
Voices against the Structure of Caste in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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Abstract:

The structure of caste is so rigid in Indian society that it seems impossible to deconstruct it in the society. All the forms of intellectual movements have failed to eliminate it in society. It has become the mental concept of the people. We live in caste. We die in caste. The caste governs all our social activities. Our humanity is hidden behind the caste. Primarily, we are the caste; secondary, we are human beings. The Hindu religion makes its structure. The work decided it, but later on, it was decided by the birth. The caste decides purity and quality. Generally, it is considered in our society that if one is born into the upper caste, he or she may be a pure and qualitative person; if one is born into the lower caste, he or she may be impure, and he or she may be a less qualitative person. It is said that as you think, as you become. It said through the religion that upper castes are born to rule over the lower castes people and lower castes are born to serve the upper castes people, and this religion has constructed such a rigid structure that it has become a weapon for the politicians for the vote bank. These ideologies rule over all other ideologies. It has made a person king and a person animal. Castes decide everything in society. It has given a superiority complex to upper castes people and an inferiority complex to lower castes. It has given such kind of psychology to the people that one thinks that I am born for this work and I am born for this work. It is said that as you think, as you become. Progressiveness cannot come if you stop thinking or confine yourself to a thinking parameter. Through this paper, an attempt has been made to discuss that Mulk Raj Anand was the first writer to attack issues of caste and class through his works.

Keywords : Caste, Class, Untouchability, Discrimination, Religion, Hypocrisy, Mental Agony, Rottenness

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand has been called the champion of the underdog. He was born in Peshawar, now in Pakistan, and studied at Khalsa College, Amritsar. After completing his degree, he went to London for a doctorate, where he read an article about caste and untouchability written by Gandhi Ji. He was so influenced that he decided to write something on the untouchability prevalent in India at the time to reform the condition of untouchables and bring pleasure to their faces. In order to do the same, he met with Gandhi in Sabarmati Ashram to discuss the same topic, and he suggested he write an article to reform the condition of the untouchables. He started writing with the same intention, but he went deep while writing; perhaps he was emotionally charged and had an excellent feeling for the untouchables, and as a result of that, the article became a novel. He has criticized people's dual behavior. He is against barbaric and cruel behavior and seems appealing to people for equal behavior, love, and compassion for all people, whether upper or lower class. Indian constitution was made, and it was supposed that the problem of untouchability and caste would be solved in the future. However, due to some political parties and religious organizations, the problem of caste and untouchability is increasing because these religious organizations are making them so rigid. They promote religious practices and decrease scientific temperament.

Millions of untouchables are living in India and leading very pitiable lives. People are known by their castes, not by their talent. It is said that Mulk Raj Anand's first novel, *Untouchable*, has yet to show that none of the Western models of attaining social justice, like Marxism, Rousseauistic, and Hegelian, is appropriate for theorizing the tragedy of Bakha. The lowest dregs of Western society can revolt, but Bakha cannot revolt against injustice. Anand has presented an accurate picture of Indian society. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar writes, "The

novel presents the picture of a place of a society, and of certain persons, not easily to be forgotten picture that is also an indictment of the evils of a decadent and perverted orthodoxy" (23). The novel deals with a new theme based on the ostracization and isolation of untouchables from Hindu society. It was the need of the hour to present the plight of untouchable Hindus. Untouchability is an analogical metaphor of human enslavement, subjugation, and oppression. This is a poignant example of man's inhumanity to his fellow man. Dr Anand writes about his feelings and emotions about it:

The world I knew best was the microcosm of the outcaste and peasants and soldiers and working people. . . . So far, however, as my work broke new ground and represented a departure from the tradition of previous Indian fiction, where the pariah and the bottom dogs had not been allowed to enter the sacred precincts of the novel, in all their reality, it seemed to become significant. It drew the attention of critics, particularly in Europe, which only knew Omar Khayam, Li Po, and Tagore but very little or nothing about the sordid or colorful lives of the millions in Asia. (*Preface, Two Leaves and a Bud*, iii).

One of the primary concerns of a great author is to present the cause of the dumb and the deserted people and their suffering. The author has criticized the snobbery, hypocrisy, ostentation, and fabrication of the aristocratic people, who are dual in their nature and behavior. Anand, the pen's prince, is the voice of the millions of masses, particularly of the untouchable and the vulnerable, exploited by undeserved tyranny and injustice from time immemorial. Moreover, this prompted Mulk Raj Anand to present a deplorable description of the destitute. C. J. George has rightly written in this regard:

It is a tragic poem of an individual caught in the crossroads of hypocrisy. At the same time, the novel has a tragic beauty of its own. The very structure of *Untouchable* and the classical purity of its form bring Bakha's drawing inwardness and loveliness into sharp relief. His inner urge to revolt and his awareness of the inability to do so make him

stoically placed (43).

Mulk Raj Anand was a writer for the downtrodden, so he wrote the novels to arouse people's sympathy towards untouchables. It was not the mistake of the downtrodden, but they became the victim of a rigid social caste system. He is the Charles Dickens of Indian English fiction. His novels deal with the theme of social criticism. He is the messiah of the downtrodden. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes in this respect, "As a writer of fiction, Anand's notable marks are vitality and a keen sense of actuality. He is a veritable Dickens for describing the inequities and idiosyncrasies in the current human situation with candor and accuracy (130)".

Mulk Raj Anand began his career with the theme of untouchability. *Untouchable* is an excellent example showing a different trend in Indian English fiction. Through the novel, he depicts the miserable condition of the downtrodden who do not have any power to fight against injustice, superstition, and social convention and are ignored at every step in the search for a better life. As a humanist, he did not write for art for art's sake, but he wrote art for reforming the lives of the downtrodden, making them aware of their rights. He advocated for the oppressed section of society to fight for the human dignity and welfare of the downtrodden. There was no respect for untouchables due to a lack of awareness. Respect was given only to upper-caste people in society. Dr. Anand has depicted what he has seen in his own life and surroundings. What he saw became the subject matter of his novels. In this regard, Arun Mukherjee expresses his views:

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, published in 1935, is one of the canonical texts of Indo-Anglican literature. It has been reprinted several times and translated into about twenty languages. Although the critics are divided about the novel's artistic merit, there is general agreement that the novel broke new ground regarding its subject matter and ostensible sympathy for that section of India's downtrodden called the untouchable (35).

It is the story of an untouchable boy whose single day begins with abuses from his father, and it seems that he is born

for suffering and abuse. There needs to be an ambience for education in the village. Nobody wants to live like Bakha as he lives. No lovely talk, only abuses. Untouchables are made to think that they are untouchables and that they are born only to clean the toilets and serve the upper section of society. Untouchables are not human, as the upper section treats them as society. Dr. Anand has depicted through the "Verna system" that the upper castes have colonized the poor people and called them 'Shudra.' Untouchability has become a mental concept since that time. Untouchables have been mistreated from that day. They are made to live in unhygienic conditions. It is said that as we live and think as we become. The writer has remarked very ironically that for the backwardness of the country, upper caste people are responsible. They made the conditions of untouchables even worse than animals. The upper castes have colonized their people to rule over them. They have created the social structure of castes. The Manu Smriti has created this ambience. It has divided society into four parts. According to it, untouchables have been given the work of cleaning and serving the upper castes. This system has abstained a large section of society from education. This is a significant reason India still stands in the race of developing countries. Dr Anand writes in this regard in his book *Apology for Heroism*:

Untouchable was, in its source, a ballad born of the freedom I had tried to win for truth against the age-old lies of the Hindus by which they upheld discrimination. . . . Someone in the great Mahabharata had cried "Cast, Caste – there is no caste." Moreover, I wanted to repeat this truth to the 'dead souls,' from the compassion of my explanations in the various Hindu hells, in the hope that I would myself come clean after I had been through the sewer, as it were". (16)

Mulk Raj Anand is a novelist by the people and for the people, and his fiction is concerned with the different aspects of social relations. He has presented us with an accurate picture of Indian society, which is caste oriented. His fiction has dealt with the different

ethos of human life and the reality of Indian society. His humanistic approach is shown in all the novels he wrote. He was affected by the Indian social structure. He could not bear the injustice that was prevalent at that time. He was also influenced by the Gandhian school of thought and the Russian Marxist. His childhood experience has created a variety of social and financial appeals. His novels have reflected the society he had seen in his life. He has presented the social reality and appealed to the masses to think over the problems that have long existed. Several revolutionary people fought against society's ill practices. Gandhi wanted to wipe out tears from every eye. Gandhi's ideas influenced contemporary writers to write against social evils. He wrote in English to present the social evil of Indian society before the world. It is the poverty and illiteracy of the poor which have made them mute listeners and victims of the rigid caste system. The reformation which the British began only lasted for a short period. Mulk Raj Anand thought that art is not for art's sake but it should be for life's sake. He advocated that the inclination of art should be to abolish problems of society. The aim of art should be to depict social problems, and it should also provide some vital solutions. Art should be used as an instrument or a tool for the service of human beings.

The problems and issues of untouchability, injustice, poverty, unemployment, and so many others have been used exclusively. People with low incomes have been treated like animals. They do not have fundamental rights because of their lack of economic status. The casteism of India has been a significant problem of India because it has divided the society into several sections. Dalits or Harijans are the people who are thought to serve the upper caste people. Through the caste system, Dalits have been colonized forever or for all time, and they can never come out of this system and they can never change their caste. An enslaved person can get freedom from his owner, but we can never come out of our castes. The caste system is more dangerous than any other system. The writers have shown the maltreatment against the poor, the destitute, and the marginalized section of society.

Untouchable (1935), the first novel by the writer, depicted one of the worst problems of Indian society: untouchability. The untouchability has been originated from the caste system. The caste

system has been made to colonize and rule over people. It has given privilege to few people and colonized the rest of people. The caste system originated from the concept of purity, and they gave the argument that others are Sudras and untouchables because they are not pure and they do not have knowledge; they are not born for knowledge but are born to serve the upper caste society. Mulk Raj Anand was the first novelist to attack this artificial theory. He asked several questions from society about how a person can be untouchable. All the people are human beings. He gave the concept of humanism. He severely criticized the caste system and all kinds of social evils of Indian society. Bakha and Sohini are specimens of Dalit society who suffer ill-treatment in this artificial society due to the caste system of Indian society. Bakha is abused in society from the morning to evening, not only by the people of upper castes but also by his parents. The system has been made in such a way that they have been colonized psychologically. The psychological impact of caste is so profound that now, the people are known by their castes, not by their works. The superiority and intellect are decided in the society by caste, not by intellect. The writer has also attacked the dual behavior of an upper caste priest who shows that he is one of the purest people in the society. However, the irony is that one of the purest people has come out as one the worst people when he tries to molest Sohini and make her the culprit of the heinous act committed by Pandit Kalinath.

As a social critic, the writer has attacked social evils and tried to find solutions for the problem of untouchability. The writer has said that the caste system is the cancer of our society. We cannot be progressive until we cut out it from our society. Progressiveness will come to society after the elimination of the caste system. The influence of Gandhian ideology can also be seen in the novel. The writer has suggested that Gandhian ideology, Christ, and the flush system may eliminate it from society, but it continues. We must think that we are primarily human beings, secondary to something else, and to make the casteless society, we must feel it. If we are attached to Someone emotionally, we love that person too much. Emotion always brings love and attachment. We should not only speak against caste and class, but we should feel this problem emotionally. If we feel emotionally

that this is the biggest problem in our society, we will try to remove it from our society. Only celebration of anything cannot bring reformation in society. In the end, through this paper, an attempt has been made to depict that Mulk Raj Anand was the first writer who raised his voice against the caste structure to bring humanism to Indian society.

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