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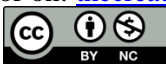
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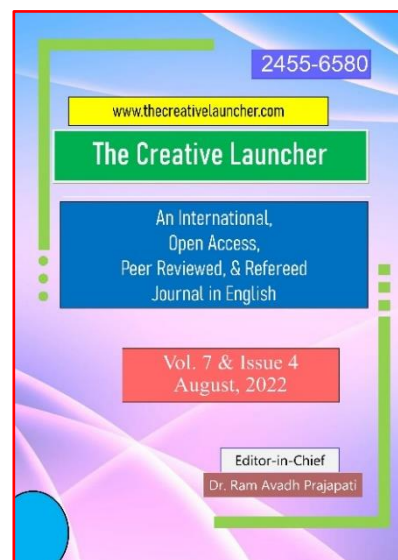
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Research Article



Social Resistance in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand was a revolutionary writer of the twentieth century India who changed the mode of writing and thinking in the field of Indian fiction writing. The novelists before him, who had written fiction, wrote the fictional side of life which were ideal and romantic in nature. There were a smaller number of issues of the society. Mulk Raj Anand's writing brought revolutionary change in the field of fiction writing. He wrote the novels for the sake of untouchables and the poor. He raised the issues of casteism, capitalism, feudalism, colonialism

and imperialism through his novels. In *Untouchable*, he has attacked one of the worst social evils of the Indian society which was ignored by the previous writers and that is blot on Indian society, culture and tradition that has colonized eighty five percent people of Indian society. This sensibility has ruined creativity of Indian people. Casteism and untouchability are the blots on the face of humanity. Anand seems fighting for the liberty, equality and justice of the untouchables and the poor. He appealed for the basic human rights and needs in the newly emerging civil structure of colonial and post-independence India. He had the opinion among all the fundamental rights that human dignity is the highest. Bakha, the leading character, had the resistance in the mind but he could not express it due to the fear of his caste. Bakha is a metaphor for all the untouchables of India.

Keywords: Untouchability, Casteism, Colonialism, Resistance, Injustice, Imperialism, Liberty, Equality, Humiliation

The novels of social resistance in Indian writing in English began with the big three— Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao and still continue with the modern novelists. The novel of social protest is not new genre but it was one of the favorite genres of the twentieth century Indian English writers. Mulk Raj Anand depicted such realities, not to talk about Indian writers, even western theoretical models of attaining justice, such as Marxist models etc. would not be appropriate to depict the tragedy of Bakha. The present research article attempts to depict the miseries of untouchables and the inhuman treatment of upper castes towards untouchables as depicted in the novel. The novelist has discussed very sensitive issue of the early twentieth century which is still relevant in the modern time. Whereas the Marathi word ‘Dalit’ was used by Mahatma Jotiba Phule in the late 1880s, for the untouchables and outcastes who were broken and exploited in the Hindu society but the real picture of the Dalits was depicted Mulk Raj Anand. In the history of Indian writing in English, the social reformation began with one of the great social reformists and pioneer of English Education in India named Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He felt that in the Indian society, there were many social evils like “Sati Pratha”, “child marriage” etc. which were prevalent in our society. He revolted against those problems and was able to solve the problems and the result was that ‘Sathi Partha’ was abolished. The reformation movement which began in the nineteenth century continued in the twentieth century and the result was that the novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao came on the scene and they did not idealize life like the previous writers but they omit nothing that is ugly or painful and idealized nothing. Their novels deal with actual social issues of the society and that deal with the absolute reality of the society and Mulk Raj Anand dared to present the reality that was earlier ignored and perhaps no one had the dare to depict the reality of the untouchables.

Mulk Raj Anand depicted the caste system and the problem of untouchability in his writings that was previously ignored by the writers or did not have courage to raise the problem of untouchables. The writer has depicted the true picture of untouchables especially the condition of the sweepers who are considered lowest in the hierarchy of untouchables. In our society, the caste plays an important role and it has become an important part of life of Indian social set up. Dr. B.R Ambedkar has well written about it:

Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. Virtue has become caste ridden and morality has become caste bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. There is no charity but it begins with the caste and ends with caste. There is sympathy but not for other caste. (Ambedkar BR: 37)

In this regard, the Hindi writer and critic Omprakash Valmiki outlines the basic conditions for “Dalit consciousness” that is crucial element for the development of Dalit literature. It talks about Ambedkarism, anti- capitalism, anti- Brahmanism and traditionalism in the realm of literary world. After the deep observation, Valmiki also talks about Baba Sahab’s comments on village life in India. He boldly talks about it that there is no place of equality, independence and brotherhood in Indian village life. Indian villages are more than heaven for Brahmins and for Dalits; they are nothing short of hell. Baba Sahab requested the fellow Dalits to leave Indian village life which is not less than hell for the untouchables. He requested the fellow Dalits, move to the cities, educate and agitate and that is heaven for them. Mulk Raj Anand has also made an attempt to show the untouchables’ condition to worldly platform so that the people of world can know the real condition of Dalits. Little before it, Baba Sahab has shown the heart touching condition of Dalits during the three Round Table Conferences and defines that the country which defines itself as a ‘Viswa Guru’ understands half of his population untouchables. Fellow man thinks other fellow man untouchable. It is beyond understanding and the irony is that this foolish thing is lingering on with the little bit of reformation.

Social protest is not a new phenomenon but we see lots of criticism during the period of Chaucer, basically, the Neo-classical Age and Victorian Age are known for the social criticism. It reforms the society a lot. Mathew Arnold defines poetry as a criticism of life. He wants to convey the message that primary aim of any part of literature is that to point out the part of society which is rotten up and also suggests some solutions. It also explores the problem into deep level and tearing the glittering veils of hypocrisy. Keeping these views in mind, the article examines the novel *Untouchable* with the particular reference to the Hindu caste system and its practices. Westerners and Indian intelligentsia consider it as a bane for the Indian society. If it is seen the problem with the post-modern perspectives or the post-modern writers as well as the people see it as anachronistic. It was not only Mulk Raj Anand who raised this problem rather there were other writers like R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and others who raised the issue of caste system.

Anand has clearly defined that he came across a story about a sweeper boy story named Uka which was written by Mahatma Gandhi in *Young India*. From this article, the writer was inspired too much and got the inspiration to write the novel. Mulk Raj Anand is known for depicting the pitiable situations and conditions of the downtrodden. In this novel, the writer has shown the inhuman attitude of the upper caste people towards the untouchables. In his novels, he depicted the inhumanity of man towards his fellow man. He has shown the exploitive nature of man regarding his caste. Anand is an impressive writer as Dickens himself. His novels made the public aware and induce their consciousness towards the injustice which was inflicted on untouchables at that time. Mulk Raj Anand is the first Indian English novelist who wrote the realistic fiction and depicted the pathetic lives of oppressed classes. In his novels, he has portrayed the lives of downtrodden, sweeper, a coolie and a peasant etc. who are the victims of upper castes as well as capitalist class.

Untouchable is very well known and very well-knit novel and the subject matter of the novel has been derived from the *Confessions* which he wrote earlier under the influence of Irene who was his first love. Despite it, Mahatma Gandhi who asked him to write a pamphlet on untouchability in 1930 and he produced the novel. The novelist describes that that one day he read an article in *Young India* written by Gandhi ji. In the article, he openly wrote that how he had met Uka, a sweeper boy wearing torn clothes and took him to the Sabarmati Ashram. This was written in pure simplicity. Mulk Raj Anand was influenced by the article and he wrote to Gandhi ji and wanted to meet him. Gandhi ji replied him to do so within three months and the result was to this conversation that the writer met him in the spring 1929. Gandhi ji opposed the theme of the novel as he felt that it was about a love affair of a boy and a girl but the writer explained it in detail and assured him that it was about a young untouchable boy Bakha and he is presented in a such a way that his position reached to the hero but finally, the novel deals with the problem of untouchability which exists even in modern society. The action of the novel is a sort of chain of incidents of humiliation in the life of the protagonist named Bakha from the morning to the evening. The cause of his humiliation is rooted in the conventional caste system of India. The untouchables suffered humiliation because of their low position in the Hindu society. The higher castes always treated the low castes with disrespect and insults and inferiority. The story of Bakha represents the conventional humiliation of the low castes. There are several modes of humiliation presented in the novel. Humiliation means, in simple words, disrespectful treatment to a human being by other human beings in which the individual dignity of the concerned is not respected. One way of humiliation is to shout out abuses to treat a person as meaningless and low. Bakha suffers humiliation when his day begins with abuses to start his work of cleaning latrines. There are many examples of it in the novel. They arouse our feeling and emotion for the untouchables. When we talk about Hinduism, we invariably refer to its caste hierarchy. Basically, Hinduism is divided in four-fold Varna system, but in reality, the whole society is fragmented and splintered in hundreds of castes and sub-castes. They are water-tight compartments. The writer has raised such

complex problems in this novel. For the writer, literature is not only a medium for entertainment but to depict social problems along with resistance to bring social reform in society. M. K. Naik has rightly said about the writer, "The writer must go straight to the heart of the problem of our time, the problem of Human Sensitivity in present complex, the tragedy of modern man" (Naik, 15).

In the novel, the writer has presented the misery of Bhangi caste. We see the description of Bakha, an untouchable boy who is living without facility in an untouched and dirty colony with his family. After seeing the description, it seems that they are living in such a place where, not to talk about human being, animals cannot survive at that place. The description is like this:

A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal clear water, now spoiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odor of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes. The absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarter a marsh, which gave out the most offensive smell. And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it, made it an "uncongenial" place to live in. (*Untouchable*, 1)

The writer has given such realistic and naturalistic picture of the society, which was ignored earlier by the writers. The writer has presented the real picture of the untouchables, who were worse than animals before independence and they were not allowed to touch the utensil of the upper castes people. Even, they could not fetch up water from the public places. The writer has described the situation very well in the following words:

The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream. They had no well of their own because it cost at least a thousand rupees to dig a well in such a hilly town as Bulashah. Before, they had to collect at the foot of the caste Hindus well and depend on the bounty of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitchers. (*Untouchable*, 15)

We should not think that this is enough but the condition was worse than it. Not to talk about the touch, touch was a crime but the heinous crime was the shadow. If the shadow of the lower caste people covers the upper caste people mistakenly, even not intentionally, the result of it used to be worse. The writer has written very well in this regard:

Keep to the side of the road, you, low- caste vermin! he suddenly heard someone touching him. Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock- eyed son of a bow- legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning! (*Untouchable*, 38)

Caste discrimination exists in our society on the basis of purity but they maintain purity with the Dalit males only and Dalit females are touchable to them as suggested in the novel. Pt. Kalinath tries to molest Sohini in the temple. In spite of it, there are lots of examples of social discrimination and caste discrimination in the novel. We see the worst condition of untouchable Bakha in the street of Bulandsahar. He buys Jalebis with his own money and the owner of the shop throws it to him as he is not a human being but a street dog. It was the perception of the people of that time that if they are touched by the untouchable, they would be defiled and we witness in the novel that a touchable man is touched by Bakha unknowingly and the result of that was that Bakha and his Jalebis mixed into dust. Untouchables had to inform their arrival otherwise they would be beaten brutally. This practice has been continuing in contemporary society as well.

According to the belief of the Hindu religion that God is very pure and the God is present everywhere in every object of Nature but not in untouchables. Untouchables were not allowed to see and worship Gods in Hindu temple because it was the belief that if untouchables do this practice, the Gods would be polluted. In the novel, Bakha imagines to see the God but he does not have dare to do that. Thus, Hindu Gods remained untouchables for the untouchable for many years. There was a ban for untouchables to enter the temple. It does not mean all the Hindus were oppressors but the maximum was cruel. There was also the Hindu like Charat Singh and youngsters who does not believe in any philosophy of segregation and untouchability.

It was inculcated in the most of the Hindu minds that untouchables were born to suffer the brutality of the upper caste people. If the untouchables did the minor mistakes, they had to suffer the harsh punishment. If they did not do anything wrong, they would have to get the same reward. The writer has depicted the incident of hockey match. While playing the match, he does not harm anyone but he is treated badly. During playing the match, he saves an injured child and bring him at home but consequence of the act is that he is bitterly treated by her mother. She says, "Voy, eater of your master! What have you done you have killed my son! Give him to me! Give me my child! You have defiled my house, besides wounding my son" (*Untouchable*, 127). After, this kind of treatment, Bakha thinks that untouchable's lives are nothing. We are good for nothing. He thinks that, despite it, I have helped the boy; I am getting this kind of treatment.

Thus, Bakha is a universal archetype of untouchables created by the writer. Through, the novel, the writer has attacked on the casteism, feudalism, colonialism and imperialism and inspired by the hope and vision that he would be successful to reconstruct a new social order. It needs to keep in the mind that Bakha is sufferer not a rebel. The writer has fought for the liberty, equality, justice and basic human needs of the untouchables in the newly structured colonial and post-independence India. The writer has shown a kind resistance against all those social evils of the society and the writer had the view that human dignity is the highest among

all the fundamental values. The writer would like to establish this fact that primarily, we are human being, secondary something else.

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