

OSTRACISM DEPICTED IN THE WORKS OF MULK RAJ ANAND

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ABSTRACT

The present paper would discuss the issues of Dalit writings with reference to Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable and her short stories. Dalit (oppressed or broken) is not a new word. It was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of depressed classes. Britishers used this term for Scheduled Caste. The word was also used by B.R Ambedkar in his Marathi speeches. It is a literature and a term for marginal classes. The term Dalit is first used in journalistic writing in around 1931 to denote Untouchability. It implies a condition of being underprivileged and deprived of basic rights and refers to the people who are suppressed on account of their lowly birth. To be a 'Dalit' in an Indian caste system is to be very low in and partially excluded from an absolute hierarchal social order. They have called by various names, such as Untouchables, Harijans, Exterior Classes, Depressed Classes, Outcastes, and Pariahs. In ancient times the terms Mlechha, Paulkasa, Chandala and also Panchama, Avarna, Nishada, Antyaja, Atishudra, etc were used for depressed classes.

KEYWORDS: *Dalit Movement, Dalit Literature, Untouchability, Ostracization, Catesim*

INTRODUCTION

Untouchability has ended long ago in all educated societies but it still lives with other prejudices in the illiterate and half-illiterate families and societies. Mostly it is caste-based discrimination but as some say that it comprises all the backward people including the women, we can say that the heterogeneous elements do not form into a group called Dalit. The root word for Dalit is dal which means to crack, open or split. Dalit has come to mean things or person burst, split, broken or torn asunder which signify the state of downtrodden, scattered, crushed or destroyed people. It is said that the root dal means low, weak, poor or helpless in Hebrew. Derived from Sanskrit, Dalit is a word current in Indian vocabulary as well as in some other languages of the world. Some of the writers hold the view that Dalit is not the caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, 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.

Mahatma Jotiba Phule of Maharashtra used the word Dalit to describe the outcasts and untouchables as the oppressed and broken victims of Indian caste-ridden society. Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker was a Vaishya or Bania of the business community. He was a social thinker and thought that his people, the Dravidians of Tamil Nadu were oppressed and dishonoured by the higher caste, the Brahmins especially, and that North India suppressed the South through the political system. He did not pursue his education to any great length and left home indifference with his father. He joined the Congress party

collaborating with M.K. Gandhi and others, working for the independence of the country. But there too he found that the leaders were at fault; found that the Congress too was run by Brahmins and their clique.

Mulk Raj Anand is a humanist hence he legitimately raises his voice against the exploitation of Dalits by an individual as well as institutions. Dalits portrayed in Anand's short stories are victims of rotten traditions, malevolent customs, corrupt and biased institutions as well as an alien outlandish political system. Anand portrays his Dalit characters with a view to realize and explore aesthetic pleasure truthfully and not for any propaganda. A cursory scrutiny of his short stories shows that not all but a few prominent Dalit characters vociferously demand their rights from dominant individuals, Brahminical institutions and agents of religion who exploit them in the name of custom or traditions. Anand makes these characters strive for their dignity because he as a writer emphasizes human dignity at all cost. Anand uses his short stories as a poignant medium to protest against the injustice perpetrated by socially, politically and economically superior individuals against backward individuals most of whom are Dalits. His stories also reveal that regulations and politically supported movements do not bring in desired results in Indian society. He also shows in his stories that the Dalits are exploited by Dalits as well. Most of the Dalits accept their predicament because they are conditioned to believe in the concept of 'Karma' rebirth and a set of values that never allow them to raise their voice. These values teach them that they are born only to serve. The curse of untouchability makes them wretched beyond redemption. The women seem to be hard hit by this attitude. The stories (*Anjali Hasta*, *Silver Bangles* and *Torrents of Wrath*) chosen especially for this research paper exhibit three attitudes of the then society towards cultured Dalits, working Dalits and extreme Dalits having no identity at all.

'Anjali Hasta' refers to a hand gesture of classical dance – Mohiniattam. Indian classical dance and music traditions have been the carriers of our glorious cultural. The artists of these art forms have been victimized for no reasons. The story does not have any clear plot and revolves around a classical dancer. It begins with a conversation among the family members of Sunder Lal Mishra – a bureaucrat. Sunder Lal Mishra is in haste because he has to attend dance performance of a well-known artist of Mohiniattam- Kumari Geeta a Devadasi.

'The Silver Bangles' deals with a love triangle in which a high caste couple and a Dalit maidservant Sajani- a sweeper by caste face each other to test their metal. One day Shrimati Goyal detects that the bangles she had kept in her jewelry box are in the hands of Sajani- the maidservant. Mrs. Goyal is suspicious of her husband's behavior. The story ends in a sudden way when Mrs. Goyal ousts Sajani from her house by saying, 'Go get out and never enter this house again!'. Mrs. Goyal also comments that she should not wear bangles and other ornaments because she is a sweeper woman. The story reveals two divergent shades of the then society. Sajani looks beautiful and knows how to catch the attention of a male, Goyal does not mind Sajani being a sweeper woman for she is eye-catching, Mrs. Goyal is defeated in beauty and logic but she uses Sajani's caste to reprimand her. The derogatory remarks of the Mrs. Goyal at different places in the story highlight the position of Dalits in pre-independence India.

'Torrents Of Wrath' highlights the attitude of moneyed people and the state machinery towards the Dalits. The central character Sukhi- a Dalit woman faces social as well as political apathy. The main action of the story happens in the broad daylight in a public place in front of a shop owned by a Baniya. Nothing is left with the Dalit woman excepting her crushed soul in an old body. She keeps her belonging with her crushed soul in the old body. She keeps her belonging with her

– a mouse, a caged colored sparrow, and a black dog. She is called pagali by the policeman. The state agency is represented in the guard who instead of helping the Dalit woman remains hand in glove with the perpetrators. The social institutions are represented in the Baniya Mam Chand who refuses to spare paltry grains for her mouse, dog, and the caged bird. She faces insurmountable problems, which are only aggravated by the state machinery. In all stories of Anand like in this story Dalit women fight well and do not fall from their grace. In Anand's short stories almost all downtrodden, including Dalits are shown as superstitious and believe in institutionalized religion. Mam Chand reminds Sukhi of her social status by telling that she was a mother of Santi Swaroop, the untouchable – a leatherworker.

Mulk Raj Anand diagnoses the cause of the apathetic attitude of common man even in the most crucial times. He writes, 'Only the faith that everyone suffers for his own deeds, kept them back from interfering in the ugly business. They merely stared.' The story reveals the attitude of the state as well as a society towards the Dalits. This story also points out that the Dalits are conditioned in such a way that to protest is considered blasphemous by them. The short story entitled 'The Liar' is about the plight of a Dalit story-teller Labhu who is well versed in storytelling. Villagers believe that Labhu is born liar.

'The Cobbler and the Machine' is yet another story in which Anand has dealt with the economic problems faced by a Dalit. He also examines how a Dalit come face to face with modernity. Machines are liberator in many of Anand's stories, for example, in 'Tractor and the Corn goddess', etc., but in this story, Anand describes that even the modernity and new technology can be of no use in the absence of proper social and political support. Saudaggar- a cobbler- an outcaste has a dream of owning sewing machines for his betterment. Anand shows how initially he is reluctant to harbor any dream for a machine. The child in the story permeates his mind with the dream of a machine, which could ease his problems and uplift his social stature as well. He tells the child, 'And perhaps God will curse my fingers and those of my pupils, and make them incapable of sewing at all if I begin to use these machines'

The short story entitled 'A Cock and Bull Story' deals with Dhobies. Anand begins with a local proverb, 'A Brahmin of a Dhobi caste, a libidinous woman and pariah dog these are to be shunned.' Anand terms this story as tentative research of the Brahmin of the Dhobi caste. The highest among the Dhobi caste is a Dhobi Brahmin. The entire story is told by uncle Chajju who is a non-Brahmin and believes that 'All Brahmins are dogs, greedy hounds who only know how to eat at the anniversaries' of his dead ancestors.' The story tells how Dalits try to imitate what they should extricate. In the story, cock refers to cock caste men among dhobis and the bull stands for bull caste men among Dhobis- the Dhobi Brahmins. Amru, the bull caste Brahmin of Dhobis and Chetu, the cock caste Kshatriya among Dhobis fight because no one is ready to give way to the other one. There is a quarrel between the two and the Brahmin dhobi falls into a river. His dead body is located the next day far away from the village.

Dalits in Anand's short stories as well as in his larger fiction struggle for dignity and equal rights in a world plagued with socio-economic inequalities. They are burdened with countless obligations and are exploited from birth to death at every stage by cultural, social and political institutions. They still find this world worth living because they remain hopeful for their future. The stories of Anand having Dalits in center expose the darker side of Indian culture. Anand is often accused of using unusually rustic and abusive language. He does so because he has limited choices. This variety of language is used in his

stories either by the Dalits or for the Dalits.

Untouchable is a novel with prime concern for society and inspired by a mission to eliminate the evils of casteism, hypocrisy, and exploitation of the poor in the name of pseudo supremacy. The novel has exposed the hypocrisy and debauchery of the caste Hindus who used to be headless to the modesty and chastity of the fair sexes who belonged to the outcaste community. They used them as their personal property. The most poignant situation was that they had no right even to ask for justice. They had to suffer. They were so submissive that they accepted every act of injustice as their destiny. Bakha is a symbolic figure who represents the untouchables with their sufferings, absolute. The East-West theme, Bakha's passion for English way of living marks the beginning of a renaissance that is the fall of caste Hindu dominion. It is the hypocrisy of the Hindu tradition which renders the untouchables as born of the feet of the Brahma, therefore regarded the lowest in the social hierarchy. Anand's derision of untouchability and all social evils succeed because of its extraordinary insight into the psyche or soul of the untouchables.

Anand is touched with pity at the deplorable plight of the untouchables. The untouchables are segregated and discriminated against the rest of society. He sailed against the current by making a sweeper the hero of his novel and it earned him the wrath of orthodox and fanatic caste Hindus. He is very pragmatic and realistic in his approach to the problem of untouchability. The theme of the novel is based on his childhood experiences. Anand has the first-hand experience of the untouchables and their surroundings. As a child, he used to play with the untouchable boys. Bakha, the hero's life is authentic. He is a scavenger boy is caught in a vicious circle from which there is no escape. Destined or subjected to clean dung and live in squalor, he has to survive on food left over by the caste Hindus and for water depends on the mercy of so-called patrons of Hindu tradition. Health and hygiene are useless words for them. A neat and clean life is still a distant dream for them. The fact that they are untouchables seems to be the only reason to perpetuate the ostracism and their sufferings merge with eternity. They are denied entrance to temples even though they are Hindus. They believe that the untouchable could defile gods and goddesses and even the premises of the temples. This hypocrisy of Hindu tradition is well portrayed by Anand, "Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. Get down, get away, dog. . ." "A temple can be polluted according to the Holy Books by a low caste man coming within sixty-nine yards of it, and here he was actually on the steps, at the door. We are ruined. We will need to have a sacrificial fire in order to purify ourselves and our shrine."

Bakha's agony is reflected when he utters, "They think we are mere dirt, because we clean dirt." In Bakha's scale of values, the English are superior to an orthodox caste Hindu. So he cannot imagine being a caste Hindu. The Untouchable is a window to the oppressed and the oppressors and they emphasize human misery with a realistic approach to the problem, but Anand is a big fiasco when he does neither furnish any solution to the most critical problem of untouchability nor does show the possibility of a better future. So Anand makes an instrument of his humanism to realize the making of a utopia on earth. Untouchable is no exception in this context.

CONCLUSIONS

Untouchable is a day in the life of a character that faces difficult situations every way he turns. It points out moral obscenities through dramatic events and through the use of omniscient narration gives a critical perspective on the atrocities of caste in India. The author focuses on the individual feeling of despair associated with such a degraded life. Each event in Bakha's life ends up being demeaning and dehumanizing. By creating this character, and gives his reader a physiological and theoretical perspective on the atrocities of caste discrimination. By writing a fictional tale of a very pressing social issue Anand is contributing to Dalit literature in a unique way. He does not present a portrait of a man but to sketch one. The picture he illustrated is incomplete because it does not give life to its subject but presents him as a theoretical articulation. Thus the works of Mulk Raj Anand works throws light on the issues of depressed classes like gender, identity, self, nation, untouchability.

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