



EXPLOITATION AND HORRENDOUS ABUSES AGAINST UNTOUCHABLES IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE* AND *THE ROAD*

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ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand's novels *Untouchable* and *the Road* are realistic portrayal of the Indian society. Anand's dealing of the theme of exploitation and horrendous abuse is the novel-form as a tool of his humanism. The novels expose class based society in India, focussing attention on a number of social belief, custom, tradition, social evil etc. of the Hindu society. These novels were written when India as a colony and untouchability was a rife through India. The novelist realistically portrays the poor plight of the untouchables and offers solutions to the social evils prevalent in the Indian Society. The present study endeavours to evaluate and analyse Anand's novels in the light of untouchability. The two novels *Untouchable* and *The Road* discuss Anand's conception of caste system in Indian society.

Keywords: *Untouchable, High Caste Hindu, Exploitation, Humiliation, Consciousness, Solution.*

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INTRODUCTION

Several decades of hectic work in the realm of Indian fiction in English are enshrined in the fictional oeuvre of Mulk Raj Anand who holds a distinctive position in contemporary Indo-Anglian fiction. He is enumerated as one of the 'big-three' in this field. If R.K. Narayan is known for his social incongruities and individual capriciousness and Raja Rao is appreciated for his philosophical propensity, Anand will be remembered for his social reformist

zeal and empathy for the down-trodden and underprivileged sections of the Indian society.

At an early age, Anand became conscious of the indigenous religious bigotry and intensification of hypocrisy in Indian society and of its injustices flourishing on anachronistic customs such as untouchability and economic domination inflicted on the have-nots by the haves. This salutary consciousness solidified his faith as a social realist in the Indian tradition. Anand's brand of untouchability



is a magnet that allures reader; a light that brightens a thousand faces and satisfies them with a promise of fresh life.

Thirties were the crucial years in the history of India as these years observed the civil disobedience, the round table conference, salt satyagraha, the passing of the Government of India Act 1935, and the introduction of provincial autonomy. Dr. G.N. Agnihotri in his *Indian Life and Problems in the Novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan* stated that :

The impact of Mahatma Gandhi's personality and his programme on this period and its literature was so great, that it will not be improper to call it Gandhian Age. This period of Mahatma Gandhi's struggle has important milestones like the Khilafat Movement (1920-21) his satyagrah against salt law (1930-32) the Quit India Movement (1942), till Independence was achieved in 1947. His political and humanitarian work continued till the last evening of 30th January 1948, when an assassin's bullet cut short the life of the Father of the Nation. (Aginhotri 10)

On the social field, the same upheaval of freedom was running with political strife and it was a definite struggle against those superstitions, caste system and untouchability. There were four varnas or categories of caste in Vedic Ages, still present in different forms – Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. These social classes had been divided according to their works. Brahmins were related to priest class. Kshatriyas were related to ruler class, Vaishyas were related to business class and Shudras with the physical labour class.

METHODOLOGY

There were two kinds of Brahmins. Those who performed religious ceremonies of Aryans constituted the Rishis's category and Brahmins who earned money by fortune telling came in purohit's category. Brahmins were supposed to do the temple's work which was somewhat related to the mind they were called scholars, pundit, vidwaan. Kshatriyas were in charge of security of the country. Most probably they were in proximity to the ruling throne called Raja, King or Senapati. They often

declared superiority over Brahmins by merits of their political power and truth claiming that they fed the Brahmins. But in reality this class came second in hierarchy of class division.

Vaishyas belonged to the merchant class, they were very professional leaders of economic policies. They aimed to earn more and more money. They always lived in luxury. In later periods there were only three categories – Brahmins, Vaishyas and Shudras, both Brahmins and Vaishyas were the exploiters of the Shudras. Later there remained only two classes, Vaishyas who came in the category of Bourgeois and Shudras who came in the category of Proletariat.

The last were Shudras, they were designated to do slavery of all the three classes. This class was considered lowest in the order. Later the condition of Shudras became more and more miserable. Mulk Raj Anand decided to focus this suppressed, poor class. They are the main protagonists of these two novels, *Untouchable* and *The Road*, who consciously or unconsciously have become the victim of this unsusceptible society. If we relate the four Varnas to body structure, we can easily grasp the real meaning of the division of hierarchy. Brahmins can be related with the mind because they were called pundits, scholars. Kshatriyas can be representators of hands because they were charged with the work of protection. Vaishyas can be embodiments of stomach because they invariably thought about earning more and more money and enjoying their earnings. Shudras were true representative of feet because they were charged to do the service of the other three classes. For this reason they were denied a proper place in society. It could be possible that they were mentally, physically and economically weak that is why they were forced to do menial jobs. In this way we grasp the real meaning of social division. Feet play great role in developing minds, hands and stomachs. We can think without feet, we can move hands without feet, can eat without feet but walking without feet is impossible, hence that is most important. Several castes had a fixed condition in the social system in which Brahmins were at the top, the Shudras at the bottom and others were between the two. Each caste had to perform its duty in the society. The relationship among these classes were



not remarkable because Shudras were considered the lowest in the society.

Society was divided into castes and sub-castes. The function of the castes and sub-castes played a great role in shaping the names of castes and sub-castes. After the division of castes and sub-castes they had to perform their work willingly or unwillingly. Dr. G.N. Agnihotri in his *Indian Life and Problem in the Novel of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan* wrote that the people, belonging to the first three castes came within the fold of the caste Hindus and :

Others outside this fold are regarded untouchables. Among the untouchables themselves there are gradations as higher and lower. Sweeper class is the lowest in the hierarchy among the untouchables themselves. (Agnihotri 16)

Untouchables were denied the right to draw water from public wells and had to wait for some one who belonged to the higher class, to draw water from public wells and give it to them. Their presence and touch was believed to be polluting and they were not permitted to go near shrines or temples, because it was thought that it would get polluted. They had to ask for food or piece of dry bread or the left essences of food from the caste Hindus. In the caste Hindus, Brahmins sat at the top most of the stair of caste system. They enjoyed the essentials of their class. Priesthood business was considered the best business in the caste Brahmin. E.M. Forster in *Preface to Untouchable* describes the duty of lower class in social community :

The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves and to rearrange their plans for the day. Thus he is a disquieting as well as disgusting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming. No wonder that the dirt enters into his soul, and

that he feels himself at moments to be what he is supposed to be. It is sometimes said that he is so degraded that he doesn't mind, but this is not the opinion of those who have studied his case, not it is borne out by my own slight testimony. (Forster 8)

Anand believed that religion did not have the elements of freedom; rather it created a barrier around human life. He attacked religion and religious beliefs especially Hindu religion and exposed the hypocrisy and exploitation of religion. Anand started his career with *Untouchable* (1935) a short but excellent novel. His main attempt was to attack all those social evils which influenced the conduct of the members of the Hindu community. At the very beginning of his career, Anand turned towards the theme of the evils of social caste system because he wanted the reader to be conscious of the displacement of these evils so that a right social order may come into being. Bhakha, the hero of *Untouchable*, represents the entire community of untouchables. Henry James called the novel, *Untouchable*, 'the power to guess unseen from the seen'. Gandhi advised Anand that untouchables never talk big rather they only express themselves humbly with folded hands. Anand accepted this advice of Gandhi completely, hence untouchables' physical incapacity to protect the customary subordination to upper rank, which is always hostile to them.

DISCUSSION

When the novel, *Untouchable* (1935) opens Anand depicts numerous scenes of the outcaste colony which give more than what environment can. The circumstances, in which Bhakha is introduced, is an explaining observation on the connection between the self and the society reckoned in relation of untouchability. Untouchables live in an unfavourable, unkindly environment. They are living in houses covered with straws, which are completely ill-suited and shabby. This shows that all inhabitants be it washermen, leather-workers, scavengers, barbers, grass-cutters, water-carriers are not human beings, rather they are animals. Even worse than them. The drains of this area throw an offensive smell and common people have to bear the odour,



they are unfamiliar with fresh air and cleanliness. Though they sweep and clean still they are destined to live in filth because there is no other place of dwelling for them. Even the water from well is provided by upper class and for this they depend upon their mercy. Water for them is like 'fruit of heaven'. In such an environment Bhakha grows as a duty scrupulous citizen. He is a brave lad of eighteen years. He faces insults one after the other. His father rebukes him daily in the morning but it is not as harsh as a slap in his face when found eating jalebis for the first time. He got so engrossed in savouring its flavour that he did not pronounce the name of his caste and profession. Unconsciously, Bhakha touched Lallaji and he slapped Bhakha. This incident altered the life of Bhakha. The story is a protest and confrontation of untouchability against those hypocrite caste Hindus who formed this system. In *Untouchable*, untouchables and high caste Hindus have interpersonal relations with each other. This imparts a kind of lesson that untouchability will always remain in society unless people of India are addressed by the slogan 'man with man'.

At other times, Bhakha asks for bread in the street of houses. It is really a pathetic sight :

The sweeper has come for the bread mother !
The sweeper has come for the bread; he
shouted a little louder. But it was of no avail.

(Anand 17)

Likewise, *The Road* (1961) came, twenty five years after *Untouchable*. Anand, once again, dealt with the same problem of untouchability. The position of Bhikhu, the hero of *The Road*, is akin to that of Bhakha's position. Both are the victim of the evil system of society. Both are struggling to come out of this system of society and want to represent Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The novel, *The Road*, exhibits the rigidity of the caste system. The Road is a symbolic novel, it is a symbol of Road, a road to improve and a road to unimprove. *The Road* like *Untouchable* once again deals with problems and sufferings of cobbler (Untouchable) youth in the villages of India. They are free to leave the village of India to put an end to their sufferings but once they do it, they get lost in throng of cities. Bhikhu is the hero of the novel, having a strong capability to work hard. He has a deep affection for his mother. Bhikhu

and other untouchables build a road to deliver milk from village to the town. While they were at it, Bhikhu was unmindful at the anger of high caste Hindus. Pundit Suraj Mani, the cruel religious priest was one such person whose role aim was to excite the rich class to become hostile and oppose the untouchables. He had an ardent desire to be seen naked by village women; such was the low mentality of the Pundit. Despite this, he called himself an elevated Pundit. Dhooli Singh, on the other hand motivated the untouchables to build the road but the high caste Hindus opposed them. Solely because a road build by untouchables is unacceptable to them as they are untouchables. Being conservatives in following the rules of caste system, They could not dream or walking on a road, constructed by untouchables. Commenting on the entry of untouchables in temples Pundit Suraj Mani has the following view:

Remember, every man and woman has the divine spark in him, however small it may be. And people suffer enough for the guilts of the past. To be sure, they ought to suffer before they can rise to a higher caste in the next life or recognize the divine. The temple teaches them Dharma. They cannot enter the house of God. I will never allow them there. But they can make dry offerings for the preservation of the Dharma which may emancipate them . . .

(Anand 41)

Again the rigidity of caste system can be gauged by the following lines uttered by Thakur Singh's wife to her daughter:

Those dirty men-beware of their looks ! And don't forget you are the daughter of the landlord of the village of Govardhan.

(Anand 16)

Bhikhu always visits the shrine of deities but never dares to go inside the temples. He forever asks his mother, whether she has entered the temple or not and how God looks. His mother, Laxmi, explains to him that Dharma is most important thing, not Dharma of religion but Dharma of duty, Dharma of Karma. On entering the house of Thakur Singh, he does not find anyone, Rukmani gives a cup of water because blood is oozing out of his torn lips but Sanju kicks the brass cup from the hands of Bhikhu. The



cottages of untouchables set on fire. Bhikhu enters into it and carries the dead out.

CONCLUSION

Anand deals with the various section of society to present inhumanity of the upper class on the lower class. His first and short novel, *Untouchable* presents the issues like loss of identity, rootlessness, and the like. As in *Untouchable*, *The Road* too, is based on the same casteism of conservative Indian society. Bhikhu is the prey of the evil system of society, which makes it hard for him to survive with honour and self-respect. Bhikhu fights with full-hearted energy against the cruel system but fails to protect his dignity. *The Road* becomes a great metaphor in the novel. It is the symbol of emancipation from degeneration. While in the novel, *Untouchable*, Bhakha joins Mahatma Gandhi's group and feels elevated both mentally and physically. On hearing the concept of Gandhi, he is surprised that any person could perform the job of scavengers. Ultimately, Bhakha hears the Mahatma saying that one of the Brahmin boys is doing scavenger's job in the Ashram. He cleans the latrines and every nook and corner of the Ashram. Bhakha's inner voice persuades him to continue with his job. Not with disdain, but willingly.

Thus, Anand has played excellently the role of a social reformer and represented India on the International level. He realized that a nation couldn't prosper until inequality is prevalent. A one-eyed person is deprived the vision of a two-eyed person. Similarly, if society is divided between the high and the lower caste, the nation will be deprived of those advancements which are readily available in modern societies the world over. Anand being the minute observer of society endeavoured to erase prevailing evils.

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