



THEME OF SOCIAL ALIENATION IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S "UNTOUCHABLE"

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ABSTRACT:

Untouchable is the first novel of Mulk Raj Anand. It deals with a serious issue of untouchability. The theme of the novel is untouchability. It is a social issue in Hindu society. The people called 'Sudras' were treated as out-caste. The problem is not fully solved even today. Mulk Raj Anand makes us think of this issue as a social evil, an injustice by man to man.

KEY WORDS : Untouchability, Sudras, Exploitation, Depressed Classes, Outcaste, Social Evil.

THEME OF SOCIAL ALIENATION IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S UNTOUCHABLE:

Mulk Raj Anand was born in a Hindu family on 12th December 1905 in Peshawar. His father was a coppersmith. His mother came from a peasant family. He had first hand knowledge of the rural life of the Punjab. He had seen village life exploited by religious hypocrisies. All these cast a spell on the mind of Mulk Raj Anand. He decided to write about those people who were being insulted and humiliated by the orthodox Hindus and the white sahibs.

"Untouchable" is the first novel of Mulk Raj Anand. It deals with the theme of social alienation. It is a realistic novel. In the novel Anand has depicted the realistic picture of pre-independent India. In 1930 Mahatma Gandhi asked him to write a pamphlet on untouchability. Instead of pamphlet Anand wrote this novel. It is a social novel, and it is concerned with the injustice and exploitation to which one large section of Hindu society is subjected by the other section enjoying a much higher status in the social hierarchy. It is concerned with the depiction of the life of the untouchables, who have been the victims of social injustice. The novel is concerned not with the life and suffering of some particular individual, but with the life and suffering of untouchables as a class.

Through the particular untouchable Bakha, the novelist has focused attention on the miserable plight of untouchables generally. He begins with particular – here Bakha, the untouchable lad- but soon generalizes upon his life and suffering. Bakha seems to a representative untouchable exemplifying the predicament of not only the so called Hindu untouchables but also of all the depressed classes in the world. It is to stress this global significance of Bakha that Anand has named the novel "Untouchable" and not "The Untouchable". The definite article "The" has been deliberately omitted. The title indicates

that the novel is not concerned with any particular individual but with the whole class of untouchables living in miserable conditions. The theme of the novel "Untouchable" is the age old injustice by the traditional Hindu society to the untouchables.

The opening paragraph of the novel epitomizes the 'big divide' between the untouchables and other resident communities in the town. The novel begins with a realistic description of the colony where the untouchables live. It is situated at a particular distance. The upper-caste Hindus and the Tommie's in the Barracks live in good condition but the untouchable live in squalid houses. Anand begins the novel with these words.

"The outcastes' colony was a group of mud walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadows both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal-clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes. The absence of a drainage system had through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarter a marsh which gave out the most offensive smell. And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it made it an 'uncongenial place to live in'"

This is the description of the outcaste colony. It is clear indication that the untouchable have to live in a segregated, isolated, filthy and unhygienic locality where cleanliness, sanitation and water-supply are dreams. In other words Anand gives us a vivid picture of the outcastes' colony. The colony is dark, damp, uncongenial place. The thatched mud-houses clustered together in two rows extremely ill fitted for human habitation. It appears as though the scavengers, leather workers, washer men, barbers, water-carriers and grass cutters-all these inhabitants of the colony are sub-human non-entities huddled up together. They should be content to live in the gutter like worm only to be crushed by the superior caste people. It practically demonstrates what the concept of untouchability is. The untouchables are living just to make the life of the upper class Hindu comfortable. The sweeper are there to clean their latrines, the washer men are there to wash their clothes, and so on. These untouchable don't have any other intention in their life other than serving to the upper class Hindu. They are not allowed to enjoy their life. On other hand the untouchables are depending on them for many things.

Bakha is the protagonist of the novel. The novel "Untouchable" covers the events of a single day in the life of Bakha. He is eighteen years old boy is one of the sons of Lakha, the Jamadar of the sweepers of the town. He lives in a dark, dingy one roomed mud cottage with his father Lakha, his brother Rakha and his sister Sohini. Bakha is much fascinated by the white man's life. The Tommie's treat him as a human being. He is conscious of the filth and dirt in which they live. The environment in which they live has corrupted their souls.

The novelist offers a realistic presentation to Bakha at work. Bakha is a dexterous workman. He cleans latrines earnestly and quickly. Each muscle of his body, hard as rock, seemed to shine like glass. He rushed along with a considerable skill from one doorless latrine to another Cleaning, brushing, pouring phenol.

The picture of the people live in the outcaste colony is equally realistic and graphic. Bakha and Sohini are exceptional examples of cleanness. But his brother Rakha is the proper representative of the people in this colony. Rakha is the brother of Bakha. Anand draws a character sketch of Rakha in all his filthiness.

The novelist has shown that the Hindu society is like a circle containing several circles of castes and subcastes. There is segregation within the untouchables also. In the colony scavengers, leather workers, washer men, barbers, water-carriers and grass cutters are living together. All these are untouchable for the upper class people. But still there is segregation within the untouchables. The washer men refuse to mix up with the leather workers and the leather workers with the scavengers. This becomes clear from the way Gulabo, a washerwoman ill treats Sohini, Bakha's sister.

A strong believer in the dignity of man and equality of all men, Anand naturally shocked by the inhuman way the untouchables are treated by those that belong to superior castes- especially the Brahmin. The degradation and humiliation inflicted on the unfortunate sections of society is highlighted through Bakha. Anand selects a particular boy Bakha as the central figure of untouchable and selectively narrates certain incidents that happens him during the day. The events that happen to Bakha produce in him an acute awareness of his low social status. Bakha, in fact suffers. He is a fine boy, good, intelligent. But what society gives him is insult and injury.

A humiliating incident happens to Bakha on the main street. At a confectioners shop Bakha is tempted to buy some jilebis. The Confectioner cheats him, while weighing. Bakha enjoys a few juicy pieces and feels exhilarated. The taste of the warm and sweet syrup was satisfying and delightful. From the above two incidents that takes place early in the morning the writer is trying to suggest that how the untouchables are insulted and deceived by the upper class.

Bakha had purchased the mouth watering jilebis and is lost in enjoying the taste of eating a portion of them. As he walks along the street, munching and looking at all sights. Accidentally he touches a Brahmin and is reviled as a disgusting creature that has made the Brahmin unclean. Though Bakha did not intend to pollute Lalla, the Caste Hindu. They all begin to insult and curse Bakha. He feels sorry and begs Lalla's pardon. He is requesting to forgive for the guilt.

The caste Hindu Lalla immediately starts shouting:

"Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock eyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning! ...Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! Offspring of a pig' he shouted"

The passage clearly shows the realistic presentation of the mental agony of Bakha at the hands of caste Hindus. The caste Hindu abuses Bakha with foul words. A number of people gather there in no time, each taunting, abusing and cursing.

The pollution or molestation scene in the temple is most realistically presented by the writer. On Pundit Kali Nath's suggestion Sohini goes to sweep the courtyard of his house. Bakha also goes there to clean the outer courtyard of the temple. Pundit Kali Nath is

attracted by her beautiful figure. He attempts to molest her. As she does not yield to his sensual pleasures he raises hue and cry against her in order to extricate from the alarm Sohini has raised to ward off his indecent advances towards her. If Sohini had yielded to his desires he would not have complained of the charge of pollution against her. Anand presents this scene in order to show that some Brahmin priests like Pundit Kali Nath are attempting to exploit some low-caste women sexually also.

3. CONCLUSION:

The theme of the novel is social alienation. To conclude, the theme of the novel one can express once agreement with the words of E.M.Forster, *"'Untouchable' could only have been written by an Indian and an Indian, who observed from outside. No European, however, sympathetic could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self pity."*

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