

Humanism in Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable

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ABSTRACT: Untouchable is one of the sociological novel published in 1935. In 'Untouchable' he gives message of Humanism. His novels embrace human experiences and convey a sense of life and character like a coloured glass. Anand's humanism has been the inspiration and the driving force behind the writing of the novels. In the novel he express the basic idea of his variety of humanism. Untouchable is the most important element of Anand humanism. He views casteism as a social crime against humanity because it has evil effects on human mind. The tradition of untouchability on the basis of the caste-system retracts the idea of progress. In the novel Bakha suffer so many indignities and humiliations in a single day merely because he is a sweeper. He is insulted abused and finally slapped for touching a high caste Hindu. In Untouchable Anand who as a humanist does not believe in God, hell and heaven rejecting the doctrine of karma and karmaphala. Mokhya or the act of justice as trite and bogas, no longer fits for the awaking of masses. The element of fate of karma is presented in his novel but only to be rejected and savagely criticism. The theme of man's inhumanity to man is the most important stream of thought in the novel. This has been depicted in the form of caste hatred or untouchability.

Key Words-Humanism, caste, literature, realism, untouchable

INTRODUCTION

The fact that Indian literatures are a product of a multilingual, multicultural and socio historical mélange cannot be overlooked. Today Indian literature reached at the apex of creation with the contribution of regional and national writers. This researcher would like to focus on the root and brief literary history of Indian writing in English and the genre – novel in Indo-Anglian literature up to the time of Mulk Raj Anand for better understanding of his novel. Here, it is essential to mention the brief history of Indian writing in English and the contributors of it. Along with the list of the contributors in Indian writing in English, the rise of the new form of literature- novel in India is also necessary to focus.

Indian English literature (IEL) refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian diaspora, such as V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Agha Shahid Ali, Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie, who are of Indian descent.

The first book written by an Indian in English was by Sake Dean Mahomet, titled Travels of Dean Mahomet; Mahomet's travel narrative was published in 1793 in England. In its early stages it was influenced by the Western art form of the novel. Early Indian writers used English unadulterated by Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian. Raja Rao (1908–2006), Indian philosopher and writer authored Kanthapura and The Serpent and the Rope which are Indian in terms of its storytelling qualities. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) wrote in Bengali

and English and was responsible for the translations of his own work into English. Dhan Gopal Mukerji was the first Indian author to win a literary award in the United States. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, a writer of non-fiction, is best known for his The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian where he relates his life experiences and influences. P. Lal, a poet, translator, publisher and essayist, founded a press in the 1950s for Indian English writing, Writers Workshop. Ram Nath Kak (1917–1933), a Kashmiri veterinarian wrote his autobiography Autumn Leaves, which is one of the most vivid portraits of life in 20th century Kashmir and has become a sort of a classic. R.K. Narayan is a writer who contributed over many decades and who continued to write till his death recently. He was discovered by Graham Greene in the sense that the latter helped him find a publisher in England. Graham Greene and Narayan remained close friends till the end. Similar to Thomas Hardy's Wessex, Narayan created the fictitious town of Malgudi where he set his novels.

HUMANISM IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S UNTOUCHABLE

Humanism stands for love of human beings with all its strength and weaknesses. It is a system which puts human interests and the mind of man paramount, rejecting religion. It means belief in humanity but not the divinity of Christ (or other prophets); devotion to human interests or welfare; a belief or outlook emphasizing common human needs and seeking solely rational ways of solving human problems and concerned with mankind as responsible and progressive

intellect beings; an outlook or system of thought concerned with human rather than divine or supernatural matters.

Similarly, a humanist is one who is concerned with or interested in human affairs, a pragmatist; one who gives supreme priority to equal opportunity, justice, welfare, and progress for all without discrimination and prejudice.

Anand's humanism and the sympathy towards the down trodden led him to portray the miserable life of the underdogs so that the Indian Intelligentsia arouse the compassion for them. The more attention is given to a man who trapped in a milieu, burdened with full of stratification and contradictions. Anand in Apology for heroism states that:

“... as my media as a writer were the memory and imagination, and the substance of my work the whole of my varied experience, the theme of my work became the whole man and the whole gamut of human relationship, rather than one single part of it.”(p.78)

The works of Mulk Raj Anand display the realist situation of his time. He took upon himself the task to chronicle the lives of the deprived. His novel *Untouchable*, explore the lives of the under-privileged who are exploited by those in power. The caste system which was invented by the Aryans had begun as a classification based on the type of work performed by individuals. It eventually decayed into a rigid stratification with the Brahmins forming the top of the pyramid, followed by the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas with the Shudras forming the base. Thus, it was a group system that was based on services and functions and was meant to be an all-inclusive order without any common dogma and allowed the fullest latitude to each group.

This, however, turned out to be appalling for those who were placed at the bottom of the pyramid. The plight of the Shudras is focused on throughout the scenes of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. In his preface to the novel, E. M. Forster comments on this aspect of the novel:

“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 and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them.”

Mulk Raj Anand's novel '*Untouchable*' summed up with so many facts as this master of literature has dynamic command over language, which he has used in the presentation of the realistic picture of the early decades of 20th century in India to reveal the social background with the eye of social reformer. The success of such a research study proves that Mulk Raj Anand has humanistic and realistic approach in his creative work that is reflected in the narration of his characters.

The main focuses of Anand's novels are deeply related to inhumanity, discrimination and injustice to man by

man. In the large range of his novels, Mulk Raj Anand has become successful to get out almost all the real and important aspect of human life. He observes:

“man excels in his creative imagination, in his capacity to transform himself, in the energy with which he can raise himself to tremendous height of dignity and redeem the world from its misery and pain”. (p.91)

Anand comes forward as a humanist not only in the select of the theme of untouchability but also in the selection of his protagonist, a sweeper by, Bakha. The novel deals with events and experience of a single day in Bakha's life which serves a mirror to the pathetic conditions of untouchables who from not only the lowest stratum of society but also the bottom of moral scale. The novel really, represents Anand's effort at reform a whole range of postulates of Hindu culture.

Bakha is as much a representative figure as he is an individual. He differs the common run of sweeper in that he is clean, is a champion at all games, his principles and a sense of duty. But in his physical inability to revolt, his obedience, his habitual subservience to superiors who either insult or patronize him he is one with the vast majority of the outcaste. After heredity and two thousand year of suppression have had their impact on him, there are few resources left in him. He goes about his job wearing the smile of humility customary among his kind.

As a writer of fiction Anand writings have acute sense of reality. This writings demand the confirmation of wellbeing to the society.

Anand has applied humanism as an instrument to dispel the darkness of ignorance, to eradicate hackneyed culture, tradition and rituals, to abolish untouchability and to give a dignified social status to the untouchables (the down trodden and the underdogs). Anand's humanism is on instrument to express his love sympathy, compassion, and respect for the untouchables.

He depicts the way untouchables think and act. He paints a beautiful portrait of their unfulfilled desires and aspirations on the canvas of literature. The subdued souls of the untouchables crave for total liberty and freedom. They wish to soar very high far away from the oppressive society. But whatever they dream remains unattainable. “In Bakha's scale of values, the white *Sahib* is far superior to a caste Hindu, and so in his land of the heart's desire, he would like to be not a caste Hindu but a white *Sahib*; and in a less unbridled mood, his imagination sees himself at least “clad in a superior military uniform, cleaning the commodes of the *Sahibs* in the British barracks.”

Since Anand has insight into the psychology of the untouchables and the caste Hindu, his depiction of the relationship between them is impartial and equiposed. He withstands the temptation to exaggerate personal elements. Although he is caste Hindu, he has castigated the caste Hindu community for injustice and oppression. But he does not

exceed the limit. He is aware of the fact that all caste Hindu are not cruel.

Through this novel 'Untouchable', Anand has thrown light on the sufferings of the outcastes done by the caste Hindus. Anand portrays his character Bakha who is a man of dignity and nobility though he is connected with the filthy profession. He chooses his character Bakha from the lowest stratum of the society to establish his firm faith in the dignity of man which was the principle to his humanism. He is extremely sensitive, tender and wishes to be treated as a human being. All he received was humiliation and injury from the society. He realizes his place in the world from the several experiences.

Anand towards the end of the novel suggested the three solutions for untouchability. Anand depicts the incident of Bakha's exposure with Colonel Hutchinson, chief of the Christian Missionary who persuades Bakha to join the Christianity towards the end of the novel. But Bakha had deep faith in Hindu gods and values. Also he had fear of losing his caste and expulsion from his community. All these notions prevented him from replacing Hindu with Christian. Bakha was an ardent follower of Hinduism so he refused to leave saying that, "the religion which was good enough for his forefathers was good enough for him" (pp.114). So, the missionary was failed to convince Bakha to change his religion.

The second solution was given in the speech of Mahatma Gandhi. He wants to share the sorrows with untouchables but at the same they were negates by him for their bad habits. Bakha feels very bad for being blamed by Gandhi for their habits. Mahatma's last speech made him impressed saying, "All public wells, temples, roads, schools, sanatoriums must be declared open to the untouchables." In terms of practicality, it was less satisfying for Bakha as he has to play nominal role for his own release. And the third solution was modernization. Bakha comes to know about some machine that clear latrines without using hands and it made him thrill. He feels that the machine is the only solution for his all problems. Finally, he accepts that the machine is the solution to his problem and he returns home. Anand's writings are clearly urged by his love for man.

To sum up, if one wants to open Anand's heart, consciousness and philosophy, humanism and humanitarianism are the keys. He emphasizes on human values and human rights. The sincerity of work can be seen in his powerful writings. The kindness and mercy are in his heart. Anand has given the freedom to his characters to grow in their creative choices. His characters are flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood due to his compassionate heart.

Anand's philosophy of humanism will facilitate a better understanding of his works. Anand is a significant humanist; he champions the cause of the lowly and the down-trodden. For him it is the solution for all the evils on earth.

As a man he restored the basic identity of man irrespective of his low caste, poverty and lack of education. It is through the tragic stories of his low characters that he expresses his message of hope. His novels are profoundly permeated by his passionate love for man. He comes to fiction through philosophy and it has given it depth and deep-rooted purposiveness. It reveals man's vital dignity and nobility. According to his approach to man, man is a creative source of infinite possibilities. The novel is a powerful comment of the caste- system. Here Anand treats untouchability as a social crime against human dignity by showing the perversion in Hindu society. Untouchability destroys human dignity.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we analysed Anand work is carefully considered philosophic attitude of comprehensive humanism which springs from the objects he treat of Indian life and tradition and which owns its own integral system of value. Now we can say that Anand is the champion of truth. He has shown all that he has experienced about the realities of human life. In Untouchable he focus the problem of Humanism. Thus, all such creative fiction with bulk quality, realism, humanism and social protest has been brought alive in Mulk Raj Anand novels.

Anand's novels are an expression on this thinking. He is a humanist who reveals the essential dignity of the victims of Indian society. This Humanism is central to Anand's novels as is central to it the essential man. The charge of propaganda is discarded by an artistic pervasiveness of it which peeps out of characters and situations which Anand favours personally. Untouchable show this great quality. Bakha is innocent, dignified and lovable inspite of the conscious humiliation heaped on them. Anand relieves the lot of men by bestowing dignity on the victim.

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