

HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL CONFLICTS AS REFLECTED IN MULK

RAJ ANAND'S NOVEL *UNTOUCHABLE*

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Abstract

Human beings are the most sophisticated and complex social entities on this globe. They are born free and happy, made with the same elements as others but they specially marginalized suppressed outcaste subalterns are voiceless, untouchable and everywhere in chain. This chain is constructed and ideologically invisible. They are dominated, exploited and dehumanized by this dominant chain made by upper class capitalist section. In this sense they are suffocated and have alienated from the main stream of equal human rights and equally acceptance as being for decades. After the independence of seventeen years of India, their condition is still like a fish out of water. For this they have raised their voices over and over. But the chain makers have turned a deaf ear to their attempts and have eaten the whole cake. This present paper looks at select samples from the novel mentioned above and correlates them with dehumanization and alienation of the migrated people.

Keywords: Sophisticated, Marginalized, Dominated, Dehumanization, Alienation

Among the Indian born English novelist, Mulk Raj Anand is a morning star of civil right movement of India. He along with Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan, is referred to as the founding father of Indian English novels. His most of the novels deal with the inhuman tortures and condition of dalit faced throughout the generations. The protagonists of his novels basically belong to lower class such as sweeper, coolie, skin collector of dead animal, and labourer communities in traditional Indian society through them he wants to throw light on the perception of oppression and exploitation faced by the oppressed people and to attempt to raise them from the long darkness of impoverishment, exploitation, and misfortune. In this

context, let us discuss how Anand through his novel *Untouchable* reflects human rights and social conflicts.

Human beings are born with certain rights. It is their basic virtues which they inherit from the very they are born. It is mentioned in Indian Constitution that as an Indian citizen we all have equal rights to live with dignity and considered all of us as being. In this context the definition of The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 is remarkable: *human rights mean the rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants and enforceable by courts in India.*

The novel *Untouchable* delineates the Indian society which is based on casteism. This society is divided into four complicated caste sections - Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra. The first three sections, specially the Brahmana have eaten the whole cake and the last section Shudra has to serve them. They have to do the low level jobs such as cleaning toilet, sweeping road, washing the clothes and so on. According to Babasaheb Ambedkar *Shudras were Aryan people in works like Who Were the Shudras? How they came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society (1946), and The Untouchables: Who were they and Why they became Untouchables? (1948).* After doing such low level works even they have no rights and dignity to live like upper class people. Rather they have to alien from the main stream of upper section of society.

Bakha, the protagonist of the novel is a representative of the lower class marginalized dalit. The novel centres round the one day of the protagonist who has faced the challenges of the crippling poverty, the paralysing slavery, the inhuman exploitation. It begins with the day of the protagonist who is called by Lakha, his father in early morning for cleaning the toilet: "get up obe Bakya, obe you son of a pig!" (15). In this context K. Satchidanandan observation is rightly acknowledgeable:

Anand brought to fictional life Bakha, his boyhood companion, the untouchable sweeper boy in *The Untouchable*. Anand's mother abused Bakha for 'polluting her son when Bakha carried home a bleeding

Anand, hurt by a stone. Bakha is reviled by caste Hindus as he cleans latrines; but Anand capture Bakha's pride in his work: The novel was not only a powerful social tract, but a remarkable technical feat as in single day's action the author builds round his hero a spiritual crisis broad enough to embrace the whole of India. Foster wrote in its introduction: "It has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it." (Satchidanandan 86)

The outcaste communities have no rights to live with the upper caste people. They have to live outside upper caste colony. They are tortured and abused everywhere in society. They have no rights to read or even sit under the same roof. They have to face the casteism and discrimination even in the school. Sometime their own community was against their schooling. The similar thing happens in *Joothan* when Valmiki was used to send school, his own community utters: "*What is the point of sending him to school? What has a crow become a swami?*" (Valmiki) They have no rights to touch the shadow of the upper caste and even the creator's creation of water. Anand's own words reflect the cut throat reality:

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 the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream ...So the outcastes had to wait for chance to bring some caste Hindu to the well, for luck to decide that he was kind, for Fate to ordain that he had time—to get their pitchers filled with water." (26)

The novelist successfully shows dehumanization of dalit and how their simple touch contaminates the upper caste people. Bakha becomes astonished and deaf and dumb when being an untouchable he approaches to Confectioner for buying jalebis and touches unconsciously, he scolds him by saying: ... *Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cockeyed son of a bowlegged scorpion! Now I have to go and take a bath to purify myself, and it was a new*

dhoti and shirt I put on this morning! They have no rights even to the most basic necessities of life diving. Similar heart touching portrait is painted by Limbale:

Why do you play with that boy? Is there no one else in the whole village to play with? Don't give him water in that vessel. If he touches it, he will defile it. Go away" I was upset because I couldn't give water to a friend. Is one's caste more important than one's friend? Is caste more important than thirst? Was not Arjya a human being? If so, how could he make water impure by merely touching it? (Limbale 2003: 20)

Dalit beauty is always a perfect food for the upper caste hungers. If we observe them on the basis of physical appetite, dalit women have been used as a sex machine for them. In this sense when they touch them they are not contaminated but if they raise voice against their barbarian urge they are punished because according to them they wish to impure them consciously. Therefore the Priest in the temple shouts to be polluted by Sohini, sister of Bakha when his wish of sexual gratification is not fulfilled by Sohini Bakha wants to revolt against this sexual harassment. She is also inhumanly treated by Gulabo, a dalit woman when she meets her in the time of fetching water. In this context she becomes the representative of vehement sufferings and deprivation of dalit women who are twice oppressed and exploited- one is from upper caste and latter is from their own community. In this place Bothanki Solomon, Director, Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights is rightly pointed out:

Dalit women are the poorest of the poor. We face caste discrimination from the rest of society but are also discriminated against by family members, especially the men. We don't want a bank account or cars, but we do want honourable lives, education and dignity

In the time of Indian independence two different leaders raised their voices for the betterment of dalit. The first was Mahatma Gandhi, who believed in raising the status of Dalit (Harijans) and called up to wipe the untouchability out. Though he was a strong believer of casteism and believed caste based society is the just society for Hinduism. The latter was Dr Ambedkar, a lawyer and himself an untouchable. He strongly believed that caste system is the main root of untouchability. Only by destroying it could 'untouchability' be destroyed. To expose the wretchedness condition of the dalit E.M. Forster utters in the preface of this novel:

The sweepers 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 can't escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. Unclean himself he pollutes other when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. This he is disgusting as well as disquieting object to the orthodox as she walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming... (*Untouchable* Preface 8)

Therefore, the protagonist Bakha always wants to escape from the main stream of casteism and gets his identity back. His infatuation to the British uniform somehow refers to his wish to become Sahib. This coat is the symbol of respect and acceptance as being which he always wants to be. Through the one day of the protagonist, the novelist attempts to pen down the life long struggle of marginalized oppressed community who have faced domination and exploited throughout the generations.

After the above survey it is quite clear to us that untouchability is a social evil which has prevented dalit from their basic rights. Bakha at the end of the novel comes to hear Gandhi's speech with a hope that the caste system is drowned and birth system is cleaned.

But after listening attentively Gandhi's speech he gets confused. His speech does not soothe him. He does not show him any possible way of removing it. Therefore Bakha like dalit after the independence of seventeen years has still in dilemma and they have struggled to get their identity back and have been accepted as being like American Negroes. But their hope will remain in reverie until the sense of consciousness emerges out like Tagore *Chandalika* : *Such a little water, yet that water grew to a fathomless, boundless sea. In it, flowed all the seven seas in one, and my caste was drowned, and my birth washed clean.*" (Tagore 149)

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