

CRISIS OF THE CASTE AND THE CLASS: A STUDY OF MULK RAJ ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*

Dr. Nidhi Sharma

Associate Professor, Department of English, SKIT, Jaipur, India

Abstract : The very primary instance which strikes our minds is the question, who is a Dalit? This, however, was originated as a Hindi & Marathi translation of the British term 'Depressed Classes'. They are the myriad categories in which this term later got transgressed as Harijans, Untouchables, Dalits, Servcile Classes, Weaker sections, Panchamas, Alishudras. Avamas, Antyajas and scheduled castes. This deprived 'depressed class' refers to the lowest strata of the Hindu caste hierarchy and social stratification whose mere 'touch' is considered 'polluting' by those at higher rung in the same structure. The current paper attempts to enunciate and analyse the numerous facets and nuances of untouchability that Anand deals with.

IndexTerms -. underprivileged, proletarian, dalit, exploitation

Introduction: To me Dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country.

He does not believe in God, rebirth of soul and holy books teaching separatism fate and heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution.

Through these lines Prof. Gangadhar Pantawane , founder editor of Asmitadarsh (Mirror of Identity) unravels the prevalent predicament of Dalit Literature. Hence according to him , "None of the normal words like untouchable , scheduled castes, depressed classes gandhi's euphemism harijan had had the same connotation. Anand himself elaborates: "One day I read an article in Young India, bu Gandhiji describing how he met Uka a sweeper boy, and finding him with torn clothes and hungry, took him to his Ashram. This narrative seemed to me more truthful than my artificially concocted novel 'Untouchable'.....and in a sudden fit of revulsion against my existence in elitist Bloomsbury, I decided to go and see the old man". Indian fiction writing in English is specially popular on account of the celebrated trio of Dr. Anand, (1905-2004) Raja Rao and RK Narayan. 'Untouchable' claimed as Anand's maiden creative attempt at delineating his Dalit consciousness through the medium of fiction justifiably becomes futile if not well placed as a change in the contemporary social psyche. His consciousness of 'Dalits' truly embedded in his humanistic philosophy. Through this novel, he succeeds in portraying few of his rudimentary tenets of Dalit ideology by establishing the dignity of humanity of common men like sweepers who essentially become human being when they are seen in their true colours and not as down trodden and dehumanized. This novel assumes to earn the space of

being a traditional social evil of the Hindu community in the Indian context for its social substance. The cruel agony of the sweeper lies in the fact that Bakha, becomes the slave of the class society. As is commented, “Ram Charan was admitted to be of highercaste among them, because he was a washerman Chhota, the leather worker’s son came next in hierarchy and Bakha was of the third lowest category” (106). The slave according to the superstitious tradition, can change his master but the sweeper is bound into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded, he pollutes others when he touches them’ Since they clean dirt and filth, Forster exemplifies the crux as follows:

Indians like most Orientals are refreshingly frank, they have none of our complexes about functioning, they accept the process as something.....they have evolved a hideous nightmare unknown to the West: the belief that the products are ritually unclean as well as physically unpleasant.

Nowhere in the novel does he seem to preach the doctrines rather he aims at only portraying the problem through relevant and rampant plot, environment and character. Narsimhaiah aptly remarks, “In the novel doctrines and dogmas are assimilated into a total sensibility which shapes his imagination and gives life to an epoch its hopes and aspirations and its curses” (2) Casteism, according to Anand is the backbone of Dalit humanism. He considers it as a social crime against humanity because of its evil repercussions on the human mind. Bakha, the untouchable undergoes umpteen indignities and humiliations in a single day whereby he is slapped, abused and even insulted for touching a high caste Hindu. Anand rightly highlights the severity as follows:

The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well because if they were ever to draw Water from it , the Hindus of three upper castes would Consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed Access to nearby brooks as their use of it would contaminate the stream”. (24)

Through this novel, Anand proposes to bring into light other issues of religious hypocrisy prominently dealing with the caste hindus especially, Pandit Kalinath, who tries to seduce Sohini, the latrine cleaner of his house. But if she doesn’t surrender to his ill wishes, then to safeguard his social prestige and to befool the worshippers in the morning Aarti session, he monas and cried aloud of the so called ‘pollution’ as “Polluted, polluted, Polluted” (78). When the worshippers couldn’t understand the situation, she reveals to Bakha, “That man, that man made suggestions to me, when I was cleaning the lavatory of his house there. And when I screamed he came out shouting that he has been defiled”. (79) Untouchability has indeed carved upon a dark psychic scar on the sanity of these Dalit workers and they are forced to linger on this throughout their lives. Bakha undergoes this agony on several occasions where:

Charat singh’s generous promise had called forth that trait of servility in Bakha which he had inherited from his forefathers: the helplessness of the poor and

the indigent suddenly receiving help.....the passive contentment of the bottom-dog suddenly illuminated by the prospect of fulfillment of a secret and long cherished desire”.

Rajanlal and Rakesh Saraswat relevantly consider “Anand’s Dalit consciousness or his humanism is comprehensive, it is an all embracing concept. Some of the noted tenets of his dalit humanism are the rejection of casteism, dignity of labour, work as worship, belief in the dignity of man”. (96) the Indian etymological reference of karma is an offshoot of Casteism. This doctrine of Karma came into existence on account of the foolishness and cruelty of the wiser ones to humiliate and trample the lower class without any fear of revolt because this concept of ‘Karma’ pumps their social ego. Mr. Kurmanadhan opines” “The theme of man’s inhumanity to man is the main stream of thought of caste-hatred or untouchability. All through the novel, Anand points out the inevitable play of fate or karma which is the regular feature of his novels”

Hence to sum up, Untouchable presents an artistic presentation of the plot with all nuances of its theme coupled with relevant solutions to the problems. Anand’s victorious feat lies in conveying the message of Dalit humanism, socialism, brotherhood, economic freedom and equality. Through this he translates his love and sympathy for the down trodden. This realism adds on to the deep hues of Dalitism which centers the spectrum of *Untouchable*.

References

- Chokhananda Abhanga Gatha. Balkrishna Lakshman Pathak, Bombay
- Preface to *Untouchable*. Delhi: Hind cket Books, 1970, p.6.
- Mulk Raj Anand. New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1973. P.34
- “The Novels of Dr. Mulk Raj Anand” Triveni, October 1954, p.51
- Preface to *Untouchable* (Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1970), p8