

SOCIO-POLITICAL REALISM IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S UNTOUCHABLE

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Abstract

*The present research paper focuses on the socio-political realism in Mulk Raj Anand's **Untouchable**. The whole novel is a series of graphic and moving scenes which are concerned with the protagonist, Bakha. The inward feelings of Bakha are traced in the outcast's colony situated in the outskirts of the town Nagar. Anand artistically makes a point which matter by creating uncongenial atmosphere for the existence of human being. He is a novelist with a social purpose and he realistically presents the life of the low-class and poor people. The problem of untouchability was severe during the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century. The caste system in Hindu religion is very old which is based on work and not on birth. The upper class people treated the poor class people like animals and they were separated from the society. The novelist sharply reacts against the age-old concept of caste which symbolizes in human classification of the people of which Bakha becomes an innocent prey. The Gandhian set up is idealistic but Bakha's adolescent impression of the machine symbolizes the new mode of production and set of new values for the eradication of untouchability.*

Key Words : *Untouchability, vaishya, cumulative ferocity, French Revolution, egalitarian ideology, feudal structure, salvation, Christianity, Gandhian ideology.*

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The novel pictures the period around 1930-40 that is before independence. The problem of untouchability was severe in those days. The caste system in Hindu religion is very old which is based on work and not on birth. A son of Brahmin could be a vaishya, if he started business. But slowly it lost this flexibility and became rigid. The so called upper class people were responsible for that. They treated the poor class people like animal. This continued for a very long time. The result was that it became a tradition. The low class was separated from the society. They lived in a separate colony outside the village, town or city. It was taken granted that doing dirty work like sweeping and scavenging was their work of birth. As a matter of fact, the whole novel is a series of graphic and moving scenes with the hero on the central focus. In this sense, K.R.S. Iyengar describes the "photographic fidelity that convinces at once, though it overwhelms us by its cumulative ferocity of detail."¹ The low class people could not receive education. They were not admitted in the schools of the upper class people. Their touch was called pollution if they touched so called upper class Hindu, his religion was defiled. The touched man must bathe and purify himself.

Critics like K. R. S. Iyengar, E. M. Forster, Prasad S. S. and many others view that Mulk Raj Anand is a novelist with a social purpose and he realistically presents the life of the low-class and poor people. What is realism then? Realism is a literary movement that began in Europe after the French Revolution in 1830. It aims at depicting life in all its aspects as faithfully as possible. A realist is objective. He does not follow his personal views and favors in his writing. It is more or less a photographic picture with minute details. A realist takes care that the picture does not become lifeless or prejudiced. In this sense Mulk Raj Anand argues, "---- most Indian writers ---- Bankim Chandra Chattarjee, RatannathSarkar and Rabindranath Tagore had not accepted in their novels, that even the so called lowest dregs of humanity, living in most poverty, squalor and degradation could become heroes of fiction. I did not know the work of Premchand".²

Anand came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. He writes, "One day I read an article in 'Young India' by Mahatma Gandhi, describing how he met Uka, a sweeper boy, and finding him with torn clothes and hungry, took him into the ashram." He met Gandhi at Sabarmati and he cleaned latrines. This proved to be instrumental in cultivating the idea of work as worship and imbibed an integral attitude for all labour as a tool of creativity. No creative writer can do justice with his people without genuine feeling and fervor. He has described his views as, "I ----- was myself somewhat transformed from the Bloomsbury intellectual, which I became in London to a more emphatically self-conscious Indian".³

Anand had truly shared the feelings of the untouchables. In the psycho-analytical term as can be viewed that many conscious and unconscious forces seem to have been operating. In this

sense, C. D. Narasimhaiah in his critical survey remarks, "Bakha fights to seek his identity. Anand suggests it in the choice of his incisive title without the definite article."⁴ The struggle of untouchables during the 30's remarkably got a momentum for communal identity. Anand is fully aware of this development and Bakha individually becomes a type. His thought towards untouchable crystallizes when Bakha appears as a hero in the novel. The novelist sharply reacts against the age-old concept of caste which symbolizes in human classification of the people of which Bakha becomes an innocent prey. Prof. S. S. Prasad analyses the contemporary socio-political realism as, "Ambedkar's leadership threatened to break the untouchables away as a separate force and further underlined the political necessity of winning their confidence. Western egalitarian ideologies had also been at work but the political dimension of the idea of a fair deal to the Harijan had urgency that could not be ignored."⁵

The method adopted for the presentation of Bakha's consciousness comprehends a sociological problem both realistically and convincingly. Strategically the choice of a day in Bakha's life provides the novel its unity, integrity and harmony. The action consist one day takes place in a contracted and confined area. Naomi Mitchison comments about it as, "Anand had depicted a rather different landscape of grim poverty, urban callousness and rigid social hierarchy."⁶

The protagonist of this novel Bakha is a latrine cleaner as he is born in to the family of Lakha, the Jamadar of swipers. His power and place in society are determined by not of his ability but of his birth in a particular caste of untouchables. In fact his attachment with British soldiers has awakened him to a consciousness of realities. V. G. Kiernan believes that "Tummies were in a rough way much friendlier than his own high -caste countrymen."⁷ Because of this turning movement Bakha comes to identify his individuality and shows his mind and make up different from fellow caste-men. The contradiction between his existing condition and new awakening generates a purgative rise to the action of the novel. This sort of change is capitalizing the nature and character of the society and also the growth and maturity of Bakha while he is not knowing that he has become both the object and instrument of this evolutionary process. Anand's mental and moral construct does not permit him to ignore the burning social facts. In this sense Rao and Krishna comments that, "His concern is to prove the need for reform in order to achieve a real social amelioration, controlling the mechanistic operation of the all material causes that determine the human destiny."⁸ Anand is a great realist and naturalist like Zola, Balzac and Flaubert and exposes the social evil and enigma.

The inward feeling of Bakha is traced in the outcast's colony situated in the outskirts of the town Nagar. Anand artistically makes a point which matter by creating uncongenial atmosphere for the existence of human being. The novel graphically describes, "The outcaste's colony was a group of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it, made it an uncongenial place to live in." (P.1)

The novel deals with the events in Bakha's life during a day. They bring out the inhuman treatment given to these low class people. Bakha's character is different in the sense that he can

think for himself through he is a commoner. There is a great possibility of his promotion as he comes in contact with a force which symbolizing the disintegration of orthodoxy feudal structure of Indian society. Not only have the Britishers but also of the Indian soldiers manifested their liberalism in their treatment of the untouchables. Bakha is attracted towards the glamour of the white man's life but his sense of understanding is aroused by grimly and gloomy realistic advise of his father. "You should try and get to know them. You have got to work for them all your life, my son, after I die. (P. 61) Further his conventional father suggest him "Schools were meant for the babus, not for the lowly sweepers." (P. 27)

Bakha finds himself alone, lost and deserted but Muslim tangawallah helped him to came out of this condition. In his quest for identity he seeks the sympathy of Muslim smoker and tangawallah, who are also known as outcasts in the eyes of Hindus, Sohini, Bakha's sister becomes the object of the priest's lust, being a Dalit she becomes the first recipient of Pandit Kali-Nath's generosity as she seems to satisfy his "waves of amorousness (P.19). He tries to malign her to come and clean the courtyard of his house at the temple. On her arrival he holds her by her breasts when she bends in the lavatory of his house. Out of anger she screams, he comes out shouting that "he had been defiled. (P.48) The situation is poignant enough to arouse a sense of disgust. Bakha becomes mad with anger and wants to murder the priest.

In the psychological framework Bakha's love for Sohini is a mixture of both brother and husband. In this sense Prasad S. S. describes, "Socially and intellectually Bakha is still primitive and the priest symbolizes the upper-class hypocritical-pretense of sanctity which can only distinguish between sister and wife."⁹ The temple episode is well woven into the novel's texture as an ironic situation. Bakha keeps a tender feeling for Ram Charan's sister and feels the urge to embrace and ravish her but all the times he is imbued with a sense of values. Anand enables his protagonist to think act, doubt, love and resent and he also gives him honour and dignity. This is, moreover, a clash between the old and the young, tradition and novelty, orthodoxy and rationalism pointing towards the crust of the novel. M .E. Derret comments, "the analysis of the states of mind of the young boy overwhelmed by that rare thing, kindness. The boy overwhelmed by that rare thing, kindness. The author's identity with his character seems complete, his humanity communicates itself".¹⁰

A dejected and disappointed Bakha is observed by Colonel Hutchinson of the Salvation Army who explores Jesus Christ to Bakha and tries to convert him. But he is disillusioned by the colonel's wife who chides her husband for missing about with all those dirty boys. Bakha now come to realize the social snobbery which has to distorted Christianity.

The concluding part of the novel gives a new vent to the social realism as the poet Sarshar reacts to Bashir's naïve and snobbish intellectualism. He doubts the treatment of British Indian Penal Code which has broken down the legal and sociological bases of caste. The clash of ideologies represented by Bashir and Sarshar carves out the centrality of the novel. Both are modern but they represent tow levels of consciousness in new era. Being a snob Bashir represents uninvolved intellectualism while Sarshar combines scientific humanism with involved political consciousness committed to action. No doubt, Bakha cannot catch this fancy

of intellectualism but he shows his preference for the machine. Here Anand makes it transparent regarding his preference for Gandhi which is not properly pursued by Kai Nicholson who finds that Anand's writing have been "continued in the vein of the Gandhian age".¹¹ The Gandhian set up is idealistic but Bakha's adolescent impression of the machine symbolizes the new mode of production and set of new values for the eradication of untouchability.

All the necessary aspects of the novel are realistic. Mulk Raj Anand has written it in objective, detached manner. The scenes are at times melodramatic. We can see the writer's anger of the upper class people. For example, he presents Pandit Kali Nath as a caricature and still he deals with his theme objectively. His character saves the novel from being prejudiced and one sided. He adds an additional socio-political realism in the novel.

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