Research Paper English Literature

Presentation of Hindu and Islam in Mulk Raj Anand's Untachable

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ABSTRACT

India is a land of diversities. This diversity is also visible in the spheres of religion. The major religions of India are Hinduism,and Islam . The message of love and brotherhood is expressed by all the religions of India. Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world. It is world's third largest religion after Christianity and Islam. It is the dominant religion in India, where Hindus form about 84 per cent of the total population.It is also known as "Sanatan Dharma" or the everlasting religion. This religion has many outstanding remarkable aspects and side by side many bad customs and superstitions which impede the proper growth of human beings,especially,the low-caste.My aim in this paper is to highlight how the message of love ,brotherhood,sympathy and kindness of sanatan dharma is ignored by the caste-hindu in Mulk Raj Anand'sUntouchable where the protagonist Bakha is overwhelmed receiving kind treatment from some nameless,ordinary muhammadans.

KEYWORDS Hinduism, Islam, love and brotherhood, bad customs and superstitions, low-caste, kind treatment, muhammadans.

Among the Indo-English Novelists Mulk Raj Anand is the most conspicuously committed writer. Anand enjoys the reputation of being a pioneer novelist because of a corpus of creative fiction of sufficient bulk and quality. Inspired by the Progressive Movement in literature that flourished in the Thirties in London, the General Strikes of 1926 in the Great Britain, the post First World war economically depressed European society and the opinions of Maxim Gorky, Roman Rolland, Thomas Mann, E.M. Froster Untouchable was written over a long weekend in 1930.

In the choice of themes, Anand is unquestionably an innovator. He is the first novelist writing in English to choose as his raw material the lower-class life of the Indian massses. In Untouchable , he almost dreads the flight of imagination, feels shy of soaring high and keeps close to the ground with a vengeance. He does not hesitate to turn the floodlight on the darkest spots in Indian Life. In Untouchable Anand has chiefly deal with the ghostly evil of untouchability afflicting the Hindu Society of the Pre-Partition era in the larger backdrop of the caste-configurations within the Hindu Society that have successfully stifled the healthy growth of a considerable section of Indian Community for centuries. The opening paragraph of the novel epitomizes the 'big divide' between the untouchables and other resident communities in the town. The novel has no story interest; it is just an impassioned plea for a social cause. It exposes the evils of untouchability and it analyses various aspects of untouchability – social, moral, psychological, religion based etc. The novel begins with an autumn morning in Bakha's life. It is significant that Bakha is constricted by a 'moral' hindrance and by a notion of detachment. Both concepts are products of orthodox Hinduism.

Hinduism misinterprets the caste system invented by the Aryans .What had begun as a classification based on the type of work performed by individuals, eventually decayed into a rigid stratification with the Brahmans forming the top of the pyramid, followed by the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas, with the shudras forming the base. Thus caste was a group system based on services and functions. It was meant to be an all-inclusive order without any common dogma and allowing the fullest latitude to each group. But the caste-system changes with the passage of time.Brahmans,kshatriyas and vaishyas tried their best to curb the freedom of shudras who form the base of the caste- pyramid.In **Untouchable** Anand lays bare the evils of the caste-system in hindu dominated society.

The religion which dominates the population of Bulandshar, the setting of Anand's novel **,Untouchable** , is Hinduism. Throughout the novel the Hindus are shown treating Bakha, the supreme specimen of humanity worse than they treat their animals. The barrage of insults which are showered on his head by the upper classes-men and women alike-are merited by the accident of his birth as an untouchable. We are shown a community which is ridden with superstition, false notions of class and hypocrisy. The hindu priests-the Brahmans-are the worst of the lot and in the figure of pundit Kali Nath we see the worst possible conjunction of decadent traditions and hypocrisy. Pundit Kali Nath, "one of the priests in charge of the temple", ill-humoured old devil', symbolizes the hypocrisy, gluttony and false pretensions of the caste Hindu and their negative attitude towards untouchables. Though he would never allow an untouchable to enter the temple, he has no compunctions in making indecent suggestions to Sohini and even tries to molest her. Pride in his superior caste has made him cruel and unjust to the untouchables, more so because the poor, weak and helpless cannot hit him back. Mulk Raj has satirized religious hypocrisy through the portrait of Kali Nath.

Besides Kali Nath, we have in **Untouchable,** a minor character, Gulabo, a beautiful, fair-complexioned, middle aged washer-woman who regards herself as a superior to the untouchables and sweepers. An analysis of the Indian social scene can help us to understand the circumstances that might have destroyed all moral values for Gulabo in her early girlhood. A beautiful outcaste girl in a hindu upper-caste dominated Indian village or town is most likely to become what Gulabo is. Through her, Anand emphatically expressed that the passion of love knows no caste system and finds that poverty stricken and fear-ridden outcaste girls are easily or forcibly accessible to the high castes' gratification. Exploitation through caste system has been a hydra-headed phenomenon. Besides, through the character of Gulabo, Anand projects that among the outcaste too there is a hierarchy and Gulabo's caste is at the top. She is, therefore, proud and looks down upon sections who belongs to the lowest strata of this hierarchy.

Though **Untouchable** is dominated by a Hindu population, considerable space is given to the Muslims. This segment of the population is unconscious of the Hindu bias against the outcastes as Islam treats all human beings equally, and therefore, has no practice similar to untouchability. The Hindus, both the upper-classes and the untouchable do not have a clear idea about Islam and its culture that is why Bakha "watched with contemptuous displeasure the indecent behav-

ior of a Mohammedan walking about with his hands buried deep in his trousers, purifying himself in the ritual manner, preparatory to his visit to the mosque. 'I wonder what they say in their prayers?' he asked himself once, he remembered, he had asked Ali, the son of a regimental bandman,'why they did that?' But Ali would not tell him and was angry, saying that Bakha was insulting his religion."(Penguin P-11)

The empathy which Bakha, technically a Hindu lower caste, feels with the muslims "whom the Hindus considered outcasts and who were, therefore, much nearer him," comes through in a series of scenes in which Bakha interacts with them. While the Hindu betel-leaf seller flings a packet of cigarettes at Bakha "as a butcher might throw a bone to an insisting dog sniffing round the corner of his shop, the muslim barbar asks Bakha to bend down and light his cigarette from his hukkah. The abuses which the upper-class Hindu showers on helpless Bakha in the market place is counterpointed by the compassionate response of the tonga-wallah, "Leave him, never mind, let him go, come along, tie your turban', consoled the tonga-wallah, who being a muhammedan and thus also an untouchable from the orthodox Hindu point of view, shared the outcaste's resentments to a certain degree. Bakha's response to the event is in keeping with his original empathy towards the muslims. " The tonga-wallah was a kind. He made me weep telling me, in that way, to take my things and walk along. But he is a Mohammedan. They do not mind touching us, the Mohammedans and the Sahibs."

Besides, presenting religiously ignorant Ali, kind-hearted tonga-wallah, Jehangir, the celebrated owner of the finest band in city, (P-46),the irritable Mohammedan keeper of cloth Stall (P-47), ' the armourer's sons, Naimat and Asmat, the tailor-master's son, Ibrahim; the band master's sons Ali Abdulla, Hassan and Hussein' (P-103) , 'Kashmiri Mohammedan from the local Carpet factory' (p-126),' the fierce looking red cheeked pathans, followers of Abdul Gaffar Khan, the frontier revolution army' Mulk Raj Anand in **Untouchable** portraits the character like Mr. R.N. Bashir, B.A (Oxon), Barrister-at-law. Very nicely he wears English clothes and insists on drinking 'Soda Water'. His mind is stiffed with the ideas of Rousseau, Hobbes, Bentham and John Stuart Mill. According to him Gandhi is a humbug, a fool, a man of the fourth century B.C., with his swadeshi and his spinning wheels. Gandhi is beyond his reach. He wants to recreate English in India. Actually R.N. Bashier is a symbolic character. He symbolizes the westerned Indians who admired the English and flattered them. He is a caricature of the Indian sycophants of the British.

In that context, it may be said that as a building rises brick by brick so the action of **Untouchable** moves forward pathetic and heart-touching scene by scene which arouses our sympathy for the untouchables who are the victims of age old exploitation and oppression on the part of the caste Hindu. After 'the early morning scene' we get 'The well scene' which brings out the true nature of Pundits Kali Nath and the jealousies and rivalries that prevail among the untouchables (Sohini and Gulabo). Then we have 'the touching scene'or 'The pollution scene'. 'The chapati throwing scene' where we come across some nameless minor characters whose only business was only to destroy Bakha's peace of mind. They try to throttle Bakha. But it is the Muhammadan tonga-walla or the hukkah-walla who try to soothe Bakha who ''caught sight of a Muhammadan who was puffing at a big hubble-bubble. 'Mian Ji', will you oblige me with a piece of coal from your clay fire-pot? He appealed. ' Bend down to it and light your cigarette, if that is what you want to do with the piece of coal.' Replied the Barbar. Bakha, not used to taking such liberties with anybody, even with the Muhammedans whom the Hindu considered outcastes and who were, therefore, much nearer to him, felt somewhat embarrassed, but he bent down and lit his cigarette. He felt a happy, carefree man as he sauntered along, drawing the smoke and breathing it out through his nostrils."

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