monarchy, and capitalist exploitation resonates far beyond his time, offering an early template for how literature can resist dehumanization and demand justice. In the broader context of this paper, Blake serves as the foundational voice in a lineage of literary resistance—one that will later be echoed and expanded by postcolonial and contemporary writers like Derek Walcott and Arundhati Roy.

Derek Walcott: Postcolonial Anguish and Hybrid Identity

If William Blake’s poetry exposes the spiritual decay caused by industrial capitalism in 18th-century England, Derek Walcott continues this literary legacy by voicing the psychological scars of colonialism in the 20th-century Caribbean. Born in Saint Lucia, Walcott occupies a space shaped by layers of conquest, slavery, cultural fragmentation, and linguistic hybridity. His poetry confronts the complexities of identity in a postcolonial world—one where the English language, inherited from colonial rule, becomes both a burden and a tool of beauty. Through works like *A Far Cry from Africa* and *Ruins of a Great House*, Walcott gives voice to a fractured cultural consciousness while still seeking reconciliation within that fragmentation.

In *A Far Cry from Africa*, Walcott captures the internal conflict of a man split between cultural loyalties: African ancestry and English education. The poem reflects on the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya and the brutal suppression by British forces. The speaker admits, “I who am poisoned with the blood of both, / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?” (Walcott, *Collected Poems* 18–19). This confession reveals the central anguish of the postcolonial subject: not merely a loss of cultural identity, but the torment of being tethered to both oppressor and oppressed. Walcott does not offer easy resolution; instead, he lays bare the complexity of colonial legacies, encouraging readers to sit with that discomfort.

Similarly, *Ruins of a Great House* explores the decaying grandeur of a colonial mansion, metaphorically connecting the physical collapse of empire to its moral failure. The poem speaks of “marble holocausts” and “deciduous beauty,” mourning not just the violence of history but the seductive charm of Western culture that persists even after its political power wanes (Walcott, *Collected Poems* 50). Walcott’s tone is elegiac but not nostalgic; he critiques the cruelty of imperialism while acknowledging how deeply colonial culture has been woven into the fabric of Caribbean life.

Language itself is a major site of struggle in Walcott’s work. Though he writes in English—the language of colonization—he infuses it with Caribbean rhythm, syntax, and sensibility. In doing so, he subverts the colonial tool, reshaping it to reflect the complexities of Caribbean

identity. His work thus becomes an act of linguistic reclamation: a creative negotiation between inherited trauma and artistic autonomy.

Through this hybrid voice, Walcott continues the tradition Blake began—using poetry to expose injustice, reclaim identity, and seek dignity. Yet where Blake calls for a visionary future beyond material exploitation, Walcott dwells within the wreckage of empire, trying to forge meaning from its ruins. His poetry does not merely resist colonialism; it transforms its language, its legacy, and its imaginative boundaries.

Arundhati Roy: Dissent in the Age of Democracy

From the ruins of empire, we move to the contradictions of modern democracy—specifically, post-independence India. Arundhati Roy, both novelist and political essayist, embodies a contemporary voice of dissent, one that interrogates the failures of democratic ideals in a society still entrenched in caste, gender, and religious hierarchies. If Blake challenged industrial oppression and Walcott colonial subjugation, Roy confronts the modern state itself—its violent silences, its majoritarian impulses, and its economic exclusions. Her works, notably *The God of Small Things* and *Field Notes on Democracy*, echo her predecessors in exposing systemic injustice, but also carve new space for resistance in an age saturated with media, surveillance, and nationalism.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy tells the story of the Ipe family in Kerala, whose lives are torn apart by caste discrimination, gendered violence, and forbidden love. The novel famously declares, “It is curious how sometimes the memory of death lives on for so much longer than the memory of the life it purloined” (Roy 3). Here, Roy links personal grief to social injustice—the destruction of lives not only through violence, but through a system that remembers transgression more than humanity. The tragedy of Ammu and Velutha is not just individual but emblematic of how institutions—family, caste, law—collude to erase voices that deviate from the norm.

Roy's nonfiction continues and deepens this critique. In *Field Notes on Democracy*, she examines how the machinery of Indian democracy often marginalizes precisely those it claims to represent. She writes, “There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard” (*Field Notes* 7). In this one line, Roy reorients the ethical responsibility of the writer—not to speak *for* others, but to dismantle the structures that suppress speech itself. Her essays confront state violence in Kashmir, the rise of Hindu nationalism, and the influence of multinational corporations—all under the guise of democratic progress.

What links Roy to both Blake and Walcott is her refusal to separate aesthetics from ethics. Her lyrical prose is steeped in metaphor, rhythm, and irony, but always directed toward uncovering social realities. Like Blake, she sees through the illusions of power; like Walcott, she articulates the pain of complex histories. Yet Roy adds a distinctly 21st-century urgency. In a world where information is abundant but empathy is scarce, her writing insists that storytelling is a political act.

Roy's resistance lies not only in the subjects she tackles but in the way she writes. Her form—fragmented, poetic, polemical—mirrors the chaos of a world in which clarity is often a luxury reserved for the powerful. In this fractured style, she invites the reader to confront discomfort, to feel the weight of what is often hidden, and to act. In the tradition of Blake and Walcott, she affirms that literature, at its best, is not a mirror but a hammer: a tool to reshape the world.

Literature as a Transhistorical Moral Voice

What unites William Blake, Derek Walcott, and Arundhati Roy—despite their varied contexts, styles, and centuries—is the deep moral urgency embedded in their literary work. Each writer responds to a distinct form of systemic injustice: Blake to the spiritual erosion of industrial capitalism, Walcott to the psychic wounds of colonial domination, and Roy to the democratic betrayal of marginalized communities in postcolonial India. Their methods differ—Blake's prophetic symbolism, Walcott's lyrical hybridity, and Roy's narrative defiance—but their commitment to truth and justice connects them across time.

As the forms of oppression have evolved—from child labor and religious hypocrisy to racial hierarchies and caste violence—the moral voice of literature has adapted in response. Blake envisioned innocence crushed under the wheels of industry and authority; Walcott explored how colonialism lives on in fractured identities and linguistic alienation; Roy unveils how modern institutions of democracy often replicate old injustices under new guises. Yet throughout this historical shift, resistance has remained a central, animating force. Each writer shows that literature is not a passive mirror of its time but a dynamic response to it—a rebellion in ink.

Their works also reveal that the ethical force of literature lies not only in its content but in its ability to evoke empathy. Blake's child chimney sweep crying “weep! weep!” (*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*) touches a nerve beyond time. Walcott's agonized division between “Africa and the English tongue I love” (*A Far Cry from Africa*) speaks to anyone caught between conflicting loyalties. Roy's observation that the oppressed are “not voiceless—just unheard” (*Field Notes on Democracy*) compels readers to question not just what they hear, but what they choose to ignore. These are not merely political statements; they are human truths.

In this way, literature becomes a transhistorical moral voice—capable of bridging centuries, continents, and cultures. It affirms the dignity of those who suffer and empowers those who resist. More than documenting history, literature engages in the ethical project of shaping it.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative and comparative literary methodology, drawing on three major theoretical lenses—**postcolonial theory**, **Marxist literary criticism**, and **ethical humanism**—to explore how English literature has served as a transhistorical voice against social injustice. These critical frameworks offer not only interpretive tools but also moral

lenses through which the selected authors—William Blake, Derek Walcott, and Arundhati Roy—can be read as literary activists whose works transcend their immediate historical moments to address broader human concerns.

Postcolonial theory provides a particularly apt lens for examining the writings of Derek Walcott and Arundhati Roy. Both writers grapple with the aftershocks of colonialism—Walcott through the fractured identity of the Caribbean subject, and Roy through the enduring caste and communal politics in post-independence India. As Edward Said famously noted, “texts are worldly; they are a part of the world, and they can be read as part of the social and political discourse” (Said 27). This understanding of literature as embedded in socio-political realities justifies our examination of Walcott’s “A Far Cry from Africa,” where the poet’s identity is “split at the root” between African ancestry and English education—a direct consequence of colonial legacy. Similarly, Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and essays in *Field Notes on Democracy* examine how colonial hierarchies mutate into modern forms of oppression, particularly through caste, gender, and state violence.

While postcolonial theory helps us decode the legacies of empire, **Marxist criticism** offers insight into the economic and ideological structures critiqued by William Blake and Roy. Blake’s poetry, particularly “London” and “The Chimney Sweeper,” portrays the dehumanizing effects of industrial capitalism, aligning with Marxist concerns about alienation, exploitation, and class struggle. His vision of “mind-forg’d manacles” (Blake, *London*) prefigures modern critiques of systemic control and capitalist commodification. Roy, too, exposes the deep entanglement of corporate power and democratic institutions, warning of “a democracy where the poor are expendable and dissent is criminalized” (Roy, *Field Notes* 9). Both writers utilize literature as a mirror to the socio-economic inequalities of their time, transforming personal expression into political resistance.

Finally, **ethical humanism** serves as the paper’s philosophical foundation. It views literature not merely as art but as an ethical act—an engagement with the dignity, suffering, and resilience of human beings. Across centuries and geographies, Blake, Walcott, and Roy embody this principle. Their writing insists that to tell stories of pain, injustice, and resistance is to affirm the worth of every human life. In Blake’s visionary imagination, Walcott’s lyrical reconciliation of fragmented identities, and Roy’s unflinching critique of power, we find a shared commitment to what Seamus Heaney called “the redress of poetry”—its ability to “re-awaken conscience” (Heaney 2).

Methodologically, this study uses **close reading and contextual analysis** to draw thematic connections between these authors. Their stylistic, historical, and geographical diversity is not a limitation but strength—demonstrating how English literature, when read across boundaries, reveals a moral continuum of resistance. This comparative approach not only highlights the evolution of oppression but affirms the constancy of literary protest and human solidarity.

Conclusion: The Interconnected Human Struggle and the Power of Storytelling

Through the voices of Blake, Walcott, and Roy, we are reminded that the fight against injustice is both timeless and timely. Oppression changes form, but its effects—alienation, silencing, dehumanization—remain constant. So too does resistance. Whether in the mystical verses of an 18th-century engraver, the conflicted laments of a Caribbean poet, or the fierce indignation of a contemporary novelist, literature has always insisted on remembering what power seeks to erase.

Each of these writers extends the moral reach of storytelling beyond their own time and place. They show us that the role of the writer is not only to observe the world but to challenge it. Their stories reveal hidden wounds and buried voices, making the invisible visible and the unheard unignorable. In doing so, they create what Roy might call “small gods”—quiet, persistent truths that resist erasure even in the face of overwhelming power.

Literature, then, is more than cultural artifact; it is a force of ethical imagination. It helps us recognize shared suffering and collective hope. It reminds us that human dignity is indivisible—that the cry of a child in Blake’s London, the inner turmoil of Walcott’s hybrid identity, and the silenced screams in Roy’s India are all echoes of one enduring struggle for justice and humanity.

In reading them together, across centuries and continents, we do more than trace the lineage of English literature—we affirm its deepest purpose: to bear witness, to resist, and to connect us in the ongoing journey toward a more just and compassionate world.

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