

The predicament of women in MulkRaj Anand's Untouchable

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Abstract

No one knows what a woman suffers... How much she has to bear ,silently and without protest,the abuse and the condemnation.

-The Big Heart

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the greatest writers in India.He paved the way for social reformation through his novels.In Untouchable novel he portrayed the character Sohini as oppressed one. India is a traditionally bound one. Women play crucial role in our society, but there is a great bias towards women. Anand's purpose was a genuine one.He wished to create a newworld through his writings. Atrocities, social oppression brought agony to the character of sohini.Temple Pontiff's mischief ,other caste women's illtreatment towards Sohini.Anand highlighted predicament of women in the novel of Untouchable. He had shown the consistency of purpose in his novels to portray the inequalities.His main purpose was to create the egalitarian society.

KEYWORDS: Predicament-Bias-Atrocities-Social oppression.

In theoretically way woman is treated as an angel. Most human societies are male dominated and so woman is grudgingly given a secondary status, that is, when she is not positively subjected to inhuman tyranny.

It is said that man's cruelty towards man is exceeded only by man's cruelty to women. This is particularly in our country, inspite of the fact that our constitution provides equal rights to men and women.Time was when woman was a prey to such evils as Purdah, female infanticide ,child marriage,dowry system, enforced widowhood, and denial of education. Though these evils have now been removed ,totally or partially by the constant efforts of several reformers, woman is continued to be treated, by and large , as an inferior creature,a pleasure giving commodity, or a child bearing machine.She is made to act the part of an un paid domestic servant with a marginally superior status. She is subjected to perpetual torture by a demanding husband, a ruthless, mother-in-law and a nagging sister-in-law.

Anand ,the champion of the downtrodden outcastes, he does not fail to portray the predicament of woman in his novels. He gives a realistic picture of the inevitable struggle of women against the degradation of the female by 99% of the male chauvinists in our country.

Most of Anand's heros – Bakha, Munoo, Ananta are motherless. In Untouchable, Bakha recalls nostalgically how his mother used to wake him up with a brass tankard of tea and give him tasty things to eat. She is an inspiring person "So loving ,so good, and with all generous, giving, always giving, mother, giver of life, Mahalakshmi."

Anand gives due importance to the sister figure also in his novels. Sohini in *Untouchable* shows great love for her brother. It is said that she feels the mother's instinct to quench Bakha's thirst. She manages work at home and outside efficiently.

Some of you may have heard a disreputable ballad which is popular in England. The first stanza tells the whole story. It runs like this :

She was poor but she was honest
Victim of a rich man's game,
For she loved the village squire.
And she lost her maiden name.

This ballad is always sung in an ironical tone, because everyone knows that the girl who is poor but honest is a fragment of the middle class imagination. That is so in Europe, and I do not suppose it is different in India.

Sohini's character is exemplified as the victim in the Indian social hierarchy. Anand paints her as a young and good looking teenager, "a slim, pale brown figure, soft and warm and glowing, shot through with a luster that sets off the rings in her ears and the bangles on her arms to a ravishing effect." Not only she is beautiful, she is also modest, charming, and hardworking. Caste exploitation is expressed in a well manner in this novel. Sohini's good looks and elegant manners make her both loved and hated. When she appears at the well to fetch water from the caste well. Washer woman Gulabo middle aged woman shows superiority and abuses her. When Sohini gently points out that she has done nothing, Gulabo tries to make assault on Sohini. The weaver's wife interference prevents the violence at the well.

Sohini's beauty brings agony in her life. The temple pontiff, Pandit Kalinath casts his eyes over the assembled women and is charmed towards the beauty of Sohini. He calls out to bring her pitcher for him to pour the water on a priority basis. Pandit Kalinath tries to usurp the chastity of Sohini at the temple. She screams. The priest at once turns the table by shouting 'polluted, polluted'. Sohini's character is pathetic due to the atrocities of hypocritical individuals of higher caste.

Anand does not function as an ambassador to show bias towards any particular class in the novel. He analyses the psychology of both the upper class Hindus and the untouchables and paves the way how the problem is. Anand's portrayal of Bakha, his sister, father's humiliations are boldly highlighted.

Outcaste's tragic ones are revealed through episodes like the pollution incident in the market, the vituperations at the well, the molestation of sister.

Indian society is so rigidly caste-ridden that people who do menial jobs are considered low-born, outcastes or untouchables. They live in object poverty and humiliation for some three thousand years. As a matter of fact, the message of equality and brotherhood preached by Hindu culture has been far away from its reality. Caste

consciousness has controlled the society and as a result of these untouchables remained helpless sufferers in these helpless situations for centuries.

Literature is like a vast canvas in a frame work in which writers portray their characters. Literature records life and society's response to wit which is embodied in the author's image portrayed in his creation. An exploration of the image of woman in literature enables us to access the writer's vision of them.

The image of woman is central to the study of literature all over the world. Altering the context and the special meaning involved, what Shakespeare told about Cleopatra is indeed true of the woman image general that

“Age can not wither

Nor custom stale her infinite variety.”¹

Woman has inspired literature and has been its pivotal theme too. She herself is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman's presence in all literature is all spreading. This is true of Indian literature in English also. Indian literature written in English is, perhaps, smaller in volume compared to the output in several regional languages.

The social deformity of the Hindu society has not changed much for ages. Gross atrocities are committed on Shudras and Panchamas by high caste. Hindus at one place or another even now in the modern age of democracy.

Some amenities are so common ones in our society. Drinking water is the basic requirement of life. It is not available to dalits. As apparently, their dirty touch will pollute the public wells and ponds. Sohini, Bakha sister, has to wait patiently till a Brahmin Pundit offers her water. The humiliation and torture of young Sohini for a pitcherful of water is one of the poignant highlights of the novel. Bakha is an attractive person. His physique is distinctive, he is described as intelligent, able bodied and strong. The novel poses oppressiveness in Indian ethos. Vital concerns of clean and unclean, healthy and unhealthy environments form a central symbolic structure in the novel. Anand wants to create egalitarian society and wishes to wipe away every drop of tears in the eyes of victims through his writings.

In our Indian society women became birth slaves by rigid Indian traditions. some men act like animals, and question that women have no heart at all. In our country men play dual role towards women's rights.

A renowned telugu writer Sri Sri in his famous book Maha prasthanam , he relates about the universal problem of oppression.

“Where is there a reason for pride

Looking at any nation's story?

All history of human glory

Is man against man, in gory strife
History stinks with flesh to the dead
Echoes the groans of the helpless poor
The course of history plots the road
Of men displaced-uprooted brood.”²

Inequalities, hostility, selfishness, machinations, jealousies, and conflicts have paved the way for marching of history through gullies and disguises. The past has been drenched in tears of women and children. One can only find moaning in the history the ruins of families, the massacres of communities and the anguished cries of the helpless.

In Untouchable Novel, Mulk Raj Anand Projected the mental agony of the downtrodden people. He adheres to the aim of depicting life of the dalits and making the readers aware of those traditional vices that hamper them from becoming progressive and modern. The main intention of writings about the dalits is to highlight their sociological problems and to draw our attention to the miseries and sufferings of the untouchables, in that motivating the victims of such pains for amelioration of their life. Indeed, Anand paves the way to bring reformation in our Indian society through his novels. His attempts are commendable one to fulfill the aspirations of the dalits, untouchables and women. Anand wishes women should possess self respect through the character of sohini. Anand is an idealist, not only great writer he has shown some solutions to the problems of Dalits in our India through this novel.

References:

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