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A CROSS CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMANISM IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S
HEART OF DARKNESS AND MULK RAJ ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper explores and examines the notion of injustice or discrimination and its treatment by the perception of social justice and humanism by adopting a cross cultural perspective with reference to analysis of racial discrimination in Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness* and Mulk Raj Anand's portrayal of caste discrimination in his novel, *Untouchable*. Prejudice or discrimination on the base of caste or colour has been a universal practice by human race. The discrimination on each basis generates similar repercussions. It entwines the tale of wretchedness, sufferings, pain and agony in the life of an individual. It can be anecdotal that racism and casteism are sheer naught as they are simply social hypothesis. But, this social malevolence can only be exterminated from society when we behave toward every human being uniformly. Social vices like racism and casteism are mended into the same composition of discrimination. However, Joseph Conrad and Mulk Raj Anand both induce optimism in reader and admit the existence of social justice for human rights on the base of essential goodness of humankind irrespective of caste, race, or creed. A Polish-born English novelist Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and the great Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* (1935) clearly define the subject of social justice as the foundation of humanism in the world. Racism and casteism which are shown in both the texts are mere social constructs but bring alertness and awareness to its readers. Their works ultimately show the essential dignity of every man in the society and thus precisely comprises the ideology of social justice and humanism.

Keywords: Social justice, Humanism, Racism, Casteism

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INTRODUCTION

Social justice is normally associated with the conception of equality or equal prospect in society. It is an ideology which stands for the equal treatment of all human beings without any social distinction based on caste, colour, race, religion, sex and so on. Likewise, humanism is a sensible system of thought which establishes people's capability and responsibility to lead meaningful and honorable lives. By asserting the self-respect and dignity of each human being, it holds up the maximization of individual emancipation and opportunity agreeable with social and global responsibility. It encourages the expansion of participatory democracy and the elaboration of the open society, standing for people's human rights and social justice. In the chapter entitled "Searching for the Meaning of Social Justice" of the work called *Social Justice and Social Work: Rediscovering a Core Value of the Profession*, Michael J. Austin, Christina Branom, and Bryn King state some definitional complexity in describing the term social justice:

The definitional complexity can be seen in the following examples of efforts to define social justice: Social justice can refer to a system of belief (liberal and conservative), a substitute for the term social justice (oppression, discrimination, exploitation, etc.) a form of advocacy or intervention (doing social justice work), a value of a profession, and / or an organization (social justice non-profit). (Austin, Branom, and King 1)

Literature and Social Justice

It is imperative to recognize that why literature matters for social justice as literature holds uniquely transformative possibilities for altering our psychological configuration – generating new schemas that readers will remain to use. This involvement is one way the humanities can influence our day-to-day lives. Besides, literary scholars who have expanded elaborated schemas for comprehending literary works can have an actual effect on helping readers identify and take out the layers of meaning and culture in a piece of literature in addition to people and experiences they keep on to encounter. Literary scholars have the prospect to enlighten alternative ideas that can oppose ideologies which are adverse to people of color, or women, or any subordinated people. Keeping in a different way, literary scholars understand literature better when they relate imaginary stories or characters with real social issues. In the chapter called "Social Justice from a Humanities Perspective: A Synthesis to Inform Practice" of the work entitled *Social Justice and Social Work: Rediscovering a Core Value of the Profession* by the authors Bryn King and Michael J. Austin, the function and involvement of literary theory and literary theorists in social justice is clearly provided. In this chapter it is noticeably expressed that how literature and literary theory raise awareness and consciousness about social justice in a society:

Similar to the discipline of history, literary theorists provide another approach to engaging and promoting social justice. The systematic approach of literary scholars to promote social change involves exposing the values inherent in literature and its potential for challenging dominant ideologies ... literary theorists define themselves in terms of the goal of improving the human condition and addressing different forms of oppression. As Fitzgerald notes, focus approaches to literary theory can be identified to help define the form of oppression, namely, social class, gender, colonial power, and heteronormativity. (King and Austin 87)

Social Transformation through Literature

As social transform sets in motion with individuals, literature and literary evaluation that have the power to reveal and alter the complex world people construct every day. New understanding of alternative ideas encourages social justice and humanism by expanding readers' intelligences and allowing them to be aware of future experiences in a more toned and compassionate way. Literature shapes people's perspectives, and how they perceive their world can in fact create a discrete reality or picture of society. If literary authors can offer readers the implements they need to better comprehend works by marginalized groups that show social injustice – such as natives, blacks, women, transgender, eunuchs, etc – then these works have a better possibility of being accepted into the standard. As David Miller visibly states the purpose of social justice in a society in the chapter entitled "The Scope of Social Justice" of the work *Principles of Social Justice*:

Society is viewed as an organism in which the flourishing of each element requires the cooperation of all the others, and the aim of social justice is to specify the institutional arrangements that will allow each person to contribute fully to social well-being ... Social justice requires the notion of a society made up of interdependent parts, with an institutional structure that affects the prospects of each individual member, and that is capable of deliberate reform by an agency such as the state in the name of fairness. (Miller 4)

A Polish-born English novelist Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and the great Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* (1935) clearly define the subject of social justice as the foundation of humanism in the world. Joseph Conrad brought up in the Polish Ukraine, a huge, productive plain between Poland and Russia. It was a diverse land, with four languages, four religions, and with various different social groups of people. Joseph Conrad granted British nationality in 1886. He has written several novels such as starting from his first novel, *Almayer's Folly* (1895), then, *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Lord Jim* (1900), *The Inheritors* (1901), *Typhoon* (1902, begun 1899), *The End of the Tether* (1902), *Romance* (1903), *Nostramo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), *Chance* (1913), *Victory* (1915), *The Shadow Line* (1917), *The Arrow of Gold* (1919), *The Rescue* (1920), *The Nature of a Crime* (1923), *The Rover* (1923), and *Suspense: A Napoleonic Novel* (1925) which is his unfinished novel and published posthumously. He has also written several remarkable essays.

The most creative phase of Conrad's career spanned from 1897 to 1911, during this time he composed many works including *Heart of Darkness*. Joseph Conrad has received his inspiration to write *Heart of Darkness* after carrying out his journey to the Congo in 1890. The story of *Heart of Darkness* deals with a British man's expedition deep into the Congo of Africa, where he encounters the brutal and mysterious Kurtz, a European trader who has proved himself as a monarch of the native people there. This novel essentially contains vivid conflicts and clashes between human characters and the brutal forces of nature; and themes of selfishness, the violent part of human nature, racial prejudice and ultimately, social justice. Conrad was concerned in screening "psycho-political" states of affairs that drew parallels between the internal lives of single characters and the broader zoom of human history.

The tale of *Heart of Darkness* is set largely in Africa and the narrator is of European lineage, so of course there is an aspect of race and colonialism in this story. The protagonist of the novel, a thirty-two-year old British sailor Charlie Marlow presents his experiences in the Congo about the violence, injustice, and cruelty performed by Europeans to natives there. It is a recurring character of Joseph Conrad's itself in this novel. Marlow points out a prevailing attitude of racism by showing how the whites consistently pass on to the black Indigenous people with pejorative and ugly names. On the other hand, Marlow feels a thrum of association to these wild, dancing, gesticulating people.

In *Heart of Darkness*, there is a sense of discrimination, exploitation, subjugation, colonization that how the whites see the blacks merely as undeveloped or uncivilized people where everything they have to scorn and disrespect and nothing to particularly admire or appreciate. This is excellently shown in one incident when Marlow eagerly wants to give a dying black man a biscuit and then heedlessly dismissing the death of his black steersman as a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara.

Although, he overlooks the man's task on his ship, he does not mourn for the man's death because he is black and consequently not worth mourning. Paradoxically, of course, a lot of the black natives are more moral and honest people, in spite of their savage ways, than the white, imperialist invaders. The subject of race, humanity, and human value is one of the other themes in this story. Ultimately, *Heart of Darkness* exhibits the quest for truth and social justice among the so many issues such as corruption, deception, communication, and violence. Marlow is looking for something essential, true and worthy of being every person equal and also something morally perfect and righteous against the others who have imposed their imperial will on the natives. Joseph Conrad's treatment of social justice and humanism is illustrious in this novel as he has great sympathy for the downtrodden people as innocent natives under the realm of British. In this respect he sometimes reminds readers strongly of Mulk Raj Anand or Charles Dickens whose novels too

had been prompted by their sympathy for the browbeaten members of society. Similar to Mulk Raj Anand's or Charles Dickens' criticism of social evils in society, Joseph Conrad raises the question on the issue of harsh racism, injustice, and oppression faced by the colonized in the name of colonizer's civilizing mission.

Certainly, the intention of his quest is Kurtz, a European trader but what he eventually discovers is that Kurtz is more wicked, greedy, and cruel than anyone else Marlow has encountered or even heard about. This exposure is devastating, for he realizes that the core, the self, the heart, of everything "leads into the heart of an immense darkness" (Conrad 76).

Another important idea that Joseph Conrad builds on is the subject of personal power and individual responsibility. *Heart of Darkness* has all the frills of the traditional adventure narrative – mystery, exotic setting, escape, suspense, unexpected attack along with the African history and racism towards the African people. Joseph Conrad writes that, "They passed me with six inches, without a glance, with the complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages" (Conrad 19). Conrad employs Marlow, the central character in the novel, as a speaker so he himself can enter the story and advise it through his own philosophical mind. Conrad writes explicitly about the hunger, sufferings, and pain of African people. On leading at the first station, Marlow comments what he observes that, "They were dying slowly – it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom" (Conrad 20).

Marlow feels sympathy toward the natives as he states that the natives aren't criminals or lawbreakers but are being treated as if they are. Conrad displays that how the Africans are shown inferior and doomed people by whites. He raises the issue of racism and social injustice but not exposed himself as a racist.

The end result of *Heart of Darkness* has been concluded Conrad's divisions of the social world into two disconnect categories: 'us,' the Europeans, and 'them,' the Africans natives. As Frances B. Singh writes in *The Colonialistic Bias of Heart of Darkness* about how the colonialistic approach taken to the novel that, "Heart of Darkness was written, consciously or unconsciously, from a colonialistic point of view" (Singh 278). In the novel, the author Joseph Conrad illustrates how racist the Europeans are toward blacks not only because they are turned into slaves but also it is seen how the European people seem to think the Africans are not equal level to them. There are several cases of discrimination and injustice towards woman in this story when women are looked down and they are considered to be worth less than men, or yet not as valuable. Injustice, exploitation, and racism can be seen all over in this novel.

There several critics as well as readers who have found Joseph Conrad himself as a complete racist because he has made some remarks about blacks that are very disturbing. For example one of this type is when he comments that, "... the thought of their humanity-like yours...Ugly" (Conrad 23). This just sets off to show how Conrad is an absolute racist. The notion of a black man's humanity being measured up to Conrad's is just plain revolting to Conrad. But, when he raises the issue of racism or seems like racist himself, simultaneously Conrad demands for social justice to blacks as well. As it is clearly shown that how the Europeans are racist toward blacks or how the European people seem to think the Africans are not equal to them because their black. This whole theory of story claims a justice and acceptability for Africans itself from its readers. Therefore, social justice and humanism both are questioned in *Heart of Darkness*.

Mulk Raj Anand was born in 1905 in Peshawar, India which is now in Pakistan and died September in 2004. He is known as prominent Indian author of novels, short stories, and critical essays in English, who is acknowledged for his realistic and sympathetic portrayal of the deprived in India. He is believed as an originator of the English-language Indian novel. Even as in Europe, he turned out to be politically active in India's struggle for autonomy and shortly from then on he wrote a series of miscellaneous books on facets of South Asian ways of life, comprising *Persian Painting* (1930), *Curries and Other Indian Dishes* (1932), *The Hindu View of Art* (1933), *The Indian Theatre* (1950), and *Seven Little-Known Birds of the Inner Eye* (1978). As a creative writer, Anand first achieved wide recognition for his novels *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), both of which scrutinized the predicaments of deprived people in Indian society. In 1945 he revisited to Bombay, now Mumbai to crusade for national reforms. Among his other major works are novels such as *Two*

Leaves and a Bud (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1939), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), *The Big Heart* (1945), *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), and *The Road* (1961). Autobiographies which he has written are *Seven Summers* (1951) and *Morning Face* (1968) for that he won the Sahitya Academy Award as Best Literature award in India. Anand has written other novels and short-story collections and in addition edited several magazines and journals, together with *MARG*, an art quarterly that he established in 1946.

Anand's alarm and sympathy for the depleted, weak and the downtrodden is present all through his fiction, especially in novels like *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud* and *Seven Summers* etc. He is a great humanist in his novels. He shows humanism as enlightenment and illumination in the wellbeing of man, true to his uppermost nature and his dignified vision. He stresses on the essential worth, dignity, and magnitude of man. Therefore, he believes and demonstrates through his novel especially *Untouchable* that a recognition of the so-called untouchables as human beings are entitled to the same rights and the opportunities as other classes of society. *Untouchable* is an imaginary story set in the so-called outcastes' colony exterior of an anonymous town during the British rule. The hero of this novel is an untouchable called Bakha who is a tall strong young man. He is the symbolic of all the down-trodden and oppressed people in a society of Pre-Independence India. He represents the hardships and humiliation which has been the fate of untouchables like him. He is a toilet cleaner and suffers a lot because of his caste. In *Premchand's Godan: A Critical Analysis*, I.D. Sharma quotes Francis H. Stoddard's words and writes about how a novel sets a human's life story in it, he writes that "A novel is a narrative of human life under the stress of emotion. It differs from the epic in that. It is a narration of human rather than super human life, under the stress of ordinary rather than of excessive or heroic emotion" (Sharma 67).

Untouchable is a sociological text that centers awareness on a number of customs, traditions, social evils etc. of Hindu Society during 1930's. At that time there was no proper system of drainage and there was foul and stinking smells far and wide. The untouchables considered as low caste people were not only underprivileged, ill-fed, ill-clothed but also sick and contaminated. Hence, Bakha's mother died because of lack of proper treatment or medication, and his father was asthmatic patient. On the other hand, the upper caste people were apathetic, wealthy, well-off, aggressive, intolerant and cruel due to their superior status or position in society. Each day Bakha had to endure similar soul-breaking torments at the hands of the towns people whose infliction him severe physical, moral and spiritual grievances while keeping him matter to hunger, humiliation, dirt and deprivation. He had to experience a kind of severe psychosomatic pain which disturbed him and restricted him from taking pleasure in the ordinary things which other Hindu community people were benefiting from. This led to a crisis of identity in Bakha. He reacted with rage, horror resentment and a desire to take revenge. E. M. Forster, a friend of Mulk Raj Anand has written the preface of *Untouchable* by which novel has perceived its aesthetic. E.M. Foster puts about Bakha in the preface:

He has just the right mixture of insight and detachment, and the fact that he has come to fiction through philosophy has given him depth. It might have given him vagueness-that curse of the generalizing mind-but his hero suffering abstraction. Bakha is real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak, and thoroughly Indian. (Foster 9)

Apart from all humiliations and tortures, Bakha was not only efficient in his work but also was doing it with full dedication. Anand's credence in impartiality and social justice is well projected in this novel. The untouchable were expelled from all the social occasions or happenings and their association from outside or from others was quite limited and their possibility got hindered making them suffer from destitution for many decades. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel Anand proposes that it is technology, in the form of the newly introduced flush toilet that may be his redeemer by eliminating the need for a caste of toilet cleaners.

The caste system and racism equally consist of both prejudice and discrimination based in social or racial perceptions of people. Racism provides protection to the ignorant who aims to divide and destroy the social circle. Exactly like racism hampers the growth of any country so does the casteism as their ramifications are same. The orderliness of casteism blinds people as it pays no attention to the healthy social standards of

justice, evenhandedness and universal fraternity. In the work called *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, Ghanshyam Shah quotes the words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on this. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar says that "You cannot build anything on the foundation of caste. You cannot build a nation. You cannot build up a morality" (Shah 102).

Untouchable compels a reader to consider and foster humanitarian attitude in understanding casteism. It deals with the humanism which should be regarded as a religion for everyone. Mulk Raj Anand intensely scrutinizes the distort society and narrates the tale of woe. His love for humanism makes him employ his art for the good turn of humanity. Caste and nationwide barricades have no importance for him, and he looks upon all mankind as one. The indication of contemporary social evil in the novel was extensively commended and brought him the position of India's Charles Dickens. As Dickens exposed and castigated all the evils, malpractices rampant in the legal system and in the prison of time, the exploitation, the prevalence of crime, and the evils of poverty, similarly Mulk Raj Anand's passion and compassion for humanity are boundless. In *Indian Writing in English*, Prof. K.R.S. Iyengar sums up with assumption of the novel:

Untouchable strikes us as the picture of the place of a society, and the certain persons not easily to be forgotten; a picture that is also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy. As a novelist addressing himself to the task of exposing certain evils, Anand has been as effective as Dickens himself. (Iyengar 330)

Analogies drawn in *Heart of Darkness* and *Untouchable*

There are many issues drawn parallels between *Heart of Darkness* and *Untouchable* to bring out the plight of man caught amidst social forces beyond his control. The evaluation of both the novels states out the sense that injustice either based on caste or colour upshots only in the suffering of human being. Besides, *Heart of Darkness* is a captivating story about the racism in Africa as well as a symbol for social commentary on imperialism by Joseph Conrad. It is a literary masterpiece which embodies the essence of light contrasting with darkness. Joseph Conrad also presents the thought of human power, individual responsibility, and social justice by raising his voice against racism. Likewise, in *Untouchable* Mulk Raj Anand insists on the ideology of social justice and humanism by elevating the issue of untouchability or casteism in India. He believes in the dignity of every man without any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed or prosperity. Through his work, Mulk Raj Anand speaks against the hunger, exploitation, and the silent and intense suffering of vast number of untouchables, the destitute, the downtrodden, the beggars, the lepers, and countless oppressed ones including men, women and children.

Equally, *Heart of Darkness* and *Untouchable* believe in the possibility of achieving a better world order through the ideology of social justice and humanism. Although, both the authors come from two different nations but still they evolve same sensibility and devotion to the concerns of mankind or those who have been marginalized from a long time. Therefore, through their works, both Joseph Conrad and Mulk Raj Anand expose the silent passions that burst in the hearts of the people who are forbidden to rise up and express themselves. Both, the blacks or low caste people were supposed to have no ethical and no right to express them. But in both the novels, although belong from two dissimilar countries, writers have effectively marked out that the protagonists are moral at heart and are with integrity awoken.

In a world in which virtuousness or purity is endangered by injustice, cruelty, prejudice and hatred, goodness prevails in the form of sympathy, understanding and common sense as evident by both the novelists. In *Untouchable* Anand shows that component of humanity, compassion, sympathy and mercy which was not dead in upper class. There were some people who thought about for other people irrespective of their position in social hierarchy. Thus, he has constantly endeavored to make his novel a medium of transmitting his ideology of humanism and social justice. His subject manifests the essential dignity of man and dignity in society. In the work named *Five Contemporary Indian Novels* Pramod Kumar Singh observes regarding Anand's vision of life, his ideology of social justice and humanism as reflected in his fiction:

Anand is very much a man of the world, living and loving in accordance to the rhythms of his own nature. He has never been above the battle; rather, he has fought bravely against wrongs and

injustices. He has composed the theme song of love and has made his voice echo in clamorous notes to arouse the conscience of humanity. (Singh 17)

Conclusion

Therefore, the comparative studies from both eastern and western perspectives have been explored in the paper to bring forefront the very painful reality that though the world has progressed immeasurably but the modern man is still in the restraints of inequality in some or the other way. Racism and casteism which are shown in both the texts are mere social constructs but bring alertness and awareness to its readers. It brings awareness and consciousness to the mind-set of people that this social evil has entangled our society and is slowly swallowing up it like a monster. Hence, these social evils can only be eradicated from world when we respect every human being equally which in turn brings social justice for everyone.

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