

The Immitigable Hardships and Physical and Mental Agonies of the Untouchables in Mulk Raj Anand's: Untouchable

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Abstract- Untouchable is Mulk Raj Anand's first novel and it brought to him immense popularity and prestige. This novel shows the realistic picture of society. In this novel Anand has portrayed a picture of untouchable who is sweeper boy. This character is the representative of all down trodden society in pre-independence of India. . With Bakha, the central character, there are other characters who also suffer because of their lower caste. The present paper of us is concerned with evils of untouchability and the need for radical empathy.

I. INTRODUCTION

From the time immemorial, Caste has been a dominant subject in India. Even after completing 65 years of independence the inhuman, savage practice of untouchability still prevails almost everywhere in the country. Mulk Raj Anand was an eminent Indian writer in English, notable for his depiction of the lives of the poorer castes in traditional Indian society. He has to his credit sixteen novels, twelve collections of short stories and more than twenty-five books on art and other general subjects and hundreds of articles.

Mulk Raj Anand – His themes and Style of writing:

Anand is Dickensian in his ultra-sensitivity to the existence of social evils in protean forms. In fact, it is the keen awareness of the human predicament that propelled him into creative writing. Therefore the themes which Anand has chosen for his novels are based on such problems as casteism and human suffering caused by a variety of factors-political, economic, social and cultural. He tries to create in the readers an urgent awareness of the dehumanizing, social evils, to stir the springs of tenderness in them and to activate them for the removal of these evils in order that a desirable, just social order may come into being.

Anand's debut novel, 'untouchable', has brought him immense popularity that shows the realistic picture of society of the nineteen thirties during which Indian struggle for Independence was at its peak. The readers will realize the humiliation and physical as well as mental agonies of the untouchables throughout the novel. It was very heart rending to know that the so-called upper castes have not even accepted the lower castes with equality. In this novel, Anand succeeds in exposing the oppression, injustice, exploitation to the whole community of the outcastes in India.

Miserable Living Conditions of Untouchables:

'Untouchable' happens to be the very first novel written by M.R. Anand under the deep influence of Gandhi. With Bakha, the central character, there are other characters who also suffer because of their lower caste. For the privileged, the colony of the untouchability is a forbidden place. That is why it is termed as "out-castes' colony". It reveals that the privileged people are totally indifferent to the welfare of the people who slavishly serve them. They treat the outcastes as their moveable, yet untouchable, property. They consider the sweepers dirty just because they clean their dirt. They make the untouchable lead a life of total dependence on them. Even for water, the basic necessity of human existence, the sweepers have to depend on the mercy of the caste Hindus.

Bakha symbolizes the exploitation and oppression which has been the fate of untouchables like him. The novel describes a single day in the life of Bakha; the untouchable belonging to the scavenger caste, commonly known as *bhangi* in many Indian languages. The work of this caste was to clean toilets and streets and keeps them clean for the upper castes. The living conditions of the untouchables were extremely squalid and they were forced to reside in kutcha mud-walled, single-roomed cottages. There was not proper system of drainage and there was foul smell everywhere. Almost every page of the novel is drenched in Bakha's unseen tears who patiently endure the most humiliating and depressing days of his young life in this story. From sunrise on he is forced to deal with discrimination, hatred and hypocrisy. Bakha begins his daily routine work with his father's cascade of abuses:

"Get up, ohe, you Bakhya, Ohe son of pig! Are you up? Get up, you illegally begotten".¹

The Plight and mental agonies of down-trodden:

Bakha is a very dexterous workman; passerby's often marveled at his skill and thought for a while that he was not the kind of man who ought to be cleaning public latrines. Despite Bakha's skill and work ethic he was no chance of moving up in his life. He is forever confined to his duty, demeaning job as he has taken birth in down-trodden class. Bakha's potentialities are curbed and strangulated before they can even sprout. In spite of his ardent desire to go to school and by being educated, he is not allowed to school because the parents of the high castes children would not allow their sons to be contaminated by the touch of the low-caste man's son. Bakha worked in the barracks of a British regiment and was caught by the glamour of the white man's life. He is all enthusiastic and has his own set of dreams. His dreams

vary from to dress like a “Tommy” (Englishman) in ‘fashun’ to play Hockey. However his limited means and the circumstances force him to literally beg for the food and get humiliated in each turn of the road. They were not permitted even to take water from a well and had to wait for hours for the mercy of the upper caste. The food will be given to them by throwing and if they touch anybody by accident they will be punished. The upper class however doesn’t find this untouchability when they molest their teen girls. More humiliation is in store for Bakha before his day is out. His curiosity takes him to a local temple, and he becomes inquisitive to see the hidden mystery in the temple. While Bakha was peering through the window he was interrupted by the priest shouting “Polluted! Polluted!” Meanwhile the crowd gathered and shouted him by saying:

“Get off the steps you scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service!”²

Bakha ran down to the courtyard where his sister Sohini was waiting. Here he got a shock again as the priest claimed, “I have been defiled by contact”. Sohini with sobs and tears in her eyes explained the priest claim saying:

“That man made suggestions to me, when I was cleaning the lavatory of his house there. And when I screamed, he came out shouting that he had been defiled”.³

Though Bakha’s eyes flared wild and red and was enraged by this and flew into a tirade, he remains a mute witness. He desperately comes and tells his father.

“They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt.”⁴

The inhuman treatment meted out to Untouchables:

The conditions which the untouchables are enforced into are really shocking through one can share their aches and agonies. Cigarettes are flung at him as a bone is flung at an insistent sniffing dog. Jilebis are thrown at him, like the wastes thrown at a pig; and the thin paper-like pancake (given as food to the sweeper) flies down to him like a kite from the third floor. Wherever Bakha goes, he is belittled with such words as ‘defiled’ and ‘polluted’. The privileged castes Hindus assert their superiority over the outcastes by inflicting pain on them.

“Dogs” is the name that normally comes to the mind of the privileged folk to identify the outcastes. The “touching incident” reveals the horror of being an untouchable. The people who gather around Bakha shoot abuses by calling him, “low-caste vermin”, “swine”, “dog”, “brute”, “son of a bitch”, “offspring of a pig” etc. These abusive words thrown on a lonely and helpless person are in opposition to the privileged folk’s claim of being “twice-born”. These words actually reveal their polluted mind. The story goes on to show even more examples of the harsh treatment of untouchables.

II. CONCLUSION

All these incidents reveal how unjustly the untouchables are treated by caste-Hindus. Anand concludes the novel

Untouchable with a note of faith and idealism. The manifest plea in the novel is for the total abolition of untouchability. Bakha fervently hopes for the dawn to his nature of his work and his relevance in the society without the label of ‘untouchable’. The inhuman treatment meted out to Bakha in Untouchable could have really happened to a social outcaste during the colonial days in India; perhaps such cruelties are being perpetuated in many parts of villages even today which the objective newspapers publish. Undoubtedly, Anand had drawn upon what he had himself witnessed and heard as a boy, he brings into print in the form of a novel. As a novelist addressing himself to the task of exposing social evils, Anand has been an effective writer and he can be compared to Dickens in this respect. The novel evokes in the mind of the objective reader, the horrifying social malady that existed in the colonial days and in the subsequent decades makes a tale of socially created woe to the downtrodden in the Indian society. Anand dreamt for our strong, united, prosperous and peaceful nation.

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