

Social Protest in Mulk Raj Anand's Novel Untouchable

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Abstract- MULK RAJ ANAND , like Prem Chand in Hindi and Sarat Chandra in Bengali, passionately concerned with the hardship of the life of villagers, their poverty, squalor and backwardness coupled with gross ignorance and the cruelties of caste, took upon himself the task of attacking social snobbery and prejudice. The Indian life that he depicts in his novels. In the field of Indo-English fiction, Anand is perhaps the first to have written of this 'motley crowd' who had hitherto been largely ignored by other contemporary Indian writers . He has been relentlessly advocating for the need to help raise the untouchables, the peasants, the serfs, the coolies and the oppressed and suppressed sections of society to human dignity and self – awareness, to shake them of from ignorance, apathy and despair they are sunk in.

Key words: social snobbery, squalor, ignorance, self-awareness

INTRODUCTION

Anand's first three novels deal with the misery and wretchedness of the crushed and the poor and their struggle for a better life. His subsequent novels are almost a variation on the same theme and are intended to bring home to the reader the plight of the ever-burdened peasant who is powerless to fight superstition and social convention and who is baulked at every step in his aspiration for a better living. The most significant aspect of Anand is that his protagonists come from intimate contact with flesh and blood of everyday existence. Anand himself admits:

All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels...were dear to me because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration- they had given me to mature into manhood, when I began to interpret their lives in my writing. They were the flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, and obsessed me in the way, in which certain human beings obsess an artists soul. And I was doing no more than what a writer does when he seeks to interpret the truth from the realities of his life.

In *Untouchable* (1935), Bakha - an eighteen-year-old boy, like his father Lakha – a cleaner of latrines, is considered as an outcast by the society. Anand exemplifies the problem of 'untouchability', the treatment of the latrine-cleaning class condemned to isolation and deprivation as handlers of excrement; he exposes this as a social evil and suggests its remedy'. His method is to narrate a single day's events in Bakha's life. Sturdy, genial, easy-going, athletic. Bakha lives and works in the Army camp, pathetically aspiring to be as much like the sahibs as possible and playing hockey with their children. But early on the fateful day, he touches a Brahmin by accident and is reviled as a disgusting creature, who has made the Brahmin unclean. He then receives terrific shocks of indictment quite a number of times : he is abused and slapped for polluting an injured child in his attempt to help him. His soul cries in anguish : " I only get abuse and derision wherever I go. Pollution, Pollution, I do nothing else but pollute people....."

His whole countenance lights with fire, the strength, the power of his giant body glistens with the desire for revenge in his eyes, while horror, rage indignation sweep over his frame. But this momentary rage and revolt soon evaporate when he finds that he is still too much bound to his low-caste-status. Colonel Hutchinson , the Salvationist, with his shield of casteless society and salvation for all: Gandhiji with his strong dislike for untouchability as "the greatest blot on Hinduism" and his views that untouchables are in fact Harijans – 'men of God' and then the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar with his new machine the flush that " will clean dung without anyone having to handle it", - all the three encounters raise hope in Bakha for a while. Each encounter , significant in its own way, is an integral part of the novel. The poet's encounter opens up new and exciting vistas of change of his profession. E.M .Forster seems to have apprehended the adverse criticism the conclusion of the novel would invite. He, therefore, defends it in these words:

Some readers may find this closing section of the book too valuable and sophisticated, in comparison with the clear observation which has preceded it, but

it is an integral part of the author's scheme. It is the necessary climax and it has mounted up with triple effect. Bakha returns to his father and is wretched bed, thinking now of the Mahatma, now of the machine. His Indian day is over and the next day will be like it, but on the surface of the earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand.

Despite Forster's able and cogent defence, some critics have found the conclusion of the novel unsatisfactory for various reasons. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar argues that Bakha's returning home, being roundly rated by his father for idling away all the afternoon, and driven out of the house, should really "be the end of the story". Taking a cue from Iyengar, C. Paul Verghese complains that the three solutions are a "result of Anand's desire to play the part of the social reformer at the expense of the novelist.....". R.S.Singh, misreading the purport of the encounters, comes out with his comment that Bakha's future is "going to be an inconclusive repetition of the day he spent in the novel". William Walsh believes that "of the three solutions hinted at to the problem of the untouchable.... it is the last which is the most favoured by Anand"

Even C.D.Narasimhaiah, mistaking the encounters for possible solutions suggested by Anand, objects: "Why didn't the novelist hint at the evils of machinery? what would happen to Bakha when the machine took his place..... That Anand does not seem to see, at any rate, in the novel"

In *Coolie* (1936) Anand shows his concern for the savagely neglected, despised and maltreated poor with an angry lack of resignation. Munoo, a poor hill boy, verdant and innocent, underfed and ill-treated by his aunt, leaves the native village to find work and see the world. The very first encounter with reality shatters his dreams. Employed in the house of a bank clerk, Munoo with his inborn naïve gaiety amuses and entertains the employer's daughter by dancing like a monkey for her, but is interfered by the shrewish and vindictive housewife who ruthlessly destroys his happiness by making him realize his position in the world: "He had no right to join the laughter of his superiors. He was to be a slave, a servant who should do the work, all the odd jobs, someone to be abused, even beaten.....".

Constant abuses and frenzied rage of his frightening and frowning mistress makes him flee to work in a primitive pickle factory in Daulatpur where the dispute between the two partners leaves him desolate, unshielded and helpless. Exasperated with the frantic competition and cunning among the

fellow-coolies. He finds himself an utter failure in the job of a market porter. The satire here becomes more general, directed not at one or two examples of vice and folly but a man's inhumanity to man

Anand does not seem to be satisfied with an understanding of the society in its exterior aspects, its institutions, its problems. He seems to be possessed by a desire, although vague, to seize and express the deeper spiritual reality beneath the flux of bourgeois living. He, therefore, criticizes social maladies, human hypocrisies, and individual idiosyncrasies. After working in vain as a market porter and sleeping on the road pavements, Munoo with the help of an elephant-driver of a circus company, stowed away to Bombay. Before he is thrown into the vast sea of humanity, the elephant-driver tells him almost like a prophet: "The bigger a city is, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam." In Bombay he starts working in the British owned Sir George White Cotton Mills and is brutally exploited along with other factory-workers and fellow-sufferers including Hari, with whom he lives in a slum.

The miserable lives of the workers and their families, their squalor and victimization, the tormenting pictures of 'an emaciated man, the bones of whose skeleton were locked up in a paralytic knot', Munoo steals out of the clashing crowd but is dashed down to unconsciousness by Mrs. Mainwaring's car and is transported to Simla to work as a page and rickshaw-puller to Mrs.Mainwaring, a sort indolent and extremely neurotic, something of a nymphomaniac European mem-sahib. Overwork and under-nourishment gradually fret away his health until he dies of consumption.

The charm of the book lies in Munoo's innocence, in his "naïve warm-heartedness, his love, and comradeship, his irrepressible curiosity and zest for life". He has an instinctive urge to live, to go on doing something in order to avoid starving. The Bombay scene with toiling, suffering, struggling, starving masses is at once vivid and realistic, where Munoo an insignificant part of the millions of half-fed and half-clad workers is "no more than a speck in this tide of humanity", and it is precisely for this reason that the story does not end here and the author transports him to the holiday-resort where he regains his identity. *Coolie* is a "cosmic painting of the lives of thousands of orphans, coolies, boy-servants, factory workers and rickshaw pullers, their health running down "through the hour-glass of Time". The

novel is a treatise on social evil at its sundry levels and phases”.

CONCLUSION

Deeply moved by abject poverty and innocence of India's toiling masses, It emerges as “an anguished cry, an indictment of the cruelty of the system, and a declaration of pity for the hero, the betrayed and the depraved Munoo. It is more than a social documentary, more than a tract for the times”.

REFERENCE

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