

# The Portrait of the Misery, the Agony and the Pain of the Oppressed People in the Indian society

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**Abstract**—Long considered the birthplace of civilization, India is currently plagued by a variety of societal ills. They are so many that the mere thought of them makes one cringe. There were social reformers who battled against these evils, but they were so entrenched that some of them still exist today. India is considered to have had several social problems from its founding. A portion of the population may revolt if the past is discussed, but it is crucial to understand the underlying causes of this prejudice. Caste has been used as the sole justification for this discrimination against and cruel, degrading treatment of a group of people. Caste, commonly referred to as a tribe, serves as the foundation for the classification and exclusion of various demographic groups based on their ancestry not just in India but also in other countries of Asia and Africa. Over 250 million people throughout the world still endure severe kinds of discrimination, including modern-day slavery and segregation, which frequently go unnoticed. Their complete realization of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights is severely hampered by caste. Since everyone in today's culture expects self-respect, Dalit authors have long loved writing autobiographies. Given how much importance they place on the authenticity of their experience, this is not unexpected. This paper portrait the Misery, the Agony and the Pain of the Oppressed People in the Indian society

**Index Terms**—Misery, Agony, Pain etc.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Comparing how outcasts are portrayed in Indian culture and highlighting the emotional anguish of the marginalized as it is portrayed in a few works by Mulk Raj Anand, Narendra Jadhav, and Mahasweta Devi are the goals of the current special research. The sadness, anguish, and grief of the underprivileged in our society, as well as the sufferings of women from all castes, have been truthfully depicted by all three

authors. The themes of oppression, alienation, and a passionate desire to revolt against the established social order and the affluent are present in all three authors. All these express the opinion that there is a need to treat all the human beings equally. The first of the three writers is Mulk Raj Anand, who is considered an outstanding figure of Indo-Anglian fiction. He has established himself as the Chief Spokesman of the Indo-Anglian literary naturalism with a non proletarian bias. All his novels have a strong social purpose. In an article entitled, *How I Became a Writer*, Anand himself says, "All my novels and short fiction arose from a long confession of nearly two thousand pages which I wrote from the compulsion of a morbid obsession with myself and the people who possessed me, deep in my conscience. This body soul search, in my autobiographical narrative, was narrated to the young daughter of a professor of philosophy, sometimes out of vanity, sometimes because of the urge to communicate the troubles of my bad conscience, and mostly from the burning and melting inevitably to the young poets' desire for verification. As no one would publish the enormous narrative, I took some of the characters or rather; the characters compelled me to put them down, in shorter, more compact, but still formless, novels". (*How I Became a Writer*, vi).

Mr. Anand, at some point of time, even complains that his works have been greeted as 'Communist propaganda' and the Illustrated Weekly of India is often content with a two-line dismissal of everything he writes. Mulk Raj Anand has often been branded as a social propagandist, and critical opinions are sharply divided on his claims to be considered as a serious literary artist. Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah says: "Mulk Raj Anand has had a long standing as a writer of fiction, but he has not had his share of praise from the serious literary critic. He has been dubbed a social

propagandist without being read and unfortunately the titles of his novels have had a good deal to do with the prevalent prejudice. It is good to remember that all art is, in a sense, propaganda, and it is the treatment that should decide. The social concerns and artistic preoccupations seem to take hold of Anand and by turns, and where the two fuse as, say, in 'Untouchable' the novel is safe and its course is one of absorbing human interest". (Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, 57). Mulk Raj Anand is the literary master and the leader of the downtrodden. As a writer, he tried to contribute what most of the Indian national leaders tried to do politically. As a delineator of Indian social life, he has his soft corner for the poor masses. His heart breaks for the downstream of society like untouchables, coolies, poor peasants or such others who have been cruelly exploited by the higher ranks of society.

In this way the problems taken into account in his novels include untouchability, religious hypocrisy, child-labour, economic exploitation, the plight of workers in a factory, the evil effects of caste system, superstition, belief in fate, class consciousness, partiality of Police, male chauvinism and such other various malpractices practised in Indian society. He focuses on these problems and tries to draw our attention with a view to realizing a better, egalitarian society may be formed where man is treated as man, and not on the basis of caste, class or creed. It is possible because the sufferers are not the victims of fate or God only, but of manmade society. It is the social force which is responsible in creating most of these problems due to lack of love, compassion, sympathy, and human consideration among men. His protest is in a constructive manner just to create a new society in a solid manner, least bothering about criticism of the privileged class. He recollects: "I certainly felt, in the midst of my own poverty and exile, the compulsion that it is better not to win applause by conforming to my establishment, but face the privileged orders and to claim the right to notice the existence of men like Bakha". (The Story of My Experiments with a white Lie, 17-18).

The novels of Anand force the existing society to go for self-awareness and introspection. Many atrocities that he attacks still appear in our society. His works are sources of unending inspiration for those organizations that work for a better society. Anand's opinion is evident in the novels that even the poor

and socially neglected people can raise to the heights if proper facilities and education are provided to them. His *Untouchable* is an example of social concerns which seek to emphasize the evil of untouchability by focusing attention on the miserable plight, suffering, poverty and degradation of a large section of Indian Society. It is the story of not one Bakha, but the whole sufferings of the untouchable class as a whole. Anand's will for modernity is evident in Bakha's thrill beyond control when he hears about the flush-out system.

Anand is considered a reformer; he does so because it is one of his aims to disturb his readers' complacency to shock them out of conventional attitudes, and encourage them to make a fresh approach to experience. It is rather a narrative technique. In *Untouchable* it is that of a progressive revolutionary, of a humanist who is all compassion for the working, downtrodden classes, and social outcasts. Being a realist, whose social realism has an unmistakable streak of Marxism in it, he carries his readers along, wins their confidence and establishes a close, harmonious relationship with them as well as with his characters. Anand lays stress on the demands of the present; he refuses to be bound by stale custom and orthodoxy. In fact, his novels convey emotional truths as well as social realities and the beauty of his art of fiction are well realized by way of analysis and interpretation of social problems and of corrupt practices as seen in *Coolie*, *Untouchable*, *The Big Heart* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*. He combines wide experience with architectonic skill, cosmic vision with objective truth, as in *Coolie*, a novel instinct with epic amplitude and magnificence. It is a fact that he never allows idealism to eclipse his vision of social reality.

Like Hindi writer Prem Chand, Anand too is a serious novelist, a passionate reformer and a critic of life who traces the roots of social injustice and moral degradation to the disruption based on co-operation and brotherhood and the growth of inequality and tyranny based on caste and class. Anand garnered a rich harvest of experience before he assayed his first attempt at storytelling, despite the early age at which he has published *Untouchable*. True, he allowed his realism to include every biographical and biological factor, record every breath, and analyze every individual thought of his characters, but none would question the skill with which he observes life in its

essential detail and describe it with great accuracy rarely. He was born into an atmosphere redolent with dissatisfaction of things as they were an atmosphere into which he infused his ardent belief that things could be bettered. In practice, therefore, he rejected the theory of Art for Art's sake; for there is abundant evidence that he was supremely conscious of a mission and that he definitely started out in many of his novels to reform and to right the wrongs by means of subtle propaganda. He was a democrat with a passion for humanity.

Anand appears to be universal in respect of the lower classes only. Just as no writer before Dickens had handled the English people, similarly no Indo-English writer before Anand had devoted so sustained and sympathetic an attention to the poor masses, outcastes and the neglected lot of the society. In *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, Anand reveals the curse of untouchability, exploitation, child labor, social governance, social set up of society, customs, religion, belief, prejudices and the theme of the miserable masses is studied in both a rural and urban setting where hunger and starvation are caused by direct denial of their rightful due to the working class by the social system and the rulers. This is nothing but a reflection of the society. Both these novels deal with the theme of untouchability, exploitation, poverty, hunger and the suffering of the Indian masses. The theme of suffering caused by vicious circumstances in life has been realistically depicted, and the heroic struggle of the central figures, against heavy odds, raises the novels to the lofty heights of an epic.

Anand has taken the theme of his novels from real life and so his novel reflects nothing but social realism. He brought to fictional life Bakha, his boyhood companion, the untouchable sweeper boy, in *Untouchable*. Anand's mother abused Bakha for 'polluting' her son when Bakha carried home a bleeding Anand, hurt by a stone. Bakha is reviled by caste Hindus as he cleans latrines; but Anand, the writer, captures Bakha's pride in his work: he tackles his odious job with a conscientiousness that invests his movement with beauty. The novel was not only a powerful social tract, but a remarkable technical feat as in a single day's action the author builds round his hero a spiritual crisis broad enough to embrace the whole of India. Forster wrote in his introduction: "It

has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it". (ix).

Anand continued his interest in social themes with his next few novels dealing with the destiny of the working class in India. *Coolie* centered on Munoo, an orphan boy dying of tuberculosis brought on by malnutrition. It exposes the whole system through its victim's tale of exploitation. Even in the dreariest of the surroundings, the little hero retains his qualities of warm-heartedness, love, comradeship and curiosity. In *The Village*, inspired by the experience of his family whose land was taken away by the landlord of the village, the novelist explores the state of the poor peasantry under British rule. The underdog protagonists Bakha and Munoo sail in the same boat as far as personal suffering is concerned. There is a similar central theme in *Untouchable* and *Coolie* social exploitation, the exploitation of the poor and the under-privileged by the forces of capitalism, industrialism and colonialism. In Anand's *Coolie*, Munoo is denied his fundamental right to life and happiness and is exploited and made to suffer, till he dies of consumption. The novelist makes it quite clear that Munoo is not the only victim of such exploitation. He represents millions of those for whom such exploitation and denial of life and happiness is the lot of everyday life. The lot of the poor is equally wretched and miserable whether in rural or urban India. Whether in a village like Bilaspur or a small town like Sham Nagar or big cities like Daulatpur and Bombay the story of suffering is the same.

Such painful journey of Bakha and Munoo is a unique feature in the study of comparative aspects found beautifully woven in these extraordinary epics of misery by Anand. Both the novels have similarities in their social background, such as exploitation by landlords and masters, ill fate caused by surroundings, social beliefs, cumulative torture, unfulfilled desires in life. Yet the protagonists make a long painful journey in life with the hope of betterment and at last both Bakha and Munoo are crushed under the heavy burdens of life and get disintegrated into ashes with the so called pure and religious dust of mother India. Mulk Raj Anand has presented the miserable condition of social by backward classes and of coolies in India. Both these novels have been written with a purpose. These novels are a powerful indictment of modern,

capitalistic Indian society and of its feudal system with the shameless and tragic exploitation of the underdog and the poor. Both the protagonists want to live but the society does not allow them to do so. They die of exploitation, poverty and hunger. If the poor are treated humanely, most of the social problems can be solved easily. Humanism is the only solution to all the problems.

Jadhav highlights the struggle, agony, depression and the determination of Damu in his struggle for survival in Mumbai. Damu survives through the Great Depression in the 1930s. He participates in all the major agitations led by Ambedkar while working hard to bring up his family. Through his struggle for survival in Mumbai and through his participation in the Ambedkarite movement, Damu evolves as a distinct individual. In his "Authors note," Jadhav describes Damu, the central character of his memoir, in these words:

"Damu was not a leader...but he refused to define himself by circumstances and aimed at shaping his own destiny. Damu had no formal education...yet he steered his children to educational heights and inculcated in them the spirit of excellence. Damu was not a *guru*... but he taught his children to believe in themselves and reclaim human dignity. Damu was often humbled...yet he maintained, 'Goats are sacrificial offerings, not lions. Damu was an ordinary man, they said...but he did an extraordinary thing: he stood up against the tyranny of the caste system.'" (xi-xii).

In this view, Damu is a rebel against 'the caste system' who shaped his own destiny and that of his children through education. He believed in himself and declared that he is the master of his own will. What is striking here is the transformation of Damu into an autonomous individual who carved out of a life of his own. We see that Damu is different from other Mahars. In the very first scene of the text, we meet a Damu who thinks very differently from the other Mahars about the Yeskar duty. "They are told 'he (Damu) was not willing to conform to tradition'" (122). Damu and Sonu Continue to shape their modern Dalit identity and reassert their humanity through their participation in Ambedkar's social movement. They meticulously practise Babasaheb's teachings on many aspects of life including cleanliness and grooming. The transformation of Damu's family is complete when it acquires

education and middle-class values. Note Sonu's words:

"We began to bathe daily and dress neatly with freshly washed clothes and tie our hair into a neat bun. We kept our house immaculately clean with all the brass pots and pans polished and shining." (178).

Jadhav's family evolves into a new middle-class family and becomes part of the global middle class in the 1990s. His mobility from Mumbai, the financial capital of India and a metropolitan city, to Washington, D.C., the U.S.A. a cosmopolitan city is suggestive of the transformation of the Mahar family into an urban middle class one. What one should not miss here is the context of liberalization of Indian Economy in the 1990s.

Jadhav's "mobility" is closely linked to the liberalization of Indian economy, i.e., making India part of the processes of globalization. As is well-known, this required various forms of structural adjustment, including a subjective transformation from what is depicted as dependence to self-reliance and self-help. I am emphasizing the significance of the opening up of new institutional spaces and the emergence of "a new geography of centrality" that connects major international financial centers like Mumbai and Washington, D.C. It is in the context of globalization, and the restructuring of the Indian economy, that Jadhav configures the spatial hierarchies in his *Outcaste*. While the village is the centre of the nation in the national order, the city is the centre of the global order of the 1990s. This reorganizing of the spatial hierarchies of the local, national and global is crucial for an analytic understanding of the "transnational identity" that Jadhav constructs in *Outcaste*. The reflection of village as a centre of "inhuman traditions" and of the city as a space of "touchability" is the recurrent theme of the text. It is in Mumbai that Damu and Sonu reject their ascribed identities as Mahars/untouchables and assert their new identity as Dalits/neo-Buddhists.

In the presentation of village life, the narrative viewpoint is that of an outsider's of an urban middle class individual who is not familiar with village life or with the Mahar world. This narrator's perspective is informed by a certain notion of universal human rights. This is evident in the repeated comparison between "the animal" and "the human," as well as in the sense that this humanity is somehow "natural,"

something inherent in some people. What is stressed in *Outcaste* is the “humanness” of untouchable Mahars and their right to demand dignity and equality. The narrative of Dalit human rights violations is addressed to the global readers and institutions. The notion of “human rights” is not linked in the citizenship of a nation. In other words, Jadhav’s notion of human rights discourse is a moral discourse that invokes the neutrality and moral authority of global civil society.

Jadhav feels that he crossed “the caste lines” through his achievements. We must pay close attention to two aspects of Jadhav’s narration of his success story. One is the description of the caste system in terms of untouchability and caste-based menial jobs. The other is the assertion of individual autonomy through his newly acquired international middle-class identity. Jadhav’s construction of certain caste practices as untouchability is similar to the discursive strategy of essentialization of untouchability in Dalit discourses on caste. Jadhav represents himself as a deracinated individual self in his desire for freedom from caste. He insists on the capacity to realize his desire to become a global citizen. Jadhav’s desire for “self-realization” and his identification with a cosmopolitan ideal set himself as a distinct individual in contrast to his relatives and Dalits in the village.

The literary works of Mahasweta Devi have been translated widely into various Indian languages. But what is commendable about Seagull’s publishing program to have her representational works translated into English is that the English reading public, well beyond the frontiers of India, could now have access to her socially-committed literature. But even as a ‘faithful bigamist,’ any translator of her works is faced with a difficult task to deal with their original and distinct flavours due to her absorption and use of local and oral history and her use of words which are far from being available in any standard dictionary. However, with the books under review, the translators have worked closely with the author to avoid misreading. Even, at times, English equivalents of Indian words, easily found in dictionaries, are rejected to retain the originals with or without italics. Further, each of the books ends with copious glossaries or notes of the author’s enriching use of Bengali which includes tribal dialects. However, despite an exhaustive glossary, a few words

like *chapyia*, *Sarjomba*, *bhatta* in *Outcast*, for example – are not included in it.

Mahasweta Devi’s *Outcast: Four Stories* can be read as the voiced articulations of the tribal ‘Others.’ Debasish Chattopadhyay suggests that Mahasweta Devi’s voice does not simply ventriloquism the plight of those at the edges of civilization, but goes deeper to analyze and reflect upon how the power structures that engender marginalization are replicated in the texture of the society of the marginalized. *Outcast: Four Short Stories* deals with the fate of four women characters that, belong to the ‘Other’ world, who are doubly marginalized and looked down upon even by those who are usually regarded as marginalized in Indian society. Dalit literature is generic in the sense that all other marginalized and oppressed groups of people are under its sway and sweep. It has struck a keynote awaking their conciseness for forging their identities. It has given ample inspiration and insight to the writers emerging from tribal and nomadic communities. Even now a large majority of women are engaged in unclean, inferior occupation such as sweeping, scavenging and working in dumping grounds, rag-picking and also in prostitution. These women have to face steep discrimination in the matters of social relations and employment due to their engagement in these occupations. Women constitute half of total population, but are unable to get equal share in active politics. Dalit Women also faced many problems in performing their duties due to illiteracy, lack of information and dependency on the male members of their families.

Women who belong to weaker section of society such as Dalits and Adivasis have realized their double exploitation, double inequality and double injustice. There is a double jeopardy. The empowerment can be achieved only through education, employment and equality which are the sum and substance of Ambedkar’s liberation movement. Dalit’s problem and women’s problem are products of *Chaturvarna*. *Manusmrithi* denied education to women. Mahasweta Devi feels that the gap between the rich and the poor is now widening very fast and the Tribals, Dalits and minorities are at the receiving end. She is against mining, as they deprive Tribals and the poor living in rural areas. Their land and livelihood is grabbed in name of development without any proper compensation. She claims that the sufferers, the victims the innocents are often turned as terrorists

and the state uses arbitrary powers to subjugate the rights of the minorities. A strong undercurrent of empathy for them can be observed in her writings.

## II. CONCLUSION

The present exclusive study is aimed at comparing the portrayal of the outcastes in the Indian society and exposing the mental sufferings of the marginalized which has been depicted in the select works of Mulk Raj Anand, Narendra Jadhav and Mahasweta Devi. All the three writers have portrayed realistically the misery, the agony and the pain of the oppressed in our society and also the sufferings of the women belonging to all castes. In all the three writers the theme of oppression, the theme of alienation and of the radical feeling to rebel against the existing system in the society and also against the wealthy are seen. All these express the opinion that there is a need to treat all the human beings equally.

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