

ISSN No.-2320-351X

PATLIPUTRA JOURNAL OF INDOLOGY

(Half-yearly Refereed Research Journal)

Vol. - 10 :: Issue : 3 :: January 2018



Editor In Chief

Prof. Deepak Kumar

**PCIR
PATLIPUTRA CENTRE FOR INDOLOGICAL RESEARCH
PATNA**

www.patliputrajournal.com

Journal No. 41629 in U.G.C. approved Journal list.

PATLIPUTRA JOURNAL OF INDOLOGY

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Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable : A Realistic Story

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Mulk Raj Anand, a great Indian Novelist is also known as father of the Indo English literature. Almost all his novels deal with the real picture of the society which is divided on the basis of caste and creed. So many writers tried to represent the difference on the basis of caste and creed but no one has presented as beautifully as Anand did. Anand presents the exploitation of lower caste and ignored people of the society.

Anand depicts through 'Bhakha' of untouchable and 'Munoo' of Coolie, the real picture of exploitation on the basis of caste and creeds. In this context R.K. Srinivasa Iyengar has rightly observed about the theme of Anand's novel.

It was Anand's aim to stray lower still
Than ever Sarat Chandra or Premchand,
to show to the west that there was none
in the orient than could be inferred from
Omar Khayyam, Tagore or Kipling and
so he described a waif like Munno in
Coolie and untouchable like Bakha, and
Indentured labourer like Gangu and set
Them right at the centre of the scheme of
Cruelty and exploitation that India held
In its vicious grip. (Iyengar 264)

Anand's six novels-Untouchable, Coolie, Two Leaves and a Bud, The Village, Across the Black Waters, and The Sward and the Sickle describes the miseries of the poor and their struggle for the upliftment.

Untouchable describes the life of downtrodden people of the Hindu society. The Hindu society is divided on the basis of castes, subcastes to run the society smoothly not to create breaches among the people of the society. But generally this caste system became a curse of the society.

If a person born in a particular caste he is suppose to line in this Caste and forced to do the work in accordance with the caste even after being competent to do the better job. They have to like, eat, marry and die within the caste system which has been allotted to them. Anand's first novel Untouchable brought up this evil and wanted a change in the society and in the lives of the downtrodden people who were being exploited in the society.

Untouchable is a story of a sweeper boy, Bhakha who is also son of a sweeper Anand has presented a realistic story of the protagonist (Bhakha) and in which the untouchable lived and the surrounding Anand was living with his father in an Indian regiment Anand further writes :

The outcastes' 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 scavenger, the leather-worker, the washerman, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society, 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 smell and altogether the ramparts of human and animals refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony and the ugliness, the squalor and misery which lay within it, made it an 'untouchable' place to live in. (Anand II)

(The protoyonist of the untouchable Bhakha begins his day with his father's world.

Get up, ohe you bhakhiya, ohe son of pig !

..get up and attend to the latrines of the

Sepoys will be angry. (15)

But he is hard worker and responsible boy. In this way, Anand has not only presented the drawback of the caste system but also the inhuman treatment of the elite class. Anand has presented the irony of the society that a person who does the job of cleaning and keeping the society neat and clean is called untouchable.

They think we are mere dirt because
We clean their dirt. (89)

Anand describes the extreme of humiliation to the protagonist, Bhakha who has to wait for long time beside the well for the help of upper caste to pour the water in his pitcher. People of the lower castes were not allowed to touch the brook or pounes as they would contaminate the stream. They had to wait for long hours beside the well.

Bhakha position in the society is not determined by the duty and hard work but by the birth in the lower class. He is being humiliated at each and every place only due to his birth in the lower caste. He is being treated like worse than animals and people of the upper caste use the word defiled, and 'polluted' for him.

The outcastes were not allowed to mount the Platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it. The Hindu of these upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream. They had no well of their own.... (26)

Anand has described duality and hypocrisy of the society Bhakha is not being allowed to enter into the temple and the extreme of humility is described by Anand that he is not being allowed in the market place without crying "Posh, Posh, Sweeper coming. On the other hand Anand place the picture of Bhakha's sister, Sohini who came to clean the courtyard of Pandit Kalinath. The Pandit Kalinath makes a failure attempt to molest her chastity. Then after Bhakha's sister cries and Pandit Kalinath exposed but he (Pandit) started to cry "Polluted, polluted and accused her for defiling the platform and polluting him."

In this way Anand places the reality of the society that a girl belonging to the lower cast, whose only touch may pollute them, but does not hesitate to embrace the sweeper girl to satisfy his lust. Anand places the duality at the society that if a person of upper caste or educated does the wrong deed, we do not accept their fault instead we find the fault in the lower caste people. The suffering is not only up to Bhakha but he is representative of all people belonging to the lower caste. The suffering of the people are not due to their destiny but due to the surrounding people of the elite class. The fact is that people belonging to the lower caste are treated worse than animals, even they get some love but the life of these people is hell. The story of Bhakha presents the reality of the society and emotional truth. Anand is the writer of common man as he had seen the plight and predicament of the lower caste very closely. And finally he exposes the agony and anguish of the downtrodden. Anand wants to modify the society with the help of literature as he himself says :

I feel only in fiction which is the transformation through the imagination of the concrete life, in words, sounds and vibration, one may porbe into the many layers of human consciousness in its various phases. (Sharma5)

Bhakha meets with Hutchinson who advices him to become christen as in the eyes of Christianity all are equal. Secondly he should wait for the praches of Gandhiji who calls tham Harijan and request to end untouchability and caste system. As Anand writes his feeling in to the following way :

As the brief Indian twilight came and went a sudden impulse shot through the transformation of space and time, and gathered all the elements that were dispersed in the stram of his soul a tentative decision. I shall go and tell father all that Gandhi said abut us, the whispered to himself, and what that clever poet said perhaps I can find the poet on the way and ask him about his machine. (Anand 175-176)

Anand has described the true voice of feeling and suffering of the untouchable. The novels end with the hope of that discrimination in the Indian society will end one day. Anand also hopes that India will be free frm social evil and al will become equal in the cociety.

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Annual Subscription (Individual)	₹	500
Annual Subscription (Institutional)	₹	600
Single Copy	₹	300

Subscription should be sent to the editor Prof. Deepak Kumar, Patliputra Centre for Indological Research, 204, Shiv Apartment, Opposite Gayatri Temple, P.O. Lohiya Nagar, Kankarbagh, Distt.- Patna, Bihar, Pin Code - 800 020

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