

Dr. Mulk Raj Anand's Novel Untouchable: A Reflected Ray of Gandhian Ideals

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Introduction:

Untouchability is a deep rooted social evil. From time immemorial, the existence of this evil cannot be denied though equality is the slogan of the 21st century, but still the prevalence of this social evil badly contaminate the society. Mahatma Gandhi , the Father of Nation said untouchability as social disgrace on Hindusim. He devoted his life to establish equality and peace through his revolutionary effort. He occupies the top most position in the history of India as humanist, reformist, socialist who have innumerable saintly and spiritual qualities. Indian English literature was grossly occupied with Gandhian conscience socially, politically and culturally. M.K. Naik writes in his History of Indian English Literature thus:

“Indian writing in English Literature of Gandhian age was inevitably influenced by the epoch making development of Indian life.”

He explains that Indian writing in English more particularly in fiction discover some of its most compelling themes during the Gandhian era.

In 1930, Gandhi become the frontline leader of Indian Independence Movement as well as the influence of the trend of Indian English novel. Gandhian influence impact upon those who have come back from abroad in the wake of Indian freedom struggle. Most of them were heavily inspired by Gandhian ideals and philosophy as well as his approach to the freedom movement. They begun to write novels on realistic events of the contemporary society.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) is the most prolific writer of Indo-Angolian Literature. Influenced and inspired by Gandhian ideals, he presents social problems realistically. In his writings, he interprets the soul of India. He is the admirer of humanistic philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and devoted follower of Gandhian ideals. In most of his writings he tries to propagate Gandhian ethics and ideals. In his fictional milieu, Anand's first contribution is his Untouchable (1935) which portrayed the real event of the contemporary society. In this first novel, Anand applies his entire effort to highlight Gandhian ideals.

Objectives :

The objective of this paper is

- (i) To highlight Gandhian ideals in Mulk Raj Anand's first novel Untouchable.
- (ii) To expose untouchability as social evil and bring it to light as sensitive, significant and sociological issue.

Methodology:

Analytical method is used to prepare this paper using secondary data from books, journals, articles, research papers and from the internet.

Discussion and Analysis:

Castesim is an age old prejudice established by the powerful and wicked class of Society. As a social critic, Dr. Mulk Raj Anand tries to remove caste system from the society as it has destroyed order and co-hesion of the society. It is henious and poisonous crime.

Mulk Raj Anand is an artist with moral understanding. He stresses the need of humanistic approach which is Gandhi's prime aim. He involved himself with the moral understanding of Indian masses. He understands the mute anguish of the discriminated people and and tries to bring out their insulted humanity through his literary creation.

Untouchable (1935) is his first novel where he exposes the evils of the his cotemporary society. It is a merciless attempt to expose hypocrisy of the upper caste of this society. Bakha is the central character of this novel. He is eighteen years old. He belongs to out-caste of the society. Anand, very realistically describes the inner sufferings of this out-caste boy Bakha in this novel. His main motive behind writting this novel is to propagate Gandhian ideals against casteism.

He very frankly admits the Gandhian influence in writing this novel. 'My Experiment with a White Lie' is his noteworthy composition where he says about Gandhian influence on him. But before he met Gandhi, Anand had written the manuscripts of his first novel Untouchable. He composed this novel on the basis of some of his real experience of his own life. Anand begun his education at cantonment school. So, his childhood friends were mainly from cantonment. They included dhuby boy called Ramcharan, Muslim boy Ali, son of cobbler called Chota and sweeper boy Bakha. Bakha, the childhood friend of his real life is the hero of his first novel Untouchable. In his childhood, he mixed up with them freely without any caste feeling. But the elders try to infuse it in his mind as 'sin' of pollution. One day, Anand was playing with his friends and Ramcharan thrown a ball and hit Anand's forehead. He become senseless and fell down. Everyone of his friends came near him but nobody dare to help him and bring him home. But that sweeper boy Bakha came forward and brought Anand his home. But, Anand's mother scolded him for he touched Bakha. This incident shocked Anand. And at that moment, he vowed to fight for Bakhas of India. He decided to carry the corores of Bakha to this sensitive soul of Indians by giving them dignity and heroism through this novel. As a result, he created Bakha in Untouchable as 'hero' whereas other reputed Indian writers like Tagore, Bankim Ch. Chatterjee, Ratannath Sarkar had not accepted the lower class people as hero of their writings.

Before, going to London, when he was in India, Anand read Russian writers like Tolstoy, Gorky etc. and strengthen his determination to create heroes from the untouchable in India. During this period when he was in London, he wrote manuscript of his first novel 'Untouchable'. But one day, he read an article in 'Young India' written by Mahatma Gandhi about a sweeper boy Uka. He was attracted by this writing, which was simple, austere and truthful than his own

Untouchable. He was deeply attracted and astonished by the similarity between Uka and his Bakha. Then he decided to meet Gandhi and sought appointment and received.

In 1932, he returned India and stayed Sabarmoti Ashram with Gandhi for three months. During this period, he revised his manuscript of untouchable. Gandhi said to him that one must write on the basis of his real experiences. In his 'Why I Write', Anand mentioned about this direct influence and impact of Gandhi upon him and in his writings of Untouchable, thus

"I worked hard to achieve sincerity, I cut and cut, trying to combine the Tolstoyan emphasis on truth of life in the raw and the Faubertion objectivity"..... I have tried since then to take off the mask of the 'Brown-Sahib' and I had became in English." – (Why I write, 1978)

Then he brought this novel back to London with glowing pride. But had despaired when the novel was rejected by 19 publishers. He said, "After I had despaired and contemplated suicide, the twentieth accepted it after E.M. Forster had written its preface"

In 1935, on 1st May, Untouchable was published. The public response to Untouchable encourage Anand to write more and the decade 1935-45, became the most productive period of Anand's Life.

Anand's Untouchable is reflected ray of Gandhian ideals. This novel is so much enchanted with Gandhian ideals that he visualizes the problem of Untouchability thoroughly through the lenses of Gandhi having few disagreement. He writes in 'Why I write', thus –

"The warmth towards Bakha may have emerged from my warmth towards the person of Gandhi"

This is the clear evidence of Gandhian impact upon him which he himself admitted. Gandhi said Untouchability is a disgrace on Hinduism. "Curse of untouchability is the greatest sin". Untouchability creates discrimination on particular section of mankind on an occupational basis. It is deeply rooted social evil. But it is still accepted truth of the society. Anand presents here Bakha symbolically. He presents realistically the acute feelings of being born as untouchable.

Untouchable is Anand's first attack on casteism which have universal objectives. Concerned with injustice and exploitation of the upper caste to the lower caste people of mankind. So, he is indeed the 'fiery-voice' of the people.

Anand's devotion to Gandhi transforms into the devotion of Bakha. Bakha is a devoted worker. His reverence to work makes him Gandhi's disciple Gandhi dedicated his life for the upliftment of the oppressed, exploited and lower class of the society. Gandhi's view towards oppressed and exploited shock Anand's humanitarian sensibility. So, his literary creations are comprised with innumerable shadow of Gandhian humanism.

Through this novel, he presents comprehensive and logistic outlook on the problem of untouchability. Here he presents acute tragic feelings of the untouchables with their mental world and soul. Very realistically, he presents the orthodoxical brutality prevailed in then time to be abolished, but still prevail in our present society. In this decade, Arundhoti Roy, in her 'God of Small Things', presents such solid political realism through the Hero Velutha in democratic

India. Velutha is the second coming of Bakha, Even today the poor, low caste people find themselves out of place, out of society and remain untouchable. Anand with reformatory purpose, articulates the suppressed feeling of untouchables through Bakha. To him, humanism brings message of love and compassion to the society, which can restore peace and equality.

Conclusion:

Untouchable is Anand's effort to express his feelings of disgust against caste system exists in India. It is a 'Saga of Sufferings'. He very realistically presents the agony of the Dalits existence when Gandhi called 'Harijans'. Bakha represents Harijans. He is a crusader, whereas the novel itself a social document. There are thousands of Bakha in our society. The period he stayed in London had not made him oblivious of his Indian brethren. He felt the need of asserting the dignity of the weak, helpless, exploited and sufferings people whose speech has been choked in their throats by the repressive force of foreign rule and Indian prejudice.

Anand was too much impressed by Mahatma Gandhi's campaign against untouchability. Gandhi's humanism attracts Anand fully, and so he writes to focus on Gandhian ideals in his novels. His humanism is a product of deep knowledge of the cultural history which implies mighty force that enables men to emerge from gloom of violence and envy. In an interview with Lalji Misra, Anand admits very clearly the impact of Gandhian ideals in his life, impact of Gandhian spirits in his heart and mind

"... I learnt simplicity in Gandhi's Ashram, I learnt sincerity and self realization there"

('Why I Write' - P – 14, in an interview taken by La Mesra on 28th December, 1986 in Indian English Teacher's conference).

"Gandhi generated in him 'the integrity of purpose and the embodiment of truth'"

Finally, the discussion may be concluded with this finding that relevance of Gandhian ideals are not denying fact even today. Inspiration of Gandhian ideals or philosophy is viewed today. Contemporary leaders like Barack Obama, King Martin Luther, Nelson Mandela, Sue Key etc. upon whom millions of people have bestowed their happiness and aspirations for future have been influenced and inspired by Gandhian ideals. Australian scholar Thomas Weber insists on to re-interpret Gandhi's philosophy of truth, Ahimsa. To sum-up, it may be said that revival, rethinking, re-interpretation of Gandhian ideals will surely bring back value-based approach to peace, unity, equality, justice and security to this violent-ridden society.

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