

SUBALTERN VOICES IN THE NOVEL UNTOUCHABLE BY MULK RAJ ANAND**D.M. Bawane**Dept. of English, Arts, Commerce and Science College, Tukum, Chandrapur
dilip3bawane@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The Novel has been measured as a medium of conveying thoughts, feelings and experiences. Indian Novel whether in English or in any other languages has a discrete quality and uniqueness which calls for serious critical attentions. Indian English novels demonstrate its social concern, realism and its parallelism to common man so Indian English Novelists exemplify their cultural perspectives of people and express their hopes and aspirations. Mulk Raj Anand is a humanist and has deep intellectual concern for humanity and his novel Untouchable is powerful documentation of subalterns who are suffering from socially setup manacles. The present research paper tries to find out how the term subaltern is applicable in Indian context and how the select novel expresses the voices of subaltern. The novel Untouchable offers a remarkable opening for the Indian English writers to explore new world of subalterns. It states a hope both for the untouchable Hindus and India, bringing the philosophy of Gandhi which efforts to raise consciousness with the purpose of removing the caste system as well as hierarchical system of the Indian culture.

Keywords: subaltern, untouchability, oppression, subjugation, suppression.

Introduction

The term Subaltern has been defined by different theorists and scholars in different ways. Lexically, the English word subaltern came from the Latin word sub-alternus which implies an under other. In that way, the word subaltern refers to the inferiority of someone or something. The Oxford English dictionary defines subaltern as both a noun and an adjective. As a noun, a subaltern is “a lower rank British officer” while as an adjective, subaltern stands for lower rank people in all respects. Most studies conflate the word subaltern with several synonymous terms including subordinated, downtrodden, marginalized and oppressed.

Antonio Gramsci first applied the term subalterns to the Italian downtrodden, specifically Southern Italian workers marginalized by the hegemonic politics of the Fascist party. Indian scholars, namely, Guha, Spivak and others applied the term in a broad sense to South Asian subalterns from both colonial and postcolonial times. Nowadays, subaltern has become a euphemism for all browbeaten people suffering under the oppression of elite groups.

The term subaltern has been adapted to post-colonial studies from the work of the Subaltern Studies group to histories, who aimed to promote a systematic discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian Studies. “It is used in Subaltern Studies as a name for the general

attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, and office or in any other way” (Guha 2000, 3).

Recently the term Subaltern is used in broad sense as synonym for minorities, subjugated women, refugees, colonial subjects, the illiterate, and children whose voices have been muted. To bring consciousness to the oppressed, marginalized or so-called Subalterns which shall help them to move from margins to the centre of the society the Postcolonial writers have been writing tirelessly. Religion is used by the aristocratic people like Brahmins to defend a strongly defined ordered structure of society to control the economically lower-class people. The hierarchical structure brings caste system in practice which has been determined by one’s profession inherited by birth.

Discussion

The status of subalterns is imposed mainly on the lower caste and lower-class people. They are common victims and they accept suppression as they do not have the economic and political power to fight back the upper-class people’s supremacy. They cannot get the voice to state out their condition and designate themselves before the world. The concept of subaltern includes not only the untouchables but also all the poor

and marginalized section of the society. These subalterns own very few chances to transform their fortune in society which is dominated by the upper class which closes the options like consciousness, education and equal rights to raise their status. Literature is tool which can the ingenuousness to fight for the cause of suppressed people. Like other literatures from different places of the world, Indian English writers have marked those subaltern concerns with special attention in their writing.

Untouchable (1935) occurs to be the first novel written by Mulk Raj Anand under the deep influence of Mahatma Gandhi. It is an archetypal novel dealing with the worst evil of Indian society that is untouchability perpetrated by the Varna system Propounded by Laws of Manu. The Novel focusses on the wretched life of subalterns who try to change their existing state by entering the centre from the margin, but their attempts falls apart when it comes to face reality. Anand described the real condition of Subalterns, their mentality and reality. In the Indian cultural context, subalternity occurs on the basis of caste, class and gender. A great destruction has been done by the caste system to the people of our country. The condition was not different under the British rule. The caste system is deep-rooted in our country from the ancient time. A social evil, untouchability is by-product of caste system. There are four main castes in Hindu Society - the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vishay's and the Sudras. The Brahmins, being considered almost near to the God, symbolised the highest class in the society. The warriors, Kshatriyas were called the defenders of the country. The Vaishayas, being interest in money, were labelled producer of wealth occupied a position lower to the former. The Sudras were the labourers who perform menial jobs of sweeping, cleaning etc. The sweepers and scavengers were considered as untouchables because of carrying out the filthy jobs. The sweepers and scavengers had to take away the human dung with their hands and it was thought that a touch by a sweeper or a scavenger would have the effect of polluting a Hindu high caste.

Untouchable, being a protest novel, invited the attention of the people, in which Mulk Raj Anand has condemned the social evil of caste system. While expressing purpose behind the creation of *Untouchable* he says, "Untouchable was in its sources a ballad born of the freedom I had tried to win for truth against the age-old lies of the Hindus by which they upheld discrimination. The profound thoughts of the upper orders in ancient India about caste were often noble. Someone in the great Mahabharata had cried, "Caste, caste - There is no caste!" And I wanted to repeat this truth to the "dead souls" from the compassion of myself explanation in the various Hindu hells, in the hope that I would, myself come clean after I had been through sewer, as it were" (George, 19).

The novel examines the hopelessness of outcasts or working-class people and their anger against upper caste. The character of subaltern Bakha is a unique creation in the realm of Indian English literature. Anand brings subaltern Bakha to the lime light and gives him a voice. He shows how Bakha, faces difficulties while going out from the separated slum (village) in which he lives to the city, how the hostile and humiliating attitude of Brahmins, priest of the temple and all other upper caste people nuisances his innocent mind. Bakha is shown not only suffering by physical humiliation but also by psychological. Bakha is portrayed in realistic manner how he suffers physically as well as psychologically. E. M. Forster has rightly said, "The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion" (Forster 1935:7-10).

Anand's childhood day's friendship with an out-caste boy has been a source in creating fictional hero like Bakha. This friendship inspired Anand to make a lively character who has soiled hands, wears dirty cloths, sweating face and belongs to subaltern class. Even though he belongs to subaltern class Anand has tried to presented him as

the child of modern India. Being a child of twentieth century Bakha has not surrendered to his fate like his father Lakha. He is eager to accept modern way of dressing as “he has secured a pair of old breeches and from a sepoy a pair of old boots; he would, if he could, like to look the white foreigner and so be in the fashion” (Iyengar 1973: 336).

One-day journey of Bakha starts with the alarming call of his father for going to work to clean latrines for the upper-caste people. It is beyond his understanding that how his work separates him from high-caste people and how the people of his community are considered physically impure and untouchable. Though high caste Hindus do not like to touch him, however, Muslims do not mind touching him. He expressively contemplates, “It is only the Hindus and the outcastes who are not sweepers. For them I am a sweeper, sweeper-Untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the world! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!” (Anand 2001:43).

Anand, in Temple incident when Bakha and his sister Sohini are being ruthlessly blamed of polluting the temple, illustrates how these subalterns were not allowed to enter into temples also. Bakha is inquisitive to know what has actually happened as he is not involved in any of the crime. Suddenly a cry disturbed the calm and holy atmosphere,

“Polluted! Polluted! Polluted!” (Anand, 68). Bakha is said to get out of the place by the worshipers as, “Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purification ceremony. Get down, get away, dog! ... A temple can be polluted according to the Holy Books by a low-caste man coming within sixty-nine yards of it, and here he was actually on the steps, at the door. We are ruined. We will need to have a sacrificial fire in order to purify ourselves and our shrine” (Anand, 69 - 70).

Conclusion

Thus Mulk Raj Anand, as socially committed novelist, through his novel *Untouchable* deals with subaltern voices that are marginalization, casteism, exploitation of weaker sex, hypocrisy and poverty in India. He raises the voice against caste segregation in the Indian society. He illustrates the real situation of Subalterns, their mentality and reality. The novelist portrays the voice of subaltern and demonstrates the exploitation and marginalization of subaltern on the basis of caste, class, gender, minority and status. The caste system has played a great destruction to the people of our country. With the help of this novel, the novelist has shown that despite the abolition of practice of untouchability by law the mental, social, and traditional outlook of Indian society remained the same.

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