
EXPLOITATION, INJUSTICE AND HUMILIATION IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S UNTOUCHABLE

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Abstract: Literature mirrors society in an artistic manner which dives into the psychologically, emotional, social, political, religious, literary aspects of human beings in society. Every work produced by the writers try to bring forth a holistic study so as to bring harmony, interconnectivity of human relationships for the betterment of the society.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the foremost novelists in Indian writing in English. He is concerned about the simple life led by the villagers, labourers, untouchables etc and showcases the treatment of the society towards them. He also brings out the sensitive touch of humanity and explores their exploitation and injustice which prevailed on them by their oppressors.

Mulk Raj Anand's first novel *Untouchable* (1939) is an indictment of the evil happenings of the perverted orthodoxy. We can consider this work as insightful into realities of injustice, humiliation of the exploiters by the exploited. Anand has artistically brought social realism suppression that had left deep indelible mark upon life's psychology of the Untouchables. It is through the novelist's hand that this work has brought out the enlightenment of man and to bring out the radical betterment of the society in terms of sympathy, compassion towards another human brings in general. Cleanliness to be viewed from mental, moralist aspects; to be clean in deed, actions and words to be given more prominence than merely emphasizing on the caste in terms of untouchability which leads them to be disturbed psychologically, condemnation, ill treatment, exploitation received by the society which snubs them to lead a normal life. Mulk Raj Anand has successfully used this novel as a platform of social humanism depicted in a realistic manner and used irony so as to highlight the plight of the Untouchables and possible aspects to mend the social evil in society. The present novel served as the instrument of arousing the instincts of conscience of the educated people in India towards the problems of economic, social, injustice along with the untouchables in India.

Keywords: Untouchable, Humanism, Injustice, Exploitation, Suppression.

Introduction: Literature mirrors society in an artistic manner which dives into the psychologically, emotional, social, political, religious, literary aspects of human beings in society. Every work produced by the writers try to bring forth a holistic study so as to bring harmony, interconnectivity of human relationships for the betterment of the society.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the foremost novelists in Indian writing in English. He is concerned about the simple life led by the villagers, labourers, untouchables etc and showcases the treatment of the society towards them. He also brings out the sensitive touch of humanity and explores their exploitation and injustice which prevailed on them by their oppressors.

Anand is not only a great novelist but also a short story writer. He is considered as a novelist who views from social humanism and caters his concerns towards mankind, their attitudes, problems and issues faced so as to illuminate and enlighten the interests of man, upliftment from the oppressors.

Mulk Raj Anand's first novel *Untouchable* (1939) is an indictment of the evil happenings of the perverted orthodoxy. We can consider this work as insightful into realities of injustice, humiliation of the exploiters by the exploited. Anand has artistically brought social realism suppression that had left deep indelible mark upon life's psychology of the Untouchables. The novels deal with misery, ill-treatment,

injustice and their struggles to lead a better life in society. We see that the novel is a miniature of the social and political aspects which affected the lives of the people in India.

In the novel, Bakha the central character who is introduced as a young 18-year-old boy who lives along with his father Lakha, his brother Rakha and his sister Sohini at the outcaste colony. At a very early age he has shouldered the responsibility as the eldest son to take care of his family members. He is a sensitive boy who is burdened with his regular work as a sweeper who works in all weather, one of the pathetic aspects to be noted is that he endures the humiliation so frequently in a caste ridden Hindu society. We see a contrast attitude between Bakha and his father Lakha, his father accepted the realities of caste system in a fatalistic manner meanwhile his son represents a section of untouchables who hopes and aspires of social injustice. We see an account of his inner and external conflict expressed because of his humiliation received from the conservative's thoughts of the people in the society.

Anand has depicted life of the untouchable who were oppressed, ill-treated and who had for a long been victims of social injustice in society. The suffering does not belong to an individual but on the whole community of untouchables as a class. It is through the character of Bakha who truly had been seen a symbolic figure who belong to the class of untouchables through the stream of consciousness technique used by the writer.

Anand gives an account in the most realistic form were the outcaste colony which is on the outskirts of the town were scavenges, the barbers, the grass cutters, the leather workers, the washer men and the other outcastes from the Hindu society live in mud- walled colonies. The misery and suffering they endure because of the offensive smell, the absence of drainage system, the dung of the donkeys, sheep, cows, buffaloes kept to make into fuel cakes etc makes them so uncongenial to live in that place. They live in a filthy environment which makes the surrounding polluted as in their habitat.

We view the happenings of the novel through Bakha were an account of his life in a day gives in an insight from his point of perception. One such incident in the novel were Sohini, Bakha's sister along with few other untouchables had to wait for some good hearted Hindu from the upper caste to fill their water from the well had suffered and waited for long hours as they considered the untouchables unclean and kept them aside like for this instance in the novel . It is so inhuman to treat human beings and the only reason for they been untouchables who belong to low caste in society.

Bakha who accidentally touched a Hindu from high caste in the market was humiliated, beaten, abused by the person in a big crowd where we see that the jalebies in his hand which he had relished were thrown down through the process when he was walking along the road. He was so embarrassed that he could not express himself as he was filled with a sense of fear, servility and dumb struck at that moment. The man slaps Bakha to further humiliate until a Muslim tongawallah disperses the crowd. He was the one who knew the helplessness of Bakha and consoles him with words; it is then he thinks that when the Mohammedans and Sahibs did not mind been touched why that a section of society was so indifferent towards him. Before he could apologise and the one and only mistake committed by him was, he forgot to announce that he is approaching as he proceeded on the road. Yet we see him with humility instinctively joined his hands to seek pardon. The man had hurt Bakha badly as if the very touch had been a great crime committed by him. The man paid not yield to what he had to say through Bakha stood with humility. He stood among the crowd who mocked at him and meanwhile no one was there to either support or help at that point of time. The humiliation caused to Bakha was so inhuman in the novel and we see the reflection as to how untouchables where been treated badly and made to feel humiliated unnecessarily. He was in torment and in a state of thoughts as to why certain people treat the untouchables in an unjust manner. We see him heart broken and he utters the following statement as, ".....For them I am a sweeper, sweeper- untouchables! Untouchables! That's the word! Untouchables! I am Untouchables!" We see his inner self hurt and immersed in the darkness.

As Bakha walks along the dusky road, the shop keeper throws a packet of Red Lamp cigarettes on him and he feels insulted and humiliated with this incident. We can observe that the ill- treatment caused by him makes him feel although more as an outcaste.

One fine day he cleans the dirt and heap of leaves in the temple; he has the desire and iniquity to have a view of the temple tries to slowly settle in a silent place where he can view the interior of the sanctum -incense rising and he views a number a number of brass images with Indian priest who performs ritualistic aspects, he observes that worshippers were present chanting verses; mean while a cry all of a sudden is heard , “Polluted , polluted! polluted!”. Bakha is petrified as though he had committed a great crime. The priests along with the people who had been in the temple rush out to the courtyard. Bakha is been scolded and shouted as follows, “Get off the steps; scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service. Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. Get down, get away, dog”. We see how he had been humiliated and not given the basic human respect but instead illtreated badly as if he had polluted the entire area. We see untouchables were not allowed even to visit the temple and worship like other caste people in the society.

In another incident we see how Bakha’s sister Sohini conveys him that the priest had tried to molest her when she was at work and when she tried to resist, the Brahmin priest began to shout “Polluted!” and blamed his sister for the act ; the priest tried to cover up the indecent act committed by him and instead blamed Sohini mercilessly. Sohini was weeping inconsolable which led him to be angry with the priest and he could not bear the hurt and insult committed to her. He was so helpless that he raged to kill him but in vain the priest escaped from the crowd. Mulk Raj Anand had satirised the priest hypocrisy and also to show case the actions committed then. Is it that Sohini belongs to lower caste that she is treated badly without self-respect and dignity; we see how social injustice prevailed and which leaves a scar on the character who feels humiliated and also outraged the modesty of a person. Bakha is so disturbed so as to take revenge and to retaliate the evil intension of the priest because of this incident. It is so disturbing to visualise the injustice caused to the untouchables especially Sohini who is shattered and ashamed of what had happened was asked by Bakha to go back home.

Later he visits the houses from where he is supposed to get food. And he had to cry at the doors, “Bread for the sweeper, mother....”. We see a woman throws bread from the roof top of her place and Bakha who was already emotionally disturbed fails to catch and it falls on the dirty pavement; he picks it up and proceeds towards his place. In another case a woman scolds him for sitting at her doorsteps; he is insulted as she feels he has polluted that place. He over comes with various questions to be answered to his father as to why Sohini was sent home instead she who did not go to fetch food, then he had to tell whole story. Bakha knew well that his father takes sides with others than support his family. he was in conflict with his mind and thought; finally felt that he can face what passes by. Meanwhile he was tired, exhausted, hungry but his mind was conflicting emotionally that he could not express it to anyone.

Meanwhile his brother Rakha had gone to the cantonment so that he can bring the left-over food of the soldiers. When Bakha told his father that he was able to get two chapatis; his father was angry and expressed that he is not that good enough person....meanwhile his father understands Bakha’s uneasiness and sympathetically enquires him: he finally narrates the incidents which led him to fury , humiliation, injustice caused to him along with his sister , he furiously abuses against the society through the following lines, “ They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt”. When his father felt that his son was hurt, he tells him that not all are bad as these people. He tells him how Bakha was saved by a Hakim Bhagwan Das in his clinic when he was ill near to death. So, there were few like Hakim from high class from the Hindu society who do good to others.

The insults, abuses he received from high caste Hindu’s clings to his mind though he wanted to oppose Bakha was helpless and oppressed with fits of depression; he regards himself as unworthy person of mankind who is not fit to touch others. We see one instance were his friend Ram Charan offers him sweet sugar plums, Bakha offers him to throw one to him as he understands that he comes from a low

caste and his friend is not supposed to touch him. We see the inhuman act to hurt, wound others which is an offense committed by the people in the then society.

Bakha cannot ask for social equality with Chota and Ram Charan his friends. Meanwhile his friends were happy and did not mind of their superiority but instead consoled Bakha who had to share how he was humiliated by the Pandit. We can observe how Bakha's soul now lies "bare before his friends, bruised and tender". He was been consoled by both of them and do understand his situation.

Later in the evening, we see the free fight after the hockey match and though the process a little boy is hurt by a stone, falls down were blood flows profusely. It was Bakha who feels pity and carries him to his house. Instead of thanking him, the child's mother begins to abuse him for having polluted the place. Bakha is totally shattered with so many traumatic experiences that he is unable to express the conflict what is going on in his psychological aspects. He feels dejected yet humble and silent.

We see a brief appearance of Gandhiji at the end of the novel where Bakha goes to Golbagh where large crowd is gathered to witness Mahatma Gandhiji's speech. The shouts of people "Mahatma Gandhiji Ki jai" repeated endlessly shows the mass appeal of our leader. Though initially Bakha could not understand, he was restless and hoped he would understand what Gandhiji was conveying. When Gandhiji regarded Untouchability as the greatest hindrance in society's growth and he wished to be reborn as an untouchable so that he could share their sorrows and sufferings. And later told that they should get rid of habits of drinking and gambling. Bakha was so influenced by the speech that he adored Gandhiji; he was spell bound and according to him he was a real leader and champion for the class of untouchables. We see the crowd shout at the end of his speech, "Gandhiji Ki jai, Hindu- Mussalman Ki jai! Harijan Ki jai! Bakha began to ponder the possible things spoken by Gandhiji etc.

If given an opportunity Bakha could have risen to great level but because of mentally crooked aspects of the people he was forced to take up an exploited place in society.

Though conditions have changed since then; the practise of untouchability is a legal offence and crime. We see Anand as a writer who projected realistically and with a mission dramatized the scenes which are pathetic and urged the readers to ponder upon the inhumane act.

We do observe a reflection of Bakha where he hates himself as an unwanted person who is not fit to even touch others as if he has committed a great crime on earth. Education has been declined to Bakha and his community members just because he hails from a lower strata of society. We see the tension, agony which he undergoes both internal and external conflict and they become victim of social injustice and exploitation. We can see that in spite of insult and suffering caused to him, he does his job with a smile of humility. He remains calm and works efficiently though he has to clean dirty of others in society. Thus, we see him as a member of the suffering class of untouchables who were treated badly and provided with no justice except humiliation, exploitation, oppression and anguish is not just subjected to him alone but of a whole class of people who are untouchables. Mulk Raj Anand has characterised the theme of injustice and exploitation with reality projected; and used this particular work as a tool and instrument of his humanism.

Anand has artistically brought social realism, suppression that had left deep indelible mark upon life's psychology of the Untouchables. It is through the novelist's hand that this work has brought out the enlightenment of man and to bring out the radical betterment of the society in terms of sympathy, compassion towards another human brings in general. Cleanliness to be viewed from mental, moralist aspects; to be clean in deed, actions and words to be given more prominence than merely emphasizing on the caste in terms of untouchability which leads them to be disturbed psychologically, condemnation, ill treatment, exploitation received by the society which snubs them to lead a normal life. Mulk Raj Anand has successfully used this novel as a platform of social humanism depicted in a realistic manner and used irony so as to highlight the plight of the Untouchables and possible aspects to mend the social evil

in society. The present novel served as the instrument of arousing the instincts of conscience of the people in India towards the problems of economic, social injustice along with the untouchables in India.

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