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Mulk Raj Anand's 'untouchable': Resistance against discrimination

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Abstract

'Some life events have a profound effect on the human subconscious', and Mulk Raj Anand also witnessed such incidents which marks a deep impact on his mind when his aunt 'Devaki' committed suicide because she was excommunicated by her family for sharing a meal with a Muslim women. This incident roused the inherent sense of justice in Anand when he was a child and this sense of justice is well reflected in his novels. His works may appropriately be called as "a literature of protest".

Keywords: Mulk Raj Anand's, untouchable, subconscious', excommunicated

Introduction

Anand's novels strikes hard at the roots of sectionalism, snobbery, contempt, etc. which cause the modern man's degeneration and despair. Being a son of a soldier, Mulk Raj Anand lives with his family in his father's army barrack and he used to play or interact with all kinds of people in the regiment during his childhood as well as in his adolescence, this gave him the opportunity to observe closely the social fabric of our society. These early playmates and friends became with the necessary imaginative attitude and amendment the protagonist of his novel 'Untouchable'. Untouchable deals with the burning topic "untouchability" that prevail in the Indian society during 1930's and which is still prevalent in our society.

Bakha who is the protagonist the novel belongs to the downtrodden class of the Indian society is a young boy who is lazy to get-up from his bed in the morning and always woke up by his father Lakha's insensitive call "Get up, ohe you Bakhya, ohe son of a pig! Get up and attend to the latrines or sepoys will be angry". Bakha doesn't clean latrines by his own choice but because he is born in caste that has been assigned to do an unclean job so the society can remain clean.

He remains clean even though he had to clean the dirt. He has a strong fascination for English clothes and English way of life. The insults and abuses of the high caste Hindus infuriates him and he is very conscious about the oppressions he is facing everyday and there is a desire in him to revolt against it. He is not passive as his father Lakha who symbolizes the common untouchable man who has accepted the work of cleaning the latrines as his fate. Actually, the centuries of servility have made him tame and passive, incapable of any resentment or revolt. Lakha regards the high class Hindus as superior to them. Mulk raj Anand through these characters has made a commentary on man's inhumanity on fellow human beings through centers of power, castes and marginalization.

Anand deals with the hypocrisy and injustice in his novels. At a very early age Anand was aware of the religious hypocrisy and bigotry in Indian society. These awareness makes him a strong critic of the basic elements of the Indian tradition. Anand doesn't even hesitate to throw floodlights on the darkest spots of the Hinduism. Through the character of Pandit Kalinath a temple priest who poses himself as a pious man, Anand shows the hypocrisy of the Hindu society. The untouchables were not allowed to collect water from the wells that is being used by the higher caste Hindus. They have to wait literally for somebody to show mercy on them to give them a pail of water. One day while Bakha's sister Sohini waiting on well for somebody to show mercy on her for a pitcher of water, Pandit Kalinath the temple priest agrees to draw water from well to Sohini and in the process he feels attracted by Sohini's youthful charm and beauty.

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He asks her to come to his house to clean the courtyard and the latrine. Sohini goes and Kalinath takes that as an advantage and tries to violate her chastity. She cries and screams for help and in turns Kalinath shouts telling polluted! Polluted! Polluted! after feeling the presence of people around his house.

Through the episode of Pandit Kalinath and Sohini Mulk Raj Anand draws the attention towards the miserable condition of dalit womens also. Anand tries to show that how dalit womens are victims of double discrimination. Women's from dalit community find themselves to be at the intersection of caste and gender. As victims of double discrimination they are often positioned by society at bottom of caste, class and gender hierarchies. They have always been the primary target of discrimination from patriarchy, which exists within their own community and from those outside their community. Mulk raj Anand has himself seen the misery, wretchedness and squalor of the downtrodden in the Indian society. His heart and sole rebelled against the injustice being done to them. He is more a social reformist than mere a novelist.

Mulk raj Anand is the first novelist in English to choose as his raw material the lower class life of the Indian society. In his novel "untouchable", he use his little imagination and keeps close to ground realities. Anand plays a strong role in addressing the evils that plague the contemporary Indian society. It became Anand's aim as a novelist to focus attention on the sufferings of downtrodden and the untouchables. In "untouchable" Anand has given a realistic depiction of the agony and sufferings of the downtrodden. The author gives us the glimpse of society where man's first identity is his caste and this is well evident in an episode of the novel when the protagonist of the novel Bakha while playing hockey with his mates injured a little boy. He lifts the boy up and takes him to his home but Bakha couldn't escape the treacherous punishment from the boys mother telling that Bakha has polluted her son by touching him. Bakha could never understand how saving a human being is equal to polluting a boy.

Casteism, is systematic form of discrimination which was originally established two thousand years ago as division of profession or varna, however with time, it transformed into a system of social hierarchy. This system of caste division was corrupted into becoming a mechanism which validated the discrimination of people by bringing a change in the discursive knowledge.

Conclusion

Ultimately, conditioning them over centuries to believe in their inferiority as human being. Dalit communities were restricted to professions such as cleansing, manual scavenging and sanitation work. They were deprived of their rights to resources such as land, education, justice and in turn were subjected to countless atrocities. Up at the lowest class of the caste system, the Dalit community have found themselves to be at the receiving end of extreme forms of physical, mental and emotional torture. Mulk raj Anand through his novel "untouchable" wants to educate his readers about the caste system, untouchability and the evils of Indian society that needs to be uprooted. Anand exposes the bitter reality of the Indian society and Hinduism. He is concerned about the complete liberation of marginalized and exploited.

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