

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi - Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

April 2014 Vol. 5, Issue- 2

5th Year of Open Access

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com

criterionejournal@gmail.com

Socialism in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

Archana M. Kulkarni

Mulk Raj Anand's half a dozen novels deal with the social issues in pre-independent India. Unlike the other Indian Social novelists, Anand dealt with the theme of lowest strata of Indian Society – the untouchables., M. R. Anand's special quality is that he had the first hand experience of all that he wrote. Anand elevates the level of discourse to a moral essay on humanism where art is concerned with the truth of the human condition. In the present article I am going to focus on the practice of the untouchability popular in pre-independent India.

Mulk Raj Anand was a prominent Indian writer in English. He was a socially committed novelist, who was born in Peshawar in 1905. His father was a coppersmith and his mother come from peasant family. His literary career was launched by family tragedy. He had a good deal of literature on his behalf. He has written more than a dozen novels and about seventy short stories and essays also. His attitude and views as a novelist had many influences. His social condition, his parents, his education, and the books he read and the people he met all have a share in making Anand a novelist. Anand was aware about the sufferings, poverty, hunger and humiliations of Indian people. That's why it became Anand's aim as a novelist to focus attention on the sufferings and problems of the outcaste. No one in India had yet dealt with these subjects because of their crude realities. Thus Anand writes on what may be called "Epics of sufferings and humiliations". He has also made Indian novel a novel of socialism and realism. He has introduced new type of characters. As Shrinivasa Iyenger observes, "Anand is often undistinguished and seems to be too much in hurry; but the vitality of his creations, the variegated richness of his total comprehension and the purposive energy of his narrative, carry all before them. His notable marks are vitality and a keen sense of actuality".

Untouchable is the first novel written by Mulk Raj Anand. It is his most popular and well knit novel. It was published on 1st May 1935, but it had great difficulty for Publishing. The novel was revised several times. The book was rejected by nineteen publishers. It was welcomed by few but criticized by many. London newspaper criticized it as "a dirty work". But it was published when E.M. Forster agreed to write its preface. He had written in his Preface to *Untouchable*:

"It seems to me indescribably clean and I hesitate for words in which this can be conveyed. Avoiding the rhetoric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it".

The novel "Untouchable" placed Anand among the leading Indian English authors. Its story had impact on the reader. E.M. Forster stressed that the novel affects the reader because the author had a clear understanding of

difficulties as he himself is an Indian. Later the novel became so popular that it was translated into twenty languages. George Orwell gave a favourable review of Anand's novel, 'The Sword and the Sickle' and remarked that,

“Although Mr. Anand's novel would still be interesting on its own merits if it been written by an Englishman, it is impossible to read it, without remembering every few pages that is also a careful curiosity”.

Bakha is the central character of the story “Untouchable”. He is the representative of the outcastes. He lives in an outcaste's colony of the town of Bulasha with his father 'Lakha', his younger brother 'Rakha' and his young beautiful sister 'Sohini'. The colony is very dirty. Bakha is a young and muscular boy of eighteen. He is a very sensitive and an uncommon boy. He is eighteen years old but he has burdened with the routine of a Sweeper. He works in all weathers, from morning to the evening with full of enthusiasm. He also faced the humiliation which was imposed on him by the Hindu society. He is discontent. He wants social Justice. He has spirit of revolt in him. He wants to revolt against the Hindu customs and traditions. Bakha is also influenced by the “Tommies”. They treated Bakha as a human being. He wants to dress like them. He stared at them. He noticed the variety of their queer, well cut forms and says,

"I will look like a Sahib and I shall walk like them. Just as they do, in twos, with chota as my companion".

Though Bakha knew that except his English clothes he has nothing English in his life, he wanted to become an English man. He even didn't like to play like other boys. He is different from his fellow friends when Chota asked him to play Khuti, he says,

“No, I must go to work, my father may see me and he will be angry”

It shows his efficiency towards his work.

Untouchable is a socialistic novel. It focuses our attention on the customs and traditions of Hindu society. It shows the evils of the caste system. It gives a picture of the Hindu society in the 1930's.

Bakha's routine work starts with his brush and basket. He has to clean the three rows of latrins everyday. Havildar Charat Singh, the famous Hockey player shouts on Bakha,

“Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, Bakhya! Ohe, Scoundrel of a sweeper's son, come and clear a latrine for me!”

Bakha suffers from the insults and abuses of the high caste Hindus. He wanted to rebel against this tyranny of the high caste Hindus. He hates himself as his touch is denied by others calling him the meanest of the mankind. When he has accidentally touched a high caste Hindu, he was cursed and abused by a big crowd. The man spoke so rudely with Bakha,

“Swine, dog, why don’t you shout and warn me of your approach! Don’t you know, you brute, that you must not touch me !”

Bakha’s crime was he must announce his approach while moving on the road. He realised that he is an “untouchable”. He felt humiliated and cried “I am a sweeper, an untouchable”. His cry shows the agony of a sweeper, an untouchable. Even for water these outcaste people have to wait for the mercy of high caste Hindus. Being an untouchable they cannot draw water themselves from the well, as they will pollute the water in the well. Even their shadow is also denied by the high caste Hindus. They have to wait long for priest Pandit Kali Nath to appear on the well and gave water to them. He was ready to give water to Sohini as she was beautiful and her beauty attracts him. He poured water into sohini’s pitcher and asked her to come to his house for cleaning. He wanted to molest sohini. But when she cried out for help, Pandit shouts “Polluted”, “Polluted”. Bakha arrives there and he wants to beat Pandit for molesting his sister. But the priest and the worshipper shouts at Bakha saying,

“Get off the steps; scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service. You have defiled our temple. Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. Get down, get away, dog”.

Through Sohini’s character Anand wanted to show the condition of Indian lower caste females. Her role in the novel is most important because by her character Anand had showed the hypocrisy of higher caste Hindus who cried that the touch of a sweeper polluted them and do not feel shameful to embrace a sweeper and untouchable girl to fulfill their hunger. By the character of Sohini Anand had showed the contrast of the Indian society.

In the novel Mulk Raj Anand exposed the practice of untouchability. It was popular in 1930’s. The novel shows the real dirt of society. Some times the high caste Hindus are dirtier than the sweeper boy. In untouchable Mulk Raj Anand has given the picture of Hindu society. Through the character of Sohini & Pandit, Anand depicted the irony of high caste Hindus who blames the lower caste on the one hand & on the other wanted to use them. Anand’s ‘Untouchable’ is the best example of socialism popular in the contemporary society of India.

Works Cited:

- 1) Marlene Fisher. The Wisdom of the Heart. 1985. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.
- 2) Ram Atma, Mulk Raj Anand A Reader, 2005, New Delhi Sahitya Akademy
- 3) Rajimwale Dr. Sharad, a History of English Literature, 2004, New Delhi Rama Brother India Pvt. Ltd.
- 4) Sinha K.N. Mulk Raj Anand.1972. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- 5) Anand, Mulk Raj, Untouchable, 1970. New Delhi: Arnold publishers.
- 6) Tilak Dr. Raghukul. Coolie, a Critical Study, 2009, New Delhi Rama Brother India Pvt. Ltd.
- 7) Narsimaih, C.D. The Swan and the Eagle. 1967. Simla: Indian Institute Of Advanced Study.