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Anand's Genuineness and Indigenous Novelists

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Abstract:

The Hindu caste system is a well planned scheme of discriminating people which persisted in India for about three thousand years and it still continues its hold in Indian Hindu society. Untouchability, the worst byproduct of this system grasps the Indian Hindu society in its clutches even in the modern democratic India. In the milieu of discrimination on the basis of caste, everyone acts as if they do not discriminate Bakha is an untouchable boy who is healthy, well built and energetic. But he is an outcast in the Hindu Indian caste society: an untouchable. Anand's novel Untouchable acts as an evidence for the cruelty imparted on untouchables by depicting Bakha's life story. His other novel The Road also brings out the picture of Bikhu, the untouchable and his sufferings in the setting of democratic India. Bakha's search to find the meaning in his life and Bikhu's striving for the escape from the malice of the caste order finally ends up with no much result. Both the protagonists were forced to realize and accept their unalterable fate as untouchables. . Mulk Raj Anand in his first novel Untouchable (1935) has shown that none of the western theoretical models of attaining social justice is successful in the Hindu Indian social context. Munno, the 'hero-anti-hero' of Coolie (1936), being a 'Kshathriya' by birth is not enslaved by caste, can at least choose to fight back. The fact is that both Bakha and Munoo are helpless laborers. Their service for the society was not valued at all. However, Anand was capable of stretching the metaphors of 'untouchable' and 'coolie' to a universal scenario suggesting that discrimination based on one's work existed universally. The two metaphors can undoubtedly be considered as collective metaphors of sociology, history and metaphysics of human suffering. Man's inhumanity to fellow man and discrimination on the basis of work, class and caste is also a universal reality

Key words: Labour, untouchability, consciousness, justice, caste-ism, novelists, humanism Untouchable

1. Introduction

While the setting of both the novels is in the backdrop of caste dominated colonial India, the two metaphors, as created by Anand, have a much more comprehensive meaning. The narratives became the microcosm of the vast macrocosm of the universal problem of discrimination. Although this universal predicament was discussed worldwide, in India neither history books nor literary creations occurred on the subject. In the history of the human race, the formation of collusive centers of power and the unprecedented complexity of these hegemonic structures in controlling human beings was always a matter of thought and discussion. Here in India Mulk Raj Anand pioneered it in the field of literature.

Anand's novels depict the history of Hindu biased India in the light of the philosophies of Gandhi and Nehru. Anand's realism, enriched by the Punjabi and Hindu dialects can be considered as a sociological document showing the intermingling of cultures through the language of English. In his works, culture and historical periods are combined together dexterously to show the relationship of time and intermingling of cultures. Raja Rao's foreword to his work Kanthapura is also in this manner. It is based on Anand's realism and later motivated the India English writers to write about their indigenous cultures in their life period. Thus Anand was a forerunner who deviated from the western way of writing fiction. Alienating himself from 'the highways of romanticism' he paved the way for the Indian English writers who created their plots in the background of the villages of India.

2. Anand's Genuineness

Anand as an author approached the problems of the society realistically. His love for humanity and his consideration for the wretched beings of the society, made his alienation from the world of fantasy possible. He wrote in favour of the downtrodden with the backing of his proletarian thoughts. Consequently, class conflicts continued to communicate vigorously in almost all his novels. Not only in Untouchable and Coolie but also in Two Leaves and a Bud (1937), The Village Trilogy – The Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1940), The Sword and the Sickle (1942) and The Big Heart (1945) Anand narrated this confrontation. Unquestionably, Bakha, Munoo, Lalu of The Trilogy, Gangu of the Two Leaves and a Bud and Ananta of Big Heart are victims of their aggressors. "My

novels were intended to be different from those of others, departures from the upper and middle section fictions. I wished to recreate, the folk, whom I knew intimately, from the lower depths, the lumpens and the suppressed, oppressed, [and] repressed, those who have seldom appeared in our literature except in Sarat Chatterji, Prem Chand, Bibhuti, Tarashankar and Maneck Bannerji" ('The Sources of Protest' 6). However, Anand's statement must be viewed in the historical context of the British colonial rule of India. The British colonialism and imperialism, implemented by the European colonisers was a sort of game played for political power. As a result, the rural territories under the British domain remained relatively undeveloped. Consequently in colonial territories the British kept the colonial natives in the same level of the British working class. After his sojourn in England, Anand is highly impressed by the principles of dignity of labour followed by the British, and says: "I had been struck by the peculiar dignity and self-respect with which the porters, sweepers and other workers bore themselves here against the coolies in India who were always being kicked about and intimidated.... I admired the way in which those who did unpleasant work seemed to recognize the dignity of labour" (Apology 59).

Anand's yearning to place the Indian untouchables at par with the British coolies and other workers turns out to be a utopian illusion. Anand's realism took birth from his social and political thoughts under the influence of Bloomsbury intellectualism, British socialism, Asian communism, European proletarian-ism, Indian nationalism and his mother's humanism. Anand became a part of the 1930s movement in England, Spanish war and the Irish civil war but he was really a part and parcel of India's war for freedom. All these national and international interactions helped him develop his realistic humanism.

Indian novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan had been writing fiction in English before and after independence. Only a few authors in India risked writing in English in that period. In fact, for almost about two decades after independence, the act of writing a novel in English was considered as an act of paying loyalty to the British. On analyzing the history of the novel writing in English in India after 1930s, it could be inferred that the great trio of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan based their stories on different themes like the freedom struggle, Gandhian ideology and their impacts on society. Need for social reforms, eradication of social evils like untouchability and caste system, India's improvement in the fields of technology and science, the partition of the British ruled India, the emergence of the new urban India, the problems of rural India, etc. were the other relevant themes which entered the novels. The secular socialistic modernity mobilized by Anand over his long and generous career of aiding both political causes and the arts in India is definitely a lifelong campaign for equity. In the 1935, *Untouchable* was undoubtedly an intrusion into the conservatism of traditional Indian society. Anand extended his reach of liberalism and secularism to every nook and corner of Indian society. The 'Preface' to *Untouchable* also marks the acceptance of Anand by the British liberalism and its proponents. E.M. Forster commends in 'Preface' that "It is an excellent work and I am delighted it is being reprinted. I hope it will again be favorably received". Forster is not overdoing his affirmation for Anand, on the other hand, he legitimizes the content of the work by his mere signature. This signifies that his 'Preface' is a piece of work which shows what one can expect from the colonial era. Then, Forster tactfully counts and specifies 'the novel's three solutions to the *Untouchable's* dilemma'. The first solution is converting the untouchable to Christianity, the second one is, asking him to follow Mahatma Gandhi's process of the synthesis of tradition and the third and last one is motivating him to embrace the global commodity machine in the form of flush toilets. The mechanism can be taken as a metaphor of technology and a necessary precondition for achieving modernity.

Untouchable exposes an uncomfortable day in the life of an untouchable. Caste conventions controlled his conscience. All his considerations, contemplations and consultations on caste compelled him to become completely conscious about his caste and castelessness. The element of westernization is a necessary precondition for Bakha. He is set apart from other untouchables - by the way of British clothing which he wears, by playing hockey with the British, by being treated as a human by the British regiment, by acquiring more desires than he can pay for and by obtaining a westernized quality of 'shame' over the spitting and hawking habits of Hindus. We understand that he has observed and accepted a new world out of the way of life of the British.

Anand takes no chances with readers' sympathies. The novel operates on a simple twofold mechanism by depicting Bakha's virtues against Hindu vices and brutalities. His humanity in giving alms to a beggar can be compared and contrasted with the inhumanity of the Hindu woman in giving alms to the untouchable. But narrations of the untouchables; waiting for water, exclusion from education, the 'sin' of an untouchable presuming to smoke, the difficulty of shopping when one can't touch or be touched by Hindus, ignorance of Hindu gods and Hindu religion, exclusion from temples, the Hindu caste prejudices and the difficulty of moving along a street without touching or being touched show their meager plight. Extreme examples of the prejudiced Hindu high caste mind are observed in the comments at Bakha's attire, abuse of untouchables, the venomous language used over untouchables, abuse against the untouchable's walking normally instead of skulking, and in the abuse for defiling a hurt Hindu boy whom Bakha carries home from the hockey field.

By taking the reader inside Bakha's emotional life, they are invited to identify the emotions of Bakha's class. For example, there is a description of the story of the regimental hat all the Indian boys long for. It is evident that the desire to wear western dress haunted Bakha and he always longed for the hat. He desired for it so strongly that he had once, as a boy, asked for it, but in his maturity could not bring himself to ask for it. "Why is it," he had often asked himself, "[which] I can't go and ask now, but dared to do so when I was a child?" He couldn't find the answer to this. He didn't know that with the growth of years he had lost freedom, the wild, careless, dauntless freedom of the child, that he had lost his courage, that he was afraid" (93). This narration in Anand's *Untouchable* gives an idea about the dilemma caused in the mind of Bakha. His understanding as a kid and adult, westernized Indian and untouchable Indian, growing and constrained, and it shows as well how dependent Anand is upon the powerful engine of individualism to enlist the sympathies and arouse passion. In Bakha Anand juxtaposes a westernized 'self' and a utopian ideal which he gained from the English.

Perhaps Anand is not entirely immune to the list of sins we lay at Forster's feet, but it is contentment within a westernized individualist ethic that is most worrisome. Bakha is a character, designed by Anand in the western way of dignifying labour class. By creating Bakha Anand wants to make all the untouchables and low-castes free from all discriminations endorsed upon them by birth, caste, class and labour. Anand's appreciation for the dignity of labour is evident in his attempt. The Indian out-castes' deplorable plight is shown in the first paragraph of *Untouchable*:

The out-castes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together 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, leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other out-castes from Hindu society. "A brook ... 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, and the biting, choking, pungent fumes that oozed from its sides. 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 stink. 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." (1)

The tone is menaced while showing the degrading effects of Bakha's housing and the premises. When Bakha gives ear to the sayings of Christian mission, Gandhi, and the poet of technology the selfsame tone lingers. For Bakha, the Christians are incomprehensible. When the missionary patiently and paternally strives to save Bakha's soul, his wife's usage of phrase "these blackies" get on the nerves of Bakha (122). Bakha: Bakha "followed willingly," we read, "listening to each word that the Colonel spoke, but not understanding a word" (116). While attending the Gandhians, Bakha's thought is expressed in the sentence "'Harijan' Bakha wondered what that meant" (132). He didn't understand words like moral, religious and conscience. On the speech of anti-Brahminical poet about western technology, it is said: Bakha "felt that the poet would have been answering the most intimate questions in his (Bakha's) soul, if he had not used such big words" (146). Although Bakha's illiteracy is exposed, the conversations point the need for change from an untouchable's perspective.

The debate on caste-ism and untouchability is still rampant in independent India. The ancient concept of 'Varnashrama' does not fully approve the corrupt historical practices of caste-ism and untouchability. The modern progress provides legal remedies to achieve social justice and equality. The Hindu mind is still caste-conscious, and can't free itself from caste-ism. Bakha's ambition to study to become a 'sahib' culminates to be only a utopian dream, because his father "had told him that schools are meant for the 'babus', and not for the lowly sweepers." Bakha becomes aware of the cruelty of the upper-caste Hindus who explicitly embraced the system of caste and practice of untouchability. Bakha's dream is to become a 'babu' or a 'sahib'. Anand's paradox points out the strategies of the British and the Hindus for colonising the inferiors and low castes. Bakha is born into a family of sweepers. But he is unable to understand the complex practice of untouchability. He doesn't understand how his touch pollutes those who claim purity, by being 'twice-born'. The upper class majority thinks that intermingling will make them lose their inherited purity. Bakha tries to clean his soul as asked by Gandhi, but the question whether he would be able to leave his job of cleaning the latrines? poses unanswered. Bakha's disappointment persists. "Then the sweepers can be free from the stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of casteless and classless society" (146). The poet's vision on the abolition of untouchability and casteism is dependent on industrialization and modernism. One can readily see Anand's usage of irony here. E.M. Forster also joins with Anand's view in the matter of installation of flush systems for modernising India. Anand understood the limitations of experimentation of the flush system in India. That's why when he put these words in Bashir's mouth: "In fact, greater efficiency, better salesmanship, more mass production, standardization, dictatorship of the sweepers, Marxian materialism and all that!" (15). The tragedy is complex and is expressed in Bakha's thoughtful dilemma that he will purify his soul. But Bakha is tied up with the job of cleaning latrines. Here Anand is attempting to entangle all these ideologies in Bakha's thoughts and character. In *Untouchable*, Anand declares, "I meant to recreate the lives of the millions of Untouchables through a single person" (qtd. in Rajan 1). Bakha, the representative of all the untouchables of India, was slapped on his face by an upper-caste Hindu. The slap was for polluting the high caste Hindu by the untouchable's touch. This slap on Bakha's face is symbolic of the insult on all untouchables. Bakha is ill-treated and disgraced, constantly. The temple incident and the priest's attempt to molest Sohini are touching. But the slap is the eye opener which awakens him and makes him aware that he is an untouchable sweeper: "For them I am a sweeper, sweeper – untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!" (5). The words "sweeper" and "untouchable" make Bakha realise his position in society.

An examination of Coolie manuscripts will confirm Anand's ambition to appeal to Anglophone audiences. The contemporary Indian English novelists follow the path that Anand has paved for them. Contemporary novelists like Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* and Sharan Kumar Limbale in *Akkarmashi* knowingly or unknowingly make use of Anand's realism.

Indian fiction in English has always held a mirror up to Indian social life, and down the decades, it has explored the varied facets of Indian society. The gruesome poverty, the Independence struggle, the trauma of Partition, social changes, the crisis of identity, emerging experiences of alienation and anarchy - all these have figured on the screen of the Indian novel in English. Novelists who published their first novels in the mid-eighties have brought "a new internationalism to their fiction, a contemporaneity to their outlook with a daring experimentation in form and structure while at the same time wiping out the linguistic barriers that inhibited the earlier novelists" (K.Rao 161). They have set the tenor for a new thrust in Indian fiction in English.

The theme of cultural dualism which lies deeply entrenched in the consciousness of every educated Indian is explored in the novels which artistically focus the themes of up rootedness, social and racial tensions and prejudice, the conflict between tradition and

materialism, faith and reason, the search for one's true self and the painful experience of exile and alienation. It is the dialectic of organized life and the life of disorder that forms the fictive co-relates of the dynamics of these novels.

3. Conclusion

In Anand's novels, social reality is truthfully depicted and that reality becomes Anand's realism. His humanity supported by his proletarian perceptions seconds his realism which in turn makes his works genuine and acceptable for a large group of readers. His humanism highlights the liberation of the lower class and lower caste labourers. Anand's realism also created a genre of storytelling through individualism in relation with the castes, classes and communities of the social order that existed in Indian society. By carefully correlating the individual's aspirations with the closed corridors of castes and classes, the modern Indian English novelists achieved the fulfillment of Anand's realism in their creations. Thus tradition verses modernity becomes the main theme of these realistic novels.

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