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MULK RAJ ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE* AND ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*: A RECORD OF PAINFUL EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

The present research article is an attempt to discuss the abject misery of untouchables and the inhumanity of upper castes on them depicted in the novel of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things*. Anand and Roy deal with many social factors that damage society such as caste system in its worst form. Both Anand and Roy portray the social realities of their time in their novels. They picture the very condition of the lives of the protagonists and their miseries imposed by the so called upper caste people. The unjust and malice treatment meted out to the untouchables in India has been a matter of great concern. Since times immemorial, they have been suffering severe humiliations at the hands of the upper sections of the society. In this caste hierarchy, untouchable castes are at the lowest level. Earlier Hindu society has condemned untouchables as the dirt of society. Hindu society did not consider untouchables as human beings at all. This inhuman discrimination is the shameful drawback of Indian society.

Key words: Untouchable, Caste, Oppression, Humiliation, Sufferings, Indian Society.

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INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature written during the pre-independence period and post –independence period is the representation of its period's ,where more or less the writers penned down the social issues in their writings .Writers of every genre are the representatives of their age .The theme of suffering and exploitation are the major areas in which the novelists excel. Both of them are deeply interested in the lot of the marginalized ,under-privileged ;poverty ,social discrimination ,injustice ,exploitation and the cruelty of man-to-man been the principal concerns .Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy portray their characters with the knowledge of their own understanding and personal experience in reality they faced in life .To some extent, they bring out their real-life experiences and the India they witnessed before and after the independence era. Anand and Roy portray the marginalized section of society in more effective manner than any other author because of their involvement and their interests in the reformation they expect in their respective societies in which they live.

Mulk Raj Anand is a great novelist with a mission. His aim is to evoke compassion in the minds of the upper class and privileged sections of the society for the poor. Of the writers of Indian writing in English Mulk

Raj Anand stands out as the lone voice that lent voice to the sufferings of the socially and legally voiceless communities of India through his writings. His novels expose the silent passions that burst in the hearts of the people who are forbidden to rise up and express themselves. His purpose in writing fiction has been to focus attention on the suffering, misery and wretchedness of the poor and the down-trodden people of the society. Anand's *Untouchable* is a story of the lowest caste – Bhangi, the caste was considered untouchable even among the untouchable. Mulk Raj Anand, with the zest of a social reformer in his *Untouchable*, portrays the sufferings and pains of underdogs in the Indian society. It is a story about Bakha, the scavenger and it begins with a description of outcastes' colony on the outskirts of the Bulandshahr town. The detailed account of the houses, the outcastes living there, the soiled brook, the slushy land, the dirt and the filth, and the human refuse in the area evoke a sense of revulsion. Anand describes;

The outcastes' colony was a group of mudwalled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes. (Anand11)

Untouchable is the story of a caste sweeper boy who leaves his home early in the morning with the alarming words of his old father Lakha. His father, Lakha, the Jamadar of the sweepers, first of all ill treats him by asking him in the early hours of the cold morning to go out to clean latrines.

"Get up, oh you Bakhiya, oh the son of a pig!"

..Get up and attend to the latrines or the sepoys will be angry." (Anand15)

Bakha, the central protagonist of the novel lives in the dungeon, no better than the work he performs. The novelist employs the stream-of-consciousness technique to reveal the mental condition of Bakha. It is not only the mechanic time from dawn to dusk, but it is the story of the generations together that they have been suffering. The whole life sketch has been drawn sympathetically. The feeling of inferiority haunts Bakha when he goes he has to face the scourge of untouchability. Although he cleans the dirt and human soil, he is dirtiest in the comparison in things he cleans. The Mohammdans do not mind touching a sweeper, but the Hindus have a grave concern of untouchability as they do not like him. Bakha says to himself; "It is only the Hindus, and the outcaste who are not sweepers. For them I am a sweeper, sweeper untouchable !untouchable !untouchable !that's the word untouchable I am an untouchable ! (Anand43).

Mulk Raj Anand focuses on the oppressed down-trodden and thus brings their problems to the surface so that average reader might be able to understand the plight of the innocent creatures who suffer for no faults of their own but simply because they are the outcastes as they are born in that particular class of untouchables. The outcastes were leading a life of deprivation as the food they used to get was the waste thrown by the upper caste people. Lakha, the father of Bakha remembers in the novel the events of the day when the former went to bring the medicine from the clinic of Hakim and the feeling of his distress is reflected in the following sentences;

For an hour I stood like that in a corner, near the heap of

Litter which I had collected, and I was feeling as if a scorpion

Was stinging me. That I could not buy medicine for my son

When I was willing to pay my hard earned money for it,

Troubled me. (Anand72)

The denial of water at the well, the denial of education and the pollution through their touching of the upper class people, were the rude impressions buried in the tender mind of Bakha who performed the work of cleaning the dung and the human soil. The abusive addresses of the higher class people towards the untouchable is a common accepted way of conversation, "they always abuse us because we are sweepers.

Because we touch the dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That's why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day . That's why they don't touch us."

Wherever he goes, the treatment that is given and expected to him is worse than the treatment that is given to an animal. When he is hungry, chapattis are flung down to him from the third floor. Likewise, jilebis are given to him in a way a bone is thrown to a dog. A Hindu shopkeeper throws a packet of cigarettes at him. He has been suffering a series of humiliating experiences right from the morning. He is extremely shocked when he is slapped by a caste-Hindu, for having polluted him. The high caste Hindu further abuses:

"Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock-eyed son of a bowlegged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt! put on this morning!"(Anand53)

Anand also throws light on the hypocrisy and lustfulness of pretentious, so called priest Pandit Kali Nath who believe to be polluted by the touch of untouchable and has strong sexual desire with Sohini, an untouchable. This duality and hypocrisy is vividly revealed by Anand in the novel. He then raises an alarm of;

'Polluted, Polluted, Polluted!' shouted the Brahmin below.....Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. (Anand 69)

This is the height of hypocrisy. Bakha comes timely on the scene and the situation rages a feeling of anger in him. He realizes caste malice and hypocritical social inequities when he comes to know Pandit Kali Nath's attempt to molest Sohini, his sister. Sohini tries to tell the truth but nobody is ready either to believe or support her. Bakha bursts out in a rage with an impulse to beat him up but Sohini stops him. As both of them realize their helplessness due to the

limitations of their caste, they decide to give up. Such humiliation is common for untouchables and they have accepted as it is age old tradition. He returns home desperately and tells his father Lakha about his insult and Sohini's molestation by the Pandit.

"...They think we are mere dirt,
Because we clean their dirt." (Anand 89)

Anand has presented the real rigid conventional contemporary Indian society, the system where untouchables had no place, no respect and no sympathy. They were brutally treated by caste Hindus and were not endowed with the right to articulate or express their anger. The novel *Untouchable* is a beautiful description of plight of outcastes. The poor economic condition was one of the causes of their negligence as a being. Poverty was a curse on them, which compelled them to eat the left over from the plates of upper castes. They were not permitted to access water from brooks or wells by themselves. Even for natural objects they have to wait for hours for upper caste Hindus to get their pichters filled with water.

According to Anand, they" join their hands in servile humility to every passer-by;cursing their fate, and bemoaning their lot, if they were refused the help they wanted; praying, beseeching and blessing, if some generous soul condescended to listen to them or to help them"(Anand27). They could not fetch water from wells or brooks as according to the age-old tradition their touch could defile water.

In a nutshell, it was only their poor condition and menial job, which transformed them in to disgusting objects in the eyes of upper caste Hindus. Bakha underwent the same humiliation and embarrassment when went to beg breads. The woman did not want to trouble herself and therefore she flung the bread at him while shouting loudly, "vay Bakya, take this. Here's your bread coming down"(Anand65). He collected the bread from the pavement, which was very disgusting and humiliating. These reflect the mental sufferings of downtrodden man, Bakha. The novel *Untouchable* is the story not only of an individual but it represents the miseries and trauma of the whole community.

Anand as a novelist has very deftly portrayed the worst conditions of the untouchables who were badly suppressed by the higher caste Hindus. They had to announce their arrival while passing through a crowd. The crowd harshly punished Bakha when he accidentally touched an upper caste man." The touch man gave him an indignant, impatient look and signed to him, with a flourish of his hand, to wait" (Anand41). He

tolerated the humiliation in the market without uttering a word. The novel *Untouchable* is not the story of Bakha but it represents the miseries and humiliation of all the dispossessed and emphasizes the pernicious effects of discrimination, deprivation and a kind of denaturalization of moral and other cherishable value of a civilized society.

The novel *Untouchable* ends on an optimistic note when Bakha returns home to tell his father about what Gandhi and Iqbal Nath Sarashar have revealed in public. Bakha seems to be more happy with the proposal put forward by Iqbal Nath Sarashar, the young poet. The advent of machine to clear dung will free the untouchables from caste subalternity. "The sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society".(Paul18)

Mulk Raj Anand is a champion in depicting the doomed lives of oppressed and downtrodden people who were not considered human beings but creatures born to serve upper caste Hindus. As a novelist Anand beautifully portrayed the pathetic condition of the people of lower caste. His work present him more a social reformer who has a mission to give equal place, equal respect and equal rights in the society through his emotion and pity evoking works. Permila Paul has assessed that the corrupting influence of casteism will culminate in "segregation and subjugation of thousands of people in to perpetual misery and eventful extinction".(31).

Mulk Raj Anand is an outstanding writer of Indo-Anglian fiction. He has been conscious of the need to help raise the untouchables, the peasants, the serfs, the coolies and other suppressed members of the society to the level of dignity and self awareness in view of the abjectness, apathy and despair in which they are sunk. They suffered on the grounds of age-old traditions and socio-economic barriers of caste, class, sex, and race. Deeply touched by moved by the situation of the suffering lot Anand condemned such social evils.

Anand has, says the noted critic P.K. Singh, great concern for down-trodden people of India and his novels therefore throw light on the existing pains and predicaments of 'have-nots'. His novels present minute pictures of Indian society, with special focus on the plights of poor people. Anand's early novels deal with the misery and the wretchedness of the crushed and oppressed people and their struggle for a better life. He writes realistically in his novels all about the miserable lives of the poor. Anand being a novelist of the common man, has profoundly dealt with the villages, with the extreme poverty, with orphans, untouchables and urban labourers.

On the other hand, Arundhati Roy has also dealt with the same problem of untouchability plaguing the Indian society in her booker winner novel, *The God of Small Things*. She is appalled at the barbarous treatment meted out to the lower section of the society, even in this postcolonial age. In this regard, she says that:

"Fifty years after independence, India is still struggling with the legacy of colonialism, still flinching from the cultural insult (and) we are still caught up in the business of "disproving" the white world's definition of us"¹.

The God of Small Things is a saga of painful experiences from several point of view. Almost all the characters in the novel have something to say about their loss. Even the minor characters are not an exception to this rule. Roy draws a large canvas and the novel unfolds the story. The discrimination is perpetrated by a group of the characters who are themselves the sufferers of injustice. Roy pictures the house of Velutha, the Paravan as it'

... was dark and clean. It smelled of fish curry and woodsmoke.

Heat cleaved to things like a low fever... Velutha and Vellya Paapen's bedding was rolled up and propped against the wall. ... A grown man could stand up straight in the centre of

The room, but not along its sides' (Roy208).

Velutha, we find was unparalleled as a carpenter, as a machine and also as an "engineer". He was even referred to as "Dr Velutha" by Baby Kochamma when her garden cherub's silver were dried up inextricably and Velutha fixed its bladder for her. He never had the feeling that he was an untouchable especially when it

came to his profession .With full confidence he easily surpassed his fellow workers which made a peaceful co-existence impossible .But he did not attached much importance to what others said or thought about him.

Velutha's background was that of a untouchable grandson of a grandfather who was converted to Christianity . The legacy he received from his father Vellya Paapen and Chella was one of humiliation by the caste Hindus and Christians .His brother Kuttappan was the worst sufferer as he was leading a life which was in every sense equivalent to death . But Velutha was one who somehow tried to come out of the shell that was made ready for him by his ancestors . But as would be seen later , it all turned out to be a shattered shell where the inmate never had a choice other than getting destroyed .As an untouchable boy he had been in the habit of going to the Ayemenem house with his father to deliver coconuts plucked from the trees in the compound .These Paravans were never allowed to enter the house .They were not allowed to touch anything that the touchables touched .But Velutha at a later stage dared to touch the forbidden ..

After returning to Ayemenem, Ammu slowly got drawn to Velutha .Velutha positively responded to her advances completely oblivious of the fact that she was a 'forbidden-fruit 'for a person like him who was a untouchable .But the daring Velutha saw Ammu only as a woman and their affair marked the turning point in the novel .When his life was in danger the Marxist Party never stood by him. The spokesman of the party even told the police that he was not an active member . The Ayemenem family also was in the forefront to destroy him completely .Baby Kochamma, the guardian of the system, would go to any limit to hoard the so-called family honour. The novel demonstrates the course of creating and cataloging Parvans within the high class families --the people who go ahead of the unwritten laws of society in pursuit of happiness ..Mammachi and Baby Kochamma plotted against him and the latter misinterpreted the facts to the kottayam police.The drowning of Sophie Mol added fuel to the fire .

Vellya Paapen's report to Mammachi about the Velutha –Ammu affair .Mammachi on the other hand is remembered for the inept handling of the "Velutha-Ammu episode".For a moment she completely forgot the fact that Ammu was none other than her daughter .She saw to it that every arrangements were made for Chacko to meet the "man's needs ".Chacko got separated from his wife and she didn't want him to lead a "bachelor's life ".Ammu also had been married but unlike Chacko it was her decision to get separated from her drunken husband .Chacko had a daughter who was in the custody of his wife .Ammu also had issues and they remained with her .If Chacko who was single would have"man's needs ",by the same logic Ammu also would have "woman's needs". But in a patriarchal society that was something beyond the comprehension of Mammachi ,Baby Kochamma and others.

Marked the beginning of Velutha's end. He was asked to appear before Mammachi and the rest of the incidents expose the rich and the privileged. The daring Velutha straight away went to the Ayemenem house to listen with utmost patience Mammachi's tirade. His only worry was that he would never see Ammu again . He had also apprehensions about Ammu being hurt by her people .Though Velutha was almost innocent in the affair that he had with Ammu ,everybody _ the touchables _made that he was a true villain who should be stoned to death.The police got hold him and tortured him in all possible ways .

The way he was tortured to death would perhaps be one of the breathtaking in any fiction . It would also certainly remind one of the concentration camps where most innocent people were tortured to death.. Velutha was viciously tormented in the police station:

He (Velutha) was semi-conscious, but was not moving. His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheek bones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken sixteeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered; one had pierced his left lung which was what made him bleed from his mouth. The blood on his breathes brightred, fresh and fresh and frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured andhaemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine wasdamaged in two places; the concussion had paralysed his right arm and resultedin a loss of control over his bladder and return. Both his knee caps wereshattered (Roy, 310).

Roy describes his death, "The God of Loss. The God of Small Things. He left no foot prints in sand, no ripples in water, No image in mirrors" (Roy. 265). It is interesting to note that here Roy's portrayal of the piteous plight of the defenceless and the marginalised is very near to that of Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchables". M.R. Anand has given birth to a character, Bakha, the hero of the novel, an untouchable who receives tyranny and injustice, insult and humiliation sometimes on trifles and sometimes without any cause. But the basic difference between Bakha and Velutha is that the former is more aggressive and active than the latter. The inner soul of Bakha always strives to raise hail and fire on the caste-ridden mentality:

But there was a smouldering rage in his soul. His feeling would rise like spurts of smoke from a half smothered fire in a fitful jerks when the recollection of abuse or rebuke he had suffered kindled a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him ... "why was all this? He asked himself in the soundless speech of cells receiving and transmitting emotions which was his usual way of communicating with himself. Why was all this fuss? Why was he so humble? I could have struck him!"

But the case of Velutha is somewhat different. He never behaves like a fuming and roaring tiger, never try to transgress the age old norms of society; never behaves like a wild animal that doesn't know the rule of etiquette and manner, decorum and decency. He is a man of simplicity and innocence.

Conclusion

Both Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy reveal in their novels social evils that arise an account of once birth, economic condition and class division. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that even today the problems discussed by Anand and Roy in their novels are prevalent in our complex modern life. While one describing this hard social realism of our country, the authors hope that many sensitive readers of their novels must listen to their sincere voice and would join their hands with their rebelling soul as social activist and revolutionary spirit as a progressive writer would be satisfied seeing a new social order free from all discrimination, exploitations and inequalities. They picture the very condition of the lives of the protagonists and their miseries imposed by the so called upper caste people. Both Anand and Roy portray the social realities of their time in their novels.

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