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MULK RAJ ANAND'S "UNTOUCHABLE": A SAGA OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Indian English Writing, that is not too old than two centuries, has bloomed tremendously today by number of Indian writer who got remarkable awards on their literary Ferber. Indian writing in English today has become a literary firmament where innumerable stars twinkle at the night and help each other shine. These stars have provided much light to enable the beneficiaries to understand the complexities of Indian life, which is getting transformed very fast under the impact of forces from all over the world since independence. In Indian writing in English, not only Mulk Raj Anand, but a number of writers raises their voice against those who are downtrodden, subalterns and those who are dalits, through their creative writings. But Mulk Raj Anand's 'Untouchable' is remarkable for pointing out the conditions of the subjugated section of society

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Indian English Writing, that is not too old than two centuries, has bloomed tremendously today by number of Indian writers who got Remarkable awards on their literary Ferber. Indian writing in English Today has become a literary firmament where innumerable stars twinkle at the night and help each other shine. These stars have provided much Light to enable the beneficiaries to understand the, "complexities of Indian life, which is getting transformed very fast under the impact of forces from all over the world since independence." (Maheshwari, Preface 2002).

In Indian writing in English, not only Mulk Raj Anand, but a Number of writers raises their voice against those who are downtrodden, Subalterns and those who are dalits, through their creative writings. Kamla Markandaya in 'Nectar in a Sieve', Arundhati Roy's 'God of Small Things', Vijay Tendulkar's 'Kanyadaan', Premchand's 'Godan' and Mulk Raj Anand's 'Untouchable' are remarkable for pointing out the Conditions of the subjugated sections of society. Mulk Raj Anand, a Pioneer of Indian writing in English led the movement with a charismatic zeal to portray the penury and the predicament of dalits in India crushed and trampled under the demoniac yoke debarring man from his fellow beings in the name of petty man-made dichotomies. The present paper is focused on 'Untouchable', the first novel of Mulk Raj Anand, in which Anand exposes a social problem of untouchability. The fact that even after the passing of the untouchability offences Act in

1955, the evil of untouchability still persists in the country. It reflects a deep rooted prejudice, which affects the human behaviour and poses an intractable problem. The novel presents the miserable conditions of Dalits and drawn attention towards the behaviour of high caste for Dalits.

Discussion

Through Bakha, the protagonist, Anand shows how we have been treating humans as ritually unclean and physically unpleasant and disposing them as outcaste from society. During his childhood, Mulk Raj Anand himself had mixed up freely with the children of sweepers and such associations. Therefore, he could give better expressions to his feelings for untouchability. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar states in true manner:

Although born in one of the higher castes, his father, Lal Chand Anand, served in the Indian Army rising to be Subedar and Mulk Raj Anand as a child had mixed freely with the children of the sweepers attached to his father's regiment and such associations cutting across caste divisions and continued during his boyhood and youth. These early playmates and friends became, „with the necessary imaginative idealization and transformation, the heroes of his first novel. (Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, 1984)

Bakha's Playmates were sweepers and other poor boys attached to the regiment in which his father was employed. In fact, Bakha, the hero is drawn after the sweeper boy with whom Anand played appears in this autobiographical novel. Anand has given us the description of the incident, which is deeply rooted in his subconscious mind:

The cruelty of the God made order (Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Outcastes) come home to me, when Bakha, a sweeper boy brought me home bruised in the head by an accidental stone. My mother abused him for carrying me. And she bathed me even though I was bleeding. This little Incident was to remain in my conscious- unconscious and became a passion for injustice against the old fixtures of non human discrimination against untouchables. (Anand. Literary Criterion, 1983)

The novel covers many events in the life of a dalit, who has dreams like a common man. Once Bakha buy a packet of cigarettes when he puts an anna on the board, the shop keeper sprinkles water on the coin and throws the packet of cigarettes at the Bakha "as a butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing around the corner of this shop." (Anand Untouchable page no 34)

Mulk Raj Anand's 'Untouchable' is an archetypal dealing with the worst evil of Indian society as untouchability perpetrated by the 'Varna System'. Bakha, the protagonist was very sensitive and suffers a great deal of humiliation at the hands of caste hindus. Not only Bakha, but also his father Lakha, and friends suffer at the hands of higher class.

In the novel 'Untouchable', the hero, Bakha is an 18 year old lad doing the work of a latrine- cleaner; his misery goes beyond all powers of description as he happens to be an untouchable. At one incidents of the novel, Lakha, Bakha's father is in search of a doctor and wants his dying son to be saved. But no doctor come and sees him because of being an untouchable. He learns the bitter lesson of the life. Bakha passes through all possible types of frustration and despair.

Bakha has secured a pair of old breeches from Tommu and from a sepoy, a pair of old boots, he would if he could, like to look like the white foreigner and so be in the 'fashun'. But as the day dawns, his work of latrine-cleaning also begins. He is a steady and an efficient worker. Three rows of latrines to clean single handed and several times too, to bring cleanliness in the filth, such as Bakha's daily toil, which he turns into a dexterous art.

Seeing an injured boy in hockey match, Bakha brings him to house but he could not get praising and appreciating and he is assaulted and debarred and charged with defiling the injured boy. She abuses him, "Give me my child! You have defied my house May you die." Bakha is taken as dirt because he cleans and touches dirt. This was the position of millions of Bakha in our country. For Anand, it is acceptable and hence creation of Bakha's inner life makes 'Untouchable' the kind of novel that has great great social as well as human significance. Anand had a great sympathy and gave concern for dalits. Bakha neither leads an insurrection nor runs away nor tries Actively to change his circumstances.

The protagonist suffers morally, socially and economically. The exploitation of simple and ignorant people, the blood sucking high castes especially custodians of religion, in the form of priest etc. is really heart-melting. The dalits, who are brutally tortured by the upper class considered to belong to the lowest among them. In that society, sweeper caste is counted neither in Hindus nor in Muslims. Bakha reveals: '

They think we are dirt, because we clean dirt (page 7)

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 where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others, when he touches them. They have to purify themselves. Thus he is a disgusting object to orthodox as he walks along to public roads and it is his duty to call out and warn that he is coming. No wonders that the dirt enters into his soul and he feels himself at moment to be what he is supposed to be. .

The sensitive Bakha realizes his position and subsequent humiliation created by this episode. The coin of an untouchable can carry the seed of cancer disease. This seems to be the belief of the high-caste society. In another incident, Bakha buys jalebis and when he was busy in enjoying his jalebis, unknowingly he hits Lalaji, that was deadly sin. And the reaction was, a big crowd gathered and shower of abuses and Lalaji gives him a slap. Bakha reviews his own life and realizes that a person who touches dung and cleans latrines has no right to touch others.

Another incident happens in the temple, where Pandit Kalinath tries to molest Bakha's sister Sohini, after pretending to be considerate to her, by offering her water from the well. The custom is that she cannot take out water from the well. Pandit Kalinath agrees to get water for her. He tries to have a full glance of the zestful youth of Sohini. When she goes to clean the courtyard, he tries to molest her. Subsequently, she repels her advances, Pandit having no option, accuses her of polluting him and collects the crowd. Bakha sends Sohini back home to avoid her humiliation and himself listens to the abuses of Kalinath. Bakha is frustrated by caste prejudice. Possible solutions to get rid of these problems are suggested to him by a Christian missionary, who advised him to adopt Christian faith, which will save him from humiliation and tortures on account of caste prejudice. Bakha listens to Gandhiji, who advocates eradication of untouchability and who also exhorts him to shun dirty habits.

Bakha is a boy of modern, free India. He has numerous dreams. He cannot understand why people are so unfair and tyrannical with those born in low-caste families, why they do not realize that the low caste people, too are made of flesh and blood, therefore should be treated as human beings. He performs his duty well. Still he is a neglected person of the society. But he had known that the sepoys did not hesitate to touch him.

Anand compares him with a lion, tiger and elephant, who live by the impulse on the contrary, the upper caste people curse him as a pig, dog, swine and bull who act as the young and healthy animal, to keep inviolate his life morality and sanity. Bakha works dutifully, efficiently and thereby, he earns appreciating of the upper caste Havildar Charat Singh who promises to give him a new hockey stick for his good work. It gives him a fresh hope and happiness and he turns continues to work casually well for the rest of the day inspite of all miseries.

Conclusion: In the last section of the novel, Bakha's hope for a solution that brings him face to face with three possibilities for change. First is the opinion of Colonel Hutchinson, the Salvationist, who say that the untouchables should be converted into Christian, because they are treated with love and respect. Secondly, there is the opinion of Mahatma Gandhi, who delivered a lectures on the untouchables, the 'Children of God', Bakha's warm heartedness responds to the personal eloquence of the speaker's words. Finally, there is the opinion of the poet Iqbal, the editor. He opines that the caste-system and untouchability will be eradicated only if the sweepers change their profession and the flush system will be introduced in the country then only the hope of ray will bring change. He states:

Free of stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. (Page no146)

Bakha was humiliated by everyone. He undergoes similar soul-breaking tortures at the hands of the town folk who inflicts on him severe physical, moral, and spiritual injuries, while keeping him subject to hunger, humiliation dirt and deprivation. Bakha's father showers demeaning abuses on him, his "younger brother ridicules him for not being favourite with his father. Consequently, he detests his profession of a scavenger and dreams like the camp prisoners of a free-life.

Today, the condition of dalits is improved yet their miseries are not over. Now that old system of cleaning latrines with hands being given up. Even though the problem has been changed. Untouchability still persists in our society showing its ugly head here and there in the form of economically weak and downtrodden sections. Though people are sensitized towards their behaviour and maintains humanism yet. Dalits and weaker sections are deprived of many daily needs. There is a need of some laws and opportunities for dalits. We will have to change our mindset because there are some places still present, where the condition of dalits is worst. Man is made for love and sympathy, not for hate or humiliates.

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