

THE THEME OF SOCIAL STRUGGLE IN MULKRAJ ANAND'S "UNTOUCHABLE"

Abstract

India's revolutionary writer of the 20th century, Mulk Raj Anand, altered the way people wrote and thought about Indian fiction. Prior to him, novelists who had created fiction tended to focus on the idealized and romantic aspects of life. The problems in society were less in number. The field of fiction writing underwent a transformation thanks to the writing of Mulk Raj Anand. For the benefit of the underprivileged and untouchables, he penned the novels. Through his works, he addressed problems such as casteism, capitalism, feudalism, colonialism, and imperialism. He confronts one of the main social ills in Indian society—a stain on Indian society, culture, and legacy that has colonised 85% of the population—in *Untouchable*, a topic that has gone unaddressed by other authors. The Indian people's inventiveness has suffered because of this sensibility. Untouchability and casteism are stains on humanity's good name.

Anand appears to be standing up for the untouchables' and oppressed peoples' rights to justice, equality, and freedom. In colonial and post-independence India, he worked to advance basic human rights and needs. Among all essential rights, he believed that respect for human dignity was the most important. The main character, Bakha, harboured grudges but suppressed them out of caste-related dread. Every untouchable person in India is symbolised by the Hindu god Bakha.

Keywords: Equality, Casteism, colonialism, resistance, untouchability, humiliation, injustice and imperialism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The great three—Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao—started the genre of socially conscious novels in Indian English literature, and modern novelists are continuing working in this vein today. The genre of the social protest novel is not new, but twentieth-century Indian English writers particularly enjoyed it. Even western theoretical frameworks of achieving justice, such as Marxist models, etc., would not be appropriate to represent the tragedy of *Bakha*. Mulk Raj Anand depicted such facts, not to mention Indian writers. The current study piece makes an effort to portray the suffering of untouchables and the cruel treatment of untouchables by upper castes as they are portrayed in the novel. The novelist touched on some really delicate issues from the early 20th century that are still relevant now. While Mahatma Jotiba Phule adopted the Marathi word "Dalit" to describe the outcasts and untouchables who were shattered and exploited in Hindu society in the late 1880s, Mulk Raj Anand captured the true nature of the Dalits.

One of the greatest social reformers and the father of English education in India, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, is credited with starting the social reformation in the history of Indian writing in English. He believed that societal ills like "Sati Pratha" and "child marriage" were pervasive in Indian society. He spoke up in opposition to these issues and was successful in resolving them, which led to the abolition of "Sathi Partha." The reformation movement, which started in the nineteenth century and continued in the twentieth, led to the emergence of novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao who avoided idealising anything and instead included everything that was unpleasant or painful in life. They deal with the true realities of society in their works, and Mulk Raj Anand dared to expose a reality that had hitherto been disregarded and possibly no one had dared to depict the reality of the untouchables.

II. THE THEME OF SOCIAL RESISTANCE IN "UNTOUCHABLE"

The caste system and the issue of untouchability were previously disregarded by writers or were not brought up because they lacked the confidence to do so. Mulk Raj Anand depicted these issues in his writings. The status of sweepers, who are regarded as the lowest in the hierarchy of untouchables, is particularly highlighted in the writer's depiction of the genuine picture of untouchables. The caste system has a significant impact on our society and is now an integral element of Indian social structure. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar wrote persuasively on the subject:

Public spirit has been slain by caste. Public charity has been rendered meaningless by caste. Public opinion is impossible because of caste. Morality has become caste-bound and virtue has become caste-ridden. The deserving are not shown any compassion. There is no acknowledgement of merit. The needy receive no charity. There is no charity; caste is where it all starts and stops. However, there is no sympathy for other castes. 37 (Ambedkar BR).

In this context, Omprakash Valmiki, a writer and critic in Hindi, defines the fundamental requirements for "Dalit consciousness," a critical component in the growth of Dalit writing. In the literary sphere, it discusses Ambedkarism, anti-capitalism, anti-Brahmanism, and traditionalism. Following the in-depth study, Valmiki also discusses Baba Sahab's observations on Indian village life. He asserts with confidence that equality,

independence, and fraternity have no place in Indian rural life. For Dalits and Brahmins, Indian villages are nothing short of torment; for them, they are more than heaven. Baba Sahab urged his fellow Dalits to flee Indian villages, calling it "no less than hell" for those who are not of the upper class.

He urged his fellow Dalits to immigrate to the city, where they might educate and stir up trouble and find eternal bliss. Mulk Raj Anand has also made an effort to highlight the plight of the untouchables on a global stage so that people throughout the world can understand the true situation of Dalits. A little earlier than that, Baba Sahab demonstrated the heartbreaking state of Dalits during the three Round Table Conferences, demonstrating that the nation that considers itself a "Viswa Guru" comprehends the untouchability of half of its citizens. One man believes another man to be untouchable. It is incomprehensible, and the irony is that despite some reformation, this silly thing continues to exist.

Social protest is not a new phenomenon, but Chaucer's time saw a lot of social criticism; in general, the Neo-classical and Victorian eras are notorious for social critique. It significantly reforms society. Poetry, according to Mathew Arnold, is a critique of life. He wants to make the argument that the main goal of all literature is to identify the problematic areas of society and offer some answers. Additionally, it delves deeply into the issue while exposing hypocrisy's sparkling veils. The article analyses the book *Untouchable* with specific reference to the Hindu caste system and its practices while keeping these viewpoints in mind. It is viewed as a curse for Indian society by Westerners and the Indian elite. If it is perceived as outdated by post-modern writers or perspectives, it may also be perceived as such by the general public. Mulk Raj Anand wasn't the first author to bring up this subject; other authors including R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and others did as well.

Anand has made it known that while reading *Young India*, he came across a story by Mahatma Gandhi about a sweeper child named Uka. The author took too much inspiration from this essay and used it as the basis for her work. The pitiful circumstances and conditions of the oppressed are often depicted by Mulk Raj Anand. The author of this book portrays the cruel treatment of the untouchables by members of the upper caste. He wrote novels that showed how cruel humans can be to one another. Regarding his caste, he has demonstrated the exploitative nature of man. Anand is as equally accomplished writer as Charles Dickens. The injustice that was done to untouchables at the time was brought to the public's attention through his novels. The first Indian author of English literature to portray the miserable lives of oppressed classes in realistic fiction is Mulk Raj Anand. He has depicted the life of oppressed people like sweepers, coolies, and peasants in his novels who are the victims of upper castes and the capitalist class.

The subject matter of the very well-known and close-knit work *Untouchable* was taken from the *Confessions*, which he had earlier written while under the influence of Irene, his first love. Despite this, he wrote the work after Mahatma Gandhi urged him to publish a pamphlet against untouchability in 1930. The author of the novel recalls reading a piece by Gandhi ji in *Young India* one day. He candidly described in the essay how he encountered Uka, a sweeper boy with damaged clothing, and brought him to the Sabarmati Ashram. It was written with the utmost simplicity. The story had an impact on Mulk Raj Anand, who wrote to Gandhi ji to express his desire to see him. Gandhi ji advised him to comply within three months, and it was as a result of this talk that the writer first encountered Gandhi in the spring

of 1929. Gandhi ji disagreed with the novel's theme because he thought it was about a boy and a girl falling in love, but the author went into great detail to reassure him that it was actually about a young untouchable boy named Bakha, who is presented in such a way that his position reaches the hero. In the end, the novel addresses the issue of untouchability, which persists even in contemporary society.

The action of the book takes the form of a series of humiliating events that happen to the protagonist, Bakha, from morning to night. His humiliation is a direct result of India's traditional caste structure. Due to their poor status in Hindu society, the untouchables experienced humiliation. The lower castes were consistently treated with contempt, insults, and inferiority by the higher castes. The traditional denigration of the lower classes is depicted in the Bakha narrative. The novel presents a number of humiliation techniques. Humiliation is, to put it simply, the disrespectful treatment of another person by another person in which the other person does not respect the other person's particular dignity. Shouting insults and treating someone with contempt is one technique to make someone feel low and meaningless. When Bakha's day begins with abuse before he can begin his work cleaning latrines, he is humiliated. In the book, there are numerous examples of it. They stir up our compassion and feelings for the untouchables. Hinduism is always discussed in terms of its caste system. Hinduism is fundamentally split into four Varnas, but in fact, there are hundreds of castes and subcastes that make up the entire community. They are sealed off from the water. In this book, the author raises such sophisticated issues. For the author, literature is a tool to describe societal issues and opposition to social transformation as well as a source of enjoyment.

The novelist depicts the suffering of the Bhangi caste. An untouchable youngster named Bakha and his family are shown as living in a barren, filthy community without any facilities. According to the description, it appears that they reside in an environment that makes it impossible for animals to exist, let alone humans. This is how it is described: The once-clear water of a brook that ran alongside the lane has been polluted by the smell of dead animals left to dry on their skins and hides, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows, and buffaloes that has been piled up to make fuel cakes, and the stench of the nearby public restrooms. After several seasons of rain, the region had developed into a marsh due to improper drainage, and its stink was particularly unpleasant. This small village was also "uncongenial" to live in because to the ramparts of animal and human waste surrounding it, as well as the ugliness, filth, and sorrow that enveloped it. (Untouchable, 1)

The writer has painted a picture of society that is so realistic and naturalistic; previously, writers have neglected it. Before independence, untouchables were treated worse than animals and prohibited from touching upper caste members' utensils. The writer has painted a realistic portrait of these individuals. They were not even able to collect water from public areas. In these words, the author has very effectively characterized the circumstance:

Because the Hindus from the three upper castes would consider the water tainted if the outcasts ever drew water from the well, they were not permitted to climb the platform surrounding it. They were also prohibited from using the neighbouring brook since doing so would poison the stream. They lacked a personal well because digging one in a town as steep as Bulashah cost at least a thousand rupees. Previously, they had to gather at the base of the

Hindu caste well and rely on the generosity of some of their superiors to fill their pitchers with water. (Untouchable, 15)

We shouldn't assume that this suffices since the situation was worse than it. Not to add that it was unlawful to touch someone; but, casting a shadow was a much more serious crime. When members of the lower caste unintentionally or accidentally cover those of the upper caste, the result used to be worse. In this aspect, the author performed a fantastic work:

You low-caste scum, keep to the side of the road! He heard someone rubbing against him out of the blue. You swine, why don't you phone and let me know you're coming! Do you realise you have touched and violated me, you cock-eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! I must now go take a bath to purify myself. I also put on a brand-new dhoti and blouse this morning! (Untouchable, p. 38)

In our society, there is caste discrimination based on purity, but they only keep purity with Dalit males, and Dalit girls are acceptable to them, as suggested in the story. In the temple, Pt. Kalinath makes an attempt to molest Sohini. Despite this, the book contains numerous instances of caste and societal inequality. In the Bulandsahar Street, untouchable Bakha is in the worst possible condition. Because he is a street dog and not a human, the shop owner throws the Jalebis he purchased with his own money to him. A touchable man is accidentally touched by Bakha in the story, and as a result, Bakha and his Jalebis combined into dust. At that time, people believed that if they were touched by the untouchable, they would become polluted. Untouchables had to let them know when they were coming, or else they would be severely punished. Even in modern culture, this practice is still being used.

Hinduism has the view that while God is very pure and present in all things—including untouchables—he is not present in them. Untouchables were not permitted to visit Hindu temples and worship the Gods because it was thought that if they did so, the Gods would become tainted. Bakha imagines seeing God in the book, but he lacks the courage to do so. As a result, Hindu deities remained untouchables for the untouchable for a long time. Untouchables were forbidden from entering the shrine. While this does not imply that all Hindus were oppressors, the most were brutal.

The majority of Hindus were taught that people from lower castes were born to be brutalised by those from higher castes. The heavy penalty was meted out to the untouchables if they made even the smallest faults. They would have to receive the same award even if they had done nothing improper. The incident from the hockey game was described by the author. He doesn't hurt anyone while playing the game, but he still is treated poorly. He rescues an injured youngster while playing the game and brings him home, but as a result of the action, her mother treats him badly. "Voy, eater of your master!" she exclaims. You killed my son, what have you done? Send him my way! Give me your kid! In addition to hurting my son, you have defiled my home (Untouchable, 127). Bakha thinks that after suffering this type of agony, untouchable lives are pointless. All of us are useless. Despite receiving this treatment, he thinks I have benefited the boy and has helped the boy.

III. CONCLUSION

As a result, the author's invention of Bakha acts as a model for untouchables throughout the world. The author criticises casteism, feudalism, colonialism, and imperialism throughout the course of the book while being inspired by the hope and dream that he will be successful in restoring a new social order. It must keep in mind that Bakha is a victim and not an insurgent. The author fought for the untouchables' liberty, equality, justice, and basic human needs in newly established colonial and post-independence India. The writer had shown some sort of resistance to all those social problems of society since she believed that human dignity was the best among all essential ideals. The author intends to make the point that everything else comes in second to being human.

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