

Role of Hindu Caste System and Subaltern Identity: Communal Politics in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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ABSTRACT

*In an age where the consciousness of Human Rights is a major issue, the presentation of the marginalized groups of social members becomes very important. Dr Ambedkar states about Dalit's writes that his final words of advice to lower caste people is to educate, agitate and organize; have faith in themselves. With justice on their side he does not see how they can lose their battle. For them, it is a battle not for wealth or power but a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality. Mulk Raj Anand emerges as a crusader against social exploitation. His novel, *Untouchable* is known as the creative manifesto of Dalits in India. The protagonist, Bhakha in the novel, *Untouchable* belongs to the lowest caste of Indian society. Anand evaluates issues like society's revulsion at untouchability, some natural society concern for Bhakha's condition and the fact that in 1930's Gandhi presented *Untouchable* as symbol for great alteration in Indian society. The dilemma of Dalits can be spontaneously epitomized in Arnold's lines.*

Keywords: High Caste Hindus, Dalit, Marginality, Politics, Degradation.

Dalit Literature represents a powerful emerging trend in the Indian Literature. In the description of scavengers in *Untouchable* and target of high caste Hindus, the text interrogates the institutions that have established them at the margins. In a society where the consciousness of Human Rights is a major issue, the literary delineation of the marginalized people becomes very important. The new spurt of the developing corpus of Dalit Literature tries to focus the experiences of Dalit's distinction and exploitation. The phenomenal development in Dalit Literature is a part of growing requirement of the Dalits themselves to articulate their realization.

Dalit Literature started in Maharashtra and Gujrat. It has taken a substantial form in a variety of languages such as Hindi, Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam. Compared to Zola or Balzac, Anand emerges on the literary scene of Indian English Literature. He is a crusader against social exploitation. The importance of Anand's writing lies in the realistic presentation of the abject predicament of the down-trodden with the essential human sympathy. His writings impart a panoramic idea of the social life in India with all its qualities and demerits. His

experience of the social people their condition provides him a superb benefit in portraying the lives of social people. It is this description which creates his writings more appealing. Though, his protagonists such as Bhakha, in *Untouchable*, Munoo in *Coolie* or Gangs in *Two Leaves and a Bud* are his own powerful presentations, they emerge from limitations and powerful stand for a social cause.

Mulk Raj Anand criticizes the deadwood of the Indian tradition defined by obscurantism and conscious of its finer and enduring aspects. But Anand has borrowed his fervent socialist belief from the European tradition and this inculcated upon him a vision of modern egalitarian society.

Caste system in India is based on inequality among human beings in relation to social interaction. Caste system and its stratification are peculiar to Hindu society. The need of caste as Hindu is important to the opinions of Karma, Dharma and Moksha are closely related to the caste system:

The Hindu social system is based on the interpretation of 'Karma' and 'Dharma'. According to Prof. Max Weber, 'Dharma' means duty within the bounds of

'Karma' into which a person is born. Both 'Dharma' and 'Karma' are flexible, for according to the Hindu belief, neither external reward nor punishment exists. Life is a cycle. Therefore, the fulfillment of the 'Dharma' within the Karma can lead to rebirth into a higher 'Karma' and Casta; Vice-Versa is also possible. It is the attainment of harmony between 'Dharma' and 'Karma', which is ideal of the Hindu way of life.

(Nicholson 36)

Dr. Ambedkar, the father of Dalit Movement rejected the idea that caste system is creating by God. He commenced a political movement for the emancipation and equality of Dalits. Mahatma Phule supported this idea of Dr. Ambedkar. Dalit movement frolicked a very important role as a forming spirit of Dalit Literature. The target of Dalit movement was established a new space for Dalits. They were not satisfied with equality given by the government as a token of centuries of sufferings. They also deserve religious and creative equality. They refused to accept all role models, Eastern and Western principles, traditional writings and decided to make an art of their own and an identity of their own.

Anand has always emphasized the basic dignity of human being, despite his drawbacks, and to engender compassion for the underprivileged. Anand wished to make the folk, whom he recognized intimately from the lower depths, the suppressed those who had rarely seen in Indian literatures, except in Premchand, Saratchandra Chatterjee, Tarashankar and Maneck Bannerji. For Anand, every humiliation must be protested merely in the protection of the spiritual position of men. We have the chance to finish the estrangement of men and women from themselves and from each other. In his *Apology for Heroism*, Anand has himself described:

The theme of my work in the whole man and the whole gamut of human relationships, rather than only one single part of it.

(Anand 79)

His writings highlight a truly humanist works and humane opinion of experience. Anand has provided memorable pictures such as Bhakha's provided memorable pictures such as Bhakha's touching the caste Hindu and he is punished by them. Ananta being knocked down dead on the machine which he esteems; Munoo's traumatic experience that he is born to be tortured and ignorant villagers energetically supporting modern views, when they are convinced that is rather a recent incarnation of an age-old deity.

Mulk Raj Anand presents the evaluation of his fictional art which avoid the burden of human conscious existence, the responsibilities on the author's conscience, which may be conditioned by numerous motivations and provides modern type of religion emerging in his writings; a religion of affection for men, which has been pronounced the humanism of Mulk Raj Anand. He further elaborates that worship of each protagonist became a passion behind his works. He supported and accepted all the strengths and weakness of the men. His novel, *Untouchable* is a crusade against social domination.

The quest for identity and struggle are the central themes of Mulk Raj Anand's creative writing. Anand accepts the imaginative author's duty to be the fictive embodiment of the individual search for self. As a true modern novelist, he has defined in his fiction that identity is necessary to understand the men's predicament:

The twentieth century is a great turning point in human history. And though our main struggle remains the search for individual values, in so far as these are increasingly open to re-interpretation and discussion, it is necessary to explore the sensibilities of all human beings whether in the factory, in the village square, or in the drawing room. (Anand 79)

Numerous critics have related an emergent link between his life and his works throughout his creative writing career.

Anand's innovations with craft open his attempts to change felt experience into creative writing. Anand's works however; are firmly based on the experience of human observation.

Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Untouchable* is known as creative manifesto of Dalits in India. The protagonist Bhakha in the novel, *Untouchable* is derived from the lowest caste of Indian society. Despite his unpromising station in conscious existence, the main figure in fictitious tale acts at a variety of levels in order to critique the status quo of caste in India. Though, conscious of his condition in Indian society, Bhakha is capable to question issues well above his station in conscious existence, such as caste and its dissimilarities and the role of colonizer. Anand evaluates issues like society's revulsion at untouchability some innate societal compassion for Bakha's predicament and the fact in 1930's Gandhi used *Untouchable* as symbol for alteration in Indian Society.

The fictitious tale, *Untouchable* is about the conscious existence of a Scavenger Bhakha, a young sweeper staying in the outcaste's colony of a cantonment set in North India. The colony represents the age old practice of the sin of untouchability with false religious vigour. The life in the town and a cantonment with all its aspects, the sympathy and the humanity, the dirt and the injustice; the episodes of temple, the market place and the playground, the place of the hillside and the noise of the public place, is mentioned with so uncanny that *Untouchable* strikes us as a scene of a place, of a society and of a definite people that to be remembered. The scene has obtained the emphasis of an indictment of the injustices of the decadent and perverted orthodoxy.

Bhakha is compelled to remain a victim of social and religious determinism, an order that has connected him since his birth which itself strips him of the strength to revolt against the combined power of religion and culture. In this novel, Anand revealed a forceful critique of the Indian Caste system and English Colonial exploitation of India, which has really maximized the troubles of

untouchables such as Bhakha. The novel, *Untouchable* narrates a day in the life of the protagonist, Bhakha and the difficulties that he has to encounter in the course of the day. Bhakha does his duty efficiently and the hard work creates him very strong. Each muscle of his body, hard as rock when he came to frolick, appeared to shine forth like glass. And though his service was dirty, he remained comparatively clean. Bhakha matures a feeling of detestation at his miserable plight, and his soft heart is filled with malicious feeling at the caste Hindus when he is penalized for accidentally touching a high caste Hindu in the street on the charge of polluting him.

Sohini, Bhakha's sister; encounters the same destiny in the novel, *Untouchable*. Kali Nath, the priest tries to molest her and when she discards his advances, the cruel temple priest vindictively abuses her of having polluted him.

As the novel, *Untouchable* advances, though he does not get any to clue of anticipation towards a shadow of development in his miserable condition, he receives three probable solutions to the problem from three different angles – from a missionary to become Christian, from the motivating speech of Gandhiji to struggle from untouchability and from a young poet who advises developed sanitation as the only way to get rid of untouchability. At the end of the novel, Bhakha is received meditating on everything he has heard, though he could not make it out all. Anand selects to do the last picture of his novel by describing the inner conflict of Bhakha and juxtaposing enthusiasm with innocence.

It has a deep sense of hope, self-consciousness and self-understanding of the individual within the greater anticipation of Hindu society, there is a mark of what Bhakha has endured through-out his day's journey has had an extraordinary impact on the way he conditions himself within his own custom and culture. The novel, *Untouchable* imparts a positive note, with the strong image of Bhakha going home and vocalizing his tale, hoping to get resolution, or at least some understanding will come out.

Thus the novelist presents a society which mobilizes conceptions, which were until now concerned as immutable. In short but excellent novel, *Untouchable*, the writer has foregrounded significant breadth of issues.

Mulk Raj Anand is a reformist and is against Caste system in India. He realizes that casteism which is an offshoot of Karma, generates injustice and inhumanity. Anand believes in equality of all men. He does not create any discrimination among people in the form of caste, creed and custom, which are impediments for human being's development.

Sympathy for the poor is a part of Anand's humanism and it is on this theme that all his stories and novels are built. By highlighting the poor and miserable physical conditions, economic harassment and social atrocities to the poor and the outcasts through his theme, dialogues and numerous emotionally touching scenes such as well-scene, the molestation scene, the touching scene, the chapati-throwing and insults of Bhakha and the embarrassment of his family, Mulk Raj Anand has condemned cruelty and domination. He exhibits a sure grasp of the psychology of both the caste Hindus and the Dalits. In his discussion with the untouchables, Brahmin is armed with the realization of six thousand years of social and caste superiority- a feeling which refuses to accept the fact that Dalit is a human being, but insists on treating him like a sub-human creature, to be ignored or bullied as the occasion demands. It is this that creates the temple priest Pandit Kali Nath treats Sohini, Bhakha's sister like a juicy morsel of girlhood to be molested with impurity; and this approach prompts the betel-leaf seller from whom Bhakha purchases cigarettes to fling the pocket at the outcaste people as butchers might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing round the corner of his shop. He has to suffer in this system created by high Hindu.

Bhakha is presented as a boy caught in a vicious circle from which there is no escape. Compelled sweep dung and toilets, he has to depend for water on the pity of the Brahmins and for food on leftover provided

by them. Sweeping can hardly be a value in a conscious existence led in this fashion- a fact which assists to perpetuate the social ostracism to which the scavengers have already been condemned. But in his brain and soul which have actually suffer for greater catastrophe. Eternal slavery is the result of untouchability.

Lakha and Bhakha do not even imagine to revolt against this domination or even of harboring any protest. Bhakha resents his destiny, is mortified by it, and wishes to protest against it, but the slavery of centuries which is ingrained in him, paralyzes him even when he vaguely meditates of retaliation. At the accidental touching and reproaches he receives from Brahmins he wants to run away. But then he feels that he is hampered by the age-long barrier of ethics. Even at his sister's ill-treatment by the temple priest he finally bows down himself. He is embarrassed and his eyes are dimmed. His only refuge lies in living like a Britisher. But in that too he is becoming only mocking stuff, a laughing stock, a Pilpili Sahib. Thus Anand's observation of the psychology of both the caste Hindus and the sweepers is deep and subtle. He has presented the problem of untouchability in an objective and balanced way. The author of realistically presents the miserable conditions of scavengers and provides solutions to the social problem.

The novel *Untouchable* focuses on Bhakha who does not hate the sweeping of streets and latrines. His function provides him physical strength and dignity. He is strong and well-built. He establishes himself to be a Hindu reformer who could not bear the inhuman behaviour on the name of God. He is the victim of age-old customs and tradition.

Anand's protagonist, does not suffer from tragic flaw. His destiny is determined by heredity and he is the victim of society. In attempting to get his emancipation from the social injustices, the main protagonist searches his own individuality, which commences with the recognition of his status in the society and a sense of alienation. In this

fictitious tale, it is the touch scene which suddenly creates Bhakha realize his actual situation in society. It is the time of self-realization for him:

For them I am a Sweeper, Sweeper
Untouchable! Untouchable!
Untouchable! That's the word!
Untouchable! I am Untouchable!

This self-acknowledgement motivates him to search for emancipation:

Bhakha seeks his freedom in a feudal society which has unquestionable faith in Caste discrimination, hypocrisy, cruelty, deceit and inhumanity. We see him stand passive and bewildered at the immensity of the horror, hoping for a change. He returns to his bed at night with more hope that he had set out in the morning. But his hopes are not fulfilled even after sixty years of independence. Though, Constitution of India has made it a crime to practice untouchability.

(Ramesh 120)

There are untouchables to be seen in every place of India even today. It is obvious from the answer provided by Anand when this question to Anand is being asked why he could not sell the current edition of *Untouchable* in India he gave the answer that it is completely improbable. India believes and accepts that it has long ago solved the interrogation of untouchability by passing an Act all against it in parliament. The irony of

this is that even today there are millions of scavenger and untouchable in India. In *Untouchable* Anand does not believe in God.

He does not support the idea as trite as it is no longer fit for the consciousness of people. The earthly existence is only matter. Hence, there is no place for Karma. Bhakha suffers not because of his misdeeds but because of this caste as an Untouchable.

In *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand provides his message of humanism, frugal emancipation, equality, socialism and brotherhood. His 'Humanism' has created him appear like an optimist, his realism is also free from harshness by the deep hues of humanism that is main to untouchable. As a novelist, Anand conveys through his character. His zeal of reformation compels him to advice the ways and means to create a society which should be based on casteless society.

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