

TREATMENT OF SUBALTERN IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*

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Abstract

One of the most distinctive characteristic of India is its social system. It has been driven by casteism. It has partially been believed by the high caste Brahmins that casteism has saved Hinduism from disintegration. Therefore they have preached the proletariat and subaltern that they are specially created by Brahma to rule over them. Due to this they have divided the whole social system with four sections -Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. But their inhuman treatment over the marginalized subalterns has long been creating their identity. They have been searching their identity with the periods of time either by embracing other faiths or by revolting against them. They have their own voice for claiming their own identity through their own literature ascertains that subaltern can also speaks. This paper attempts at analyzing how Anand's novel *Untouchable* throws light on the inhuman treatment faced by the marginalized subaltern community.

Keywords: Disintegration, Proletarian, Inhuman, Marginalized, Subalterns

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the most important Indian writers in English literature. He was a writer of international repute. His works have made a mark on the international Scenario. He had written lot of novels, short stories and essays with various themes. He has been considered a pioneer of the Anglo-Indian fiction writers because his writings deal with the wretched condition of Indian people and their day to day life problems. His writings are rich with the realistic and touching portrayal of the problems of the marginalized subaltern community, often written with heart rending clarity.

The novel centers round an eventful day in the life of Bakha a young sweeper living in the outcastes' colony of a north Indian Cantonment town who is a representative of subaltern community. His day begins with the rebuking of his father when he is on his bed, half-awake: "Get up, ohe you Bakha, the son of a pig!" (*untouchable*). He goes for

sweeping and faces various inhuman tortures and abuses throughout the day which cause him to be mature and turn his gaze inward. At the end of the novel, through the present of speech of Gandhiji, the novelist shows a utopian dream to the readers for the end of untouchability on the grounds.

The subaltern means the lower classes and other social groups who are marginalized, oppressed and oppressed by the higher class community. In this context, Bakha, a representative of subaltern section refuses to improve the condition of his life because his touch and presence are considered impure and corrupt. He himself narrate his abusive condition through the following lines:

...all of them abused, abused, abused why are we always abused? The sanitary Inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers, because we touch. They hate dung. I hate it too. That's why, I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high caste... I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable I am an untouchable! (Untouchable 58-59)

Actually proletarian is a curse for society. Anand challenged this curse which prevents the progress of the lives of the untouchables and demanded for the education of untouchables. This novel expresses the prejudices and superiority complex of the upper class people who treat these untouchables in a cruel, insulting, and barbarian manner. The novelist's own words express his inner consciousness:

“The book poured out like hot lava from volcano of my crazed imagination during a long weekend. I remember that I had to finger exercise in order to ease the strain on my right hand. And I must have slept only six hours I kept on dreaming about several strains in the central character of Bakha, almost as though I was moulding his personality and transmitting it from actuality into the hero of a nightmare.”

The narrative shows a description of the outcaste colony of mud-walled houses which is the symbol of the traditional practice of untouchability. Here Bakha becomes

aware about their problem when he accidentally touches a man in the street and is punished for polluting him. The temple priest tries to sexually harass his young sister Sohini and when she repels his advances, accuses her of polluting him. They sometime are not only inhumanly treated by the Brahmin but also their own higher caste community. That is why Sohini is scolded by Gulabo, a dalit woman when she meets her. In this context E.M. Forster's words are rightly pointed out:

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)

The dalits have no right to live with the higher caste colony. They have to live mud walled houses that clustered together in outside colony in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men the barbers, the water carriers, and the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane once with crystal clear water now sullied by the dirt and fifth of the public latrines situated about it.

Perhaps the subtlest stroke in Anand's portrayal of Bakha's psychology is his account of the untouchable's own dream in life which is not to be a caste Hindu but a white sahib. He insists upon dressing himself in an English rig-out bought second-hand out of his bakshish money and even goes to bed in it. The solar hat that hung on the wall shows his wishes to be like sahib and is treated like sahib. His value for the white sahib shows their superior over Hindu caste. Therefore 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."(pp.61-62)

Through Bakha's unconscious wishes this narrative deals with the class struggle of subaltern community. This class and caste play a very significant role in Marxist's division of social system. In this context Maxim Gorky points out:

we must realize that it is the masses' labour that is the chief organizer of culture and the creator of all ideas, those that have for ages detracted from the decisive significance of labour- that source of all our knowledge, as well as the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Stalin, which are instilling a revolutionary consciousness of their rights in proletarians of all lands, and in our country are elevating labour to a force that is the basis of creativeness in Science and art. (Gorky 1982, 332)

Even the inter - caste inequality also play an important role in the novel *Untouchable*. That is why Sohini's gorgeous outer world confronts her against Gulabo's scolding, even who also belongs to the subaltern community. It is fueled by a set of rule that limits the lives and rights of outcastes, particularly the untouchables. Therefore, the outcastes are not allowed to draw their own water from the public well because this would make the water polluted in the eyes of the upper caste Hindu. The narrator says that:

The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were never 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 a 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. (*Untouchable* 26)

So, Bakha wants changes at the end of the novel because without it there will be no solution for the marginalized subaltern community and even they will not be accepted as human beings in caste based society. He wants change his status of an untouchable. Therefore he goes to attend Gandhiji's speech with a hope of new dawn in the horizon of long darkness. But the narrative does clear whether his hope remains a dream in the shadow of utopian ideology or turns the wheel into reality.

After the above survey it is quite clear to us that Bakha in this novel *Untouchable* is presented as a universal figure of the marginalized subaltern groups who desires to get his own identity back and wants to be treated and respected as a human being. They have been victimized and exploited as sweepers, toilet cleaner, laborers and so on for periods of time. Therefore through the mouth speaker Bakha, Anand wants to draw a new map similar to Babasaheb Ambedkar, a pioneer of social reformer, about India which will not be divided on the basis of caste, religion and economy. But his pen is unable to draw the new map. Still today the condition of marginalized subaltern community has not been up to the mark. Now the time has come to give their voices, identities and rights back and accept them as human being. Only then it will be possible to touch the 'happy isle' of Ulysses.

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