



A Role of Consciousness and Humanism in Anand's novel special reference to 'Untouchable'

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Abstract:

This research paper explained a core role of consciousness and humanism in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and especially one of his first masterpieces, "Untouchable". His novels are remarkable not only for the note of humanism but also deeply related to human nature of the human being. His novels portrayed human experiences and convey a sense of life and character of human being especially in the life of worker class in the society. He has literally immersed into the flowing, vibrant core of humanity and he feels its grief to the very marrow of his bones. Being a humanist, Anand has skillfully depicted the Indian society which is hostile and callous to the lots of the low-born. His first novel Untouchable is an account of a day in the life of its protagonist- Bakha, an untouchable sweeper boy. It delineates the feelings, aspirations and problems of this sweeper boy who undergoes a lot of hardship being a low-caste within Indian society. His plight has been explored by the writer in sympathetic manner.

Keywords: *Humanism, Caste System, Consciousness and Society.*

Introduction:

Mulk Raj Anand belongs to a period in the history of India when the nation was struggling hard to shake off the burden of slavery. The quit India Resolution had been passed. This struggle was against British imperialism. The Indians were being treated like dogs. The wounds of Jallianwala bagh were not healed. Anand started writing around that time. On one side he was sensitive to what was happening at the political front and on the other, to the torments of a class of people who had been suffering not only on account of imperialism but also due to the maltreatment meted out to them by the high class people in the Indian society. The pattern of responses to the underdog emerges from the humanism of Anand. Humanism is a system of thought in which human values, interests and attitudes are held dominant. It is a kind of love of man with all his weaknesses and impulses. Historically, humanism is a renaissance

doctrine which stresses the basic goodness, worth and greatness of man. Anand's humanistic creed has definite features. It is only natural that a creative artist should present his ideas in a framework of philosophy of life which he accepts and advocates. Anand is no exception in this respect. An analytical study of his fictional works reveals that the humanist philosophy has positively influenced Mulk Raj Anand. Thus, in Anand's novels we find that his response to the underdog is primarily human

Although the characters of these novels who suffer and belongs to the lower strata of life and are treated as underdogs by the society yet the motive behind Anand's exposing these people is that they should realize their potential and become the makers of such a world in which they would not be considered as second- rate human beings. An attempt has been made in this paper to trace the responses of Mulk Raj Anand to the class of people who have

suffered for a long time and are looked upon by the author as underdogs. *Untouchable* is the story of this prolonged indignity and humiliation of this class of society.

Anand has shown convincingly that there is a clear line of demarcation within the Indian society. It glitters and sparkles on the surface but houses destructive worms within. The society belongs to the high castes. They are in fact, the rulers and keep the low-caste as far away from them as they can. The 'shudras' are meant to perform the lowest of the jobs and are segregated from the main stream of the society. They are subjected to ruthless exploitation at all levels- personal, social, economic, and political.

This novel revolves round Bakha who is a sweeper boy. The author has chosen a conspicuous day from his life and through the presentation of the situation occurring on that particular day, he has drawn our attention towards the plight of low-caste people. First situation is the pollution through touch of a caste Hindu. It creates a catastrophe. As Bakha walks along the road eating 'Jalebi' and recalling the arrangement he has made for learning English, his gaze is drawn to a woman sitting in a window. He is so deeply lost in his thoughts that he has accidentally touched someone passing by.

Bakha is apparently seized with fear, humility and servility. Of course he was aware of his 'Status' in life but it was a sudden shock. At this moment Bakha realizes for the first time that the society which condemns and humiliates him forms a moral barrier which he alone is unable to break down. This awareness of his own status is "like a ray of light shooting through darkness." (P:59)

The second major situation in the novel is when Bakha's sister Sohini is molested by the priest. The irony in this situation, Anand makes us realize, is that hue and cry is raised against the molested and not the molester. Thus we see that the holy men who appear in Anand's fiction are

corrupt to the core and in their eyes; the lowest of low are quite touchable for the purpose of satisfying their lust. For example, the ascetic in *Coolie*- he appears as Pandit Surajbhan in 'The Road' seduces a childless woman under the pretext of turning her fertile. Here in *Untouchable* also, though the holy priest makes unsuccessful attempts to seduce Bakha's sister, the author has exposed the contradiction in the thinking of the so-called high-caste people,

while a mere touch of the clothes of an untouchable is thought to pollute a higher caste, sexual union is non-objectionable. Sohini raises an alarm to save herself from being molested by the priest Kali Nath but the priest is very clever and extricates himself from the difficult situation by shouting, "Polluted, Polluted".

The writer here draws our attention towards the unjust and condemnable behaviour of the so-called high-caste people who can easily go scot-free by turning the blame on to the suffering, sexually exploited girl. There seems to be a possibility of protest and revenge. But Anand underlines the fact that revolt in such cases is impotent and ineffective. Bakha knows the truth of the whole thing that he finds himself incapable of taking revenge. Here turns home crestfallen and shout against the indignities, brutalities heaped by high-caste people upon them. The hero's immediate impulse is to avenge the insult but he fails to act. It is here typical treatment of the underdog as given by Anand is projected. The burden of the past, the attitude of the ruling class, and their longing for pity and sympathy crush the will to act.

The oppressed underdog in the hero continues and devours him like a monster. He is a total picture of a dog crouching at the door of a banquet hall.

Anand's response could have been blown up in respect of magnitude of the torture, but it

remains within the limits of credibility. Anand's early life experience of

the company of the children of the sweepers equipped him better to write about them and their sufferings in vivid details. The comment of E. M. Forster in this context is worth recording.

Anand is able to present the darkness in the lives of these untouchable and their suffering with an identity which is extremely sordid and pathetic. Perhaps the subtlest stroke in Anand's portrayal of Bakha's psyche is his account of the untouchable's one dream of life which is not to be a caste Hindu but a white sahib. The sola hat hanging on the wall attracts his attention.

He imagines himself clad in a superior military uniform, cleaning the commodes of the sahibs in the British barracks. Bakha has no awe of the Englishman. Although Bakha may look a

ridiculous figure as he stumps out in artillery boots, wearing discarded trousers, puttees, breeches and overcoat with "Red Lamp" cigarette between his lips yet it is the manifestation of his inner strength and courage. He thinks that he should imitate the English men because they treated him as a human being where as the native people scorned him for his filthy habits. Bakha's admiration of the sahibs persists right through the book and wanes only when he hears Mahatma Gandhi speaks. These psychic meanderings of Bakha did not change his lot for any practical purposes. But he had dreamt of a future devoid of the curse of untouchability. As a matter of fact these possibilities have been explored by the author to look for a solution to the problems created by the caste-system in India. He believed in the dignity of man and his work.

He believed that caste had nothing to do with greatness of a man he suggests something of the kind of a classless society and these ideas have come to him not from intellectualization of the problem but from his personal experiences. The sensitiveness

that he has been able to give to his protagonist in the novel is a felt one. In his portrayal of an individual like Bakha, Anand has convincingly proved that his attitude was humane and he understood the grim realities of this cruel aspect of social life in India.

Conclusion:

In a nutshell, conclusion has been drawn on the basis of Anand's views regarding humanism and consciousness in the entire nature of the human being. The pattern of responses to the underdog emerges from the humanism of Anand. Humanism is a system of thought in which human values, interests and attitudes are held dominant. It is a kind of love of man with all his weaknesses and impulses. Historically, humanism is a renaissance doctrine which stresses the basic goodness, worth and greatness of man. Anand's humanistic creed has definite features. It is only natural that a creative artist should present his ideas in a framework of philosophy of life which he accepts and advocates. Anand is no exception in this respect. An analytical study of his fictional works reveals that the humanist philosophy has positively influenced Mulk Raj Anand. Thus, in Anand's novels we find that his response to the underdog is primarily human.

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