

Language And Culture In Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable**Dr. Vartika Raj****Associate Professor****Department of English****JDVM PG College****Kanpur**

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Abstract

Mulk Raj Anand is a prolific writer. His novel *Untouchable* deals with the culture of India before it got its independence. Bakha, the son of Lakha, is an eighteen year old handsome boy who belongs to the sweeper class, the lowest amongst the Hindu caste system. Even his touch defiles a person of the upper class. Since Bakha is an outcast and a sweeper he faces a lot of humiliation at the hands of the upper-class Hindus. Anand has tried to weave all these incidents (which contribute to the mounting embarrassment of Bakha) in a time-span of one-day. The paper is an attempt to analyse the culture and the language used by Anand.

Keywords: Defile, Untouchable, Purify, Hindu**Objective**

The objective of this paper is to study the language and culture that Anand uses in his novel 'Untouchable'.

Mulk Raj Anand is a prolific Indo-Anglian writer. His 'Untouchable' was published in 1935. The novel is written in English and deals with the subject of Untouchability in Indian community. It is set in a town Bulashah. *Untouchable* is a novel, which may be set apart as a thoroughly-Indian and a post-colonial product for variety of reasons, the first and foremost being Anand's treatment of the subject of untouchability. Not only does he take up a subject, which until then had been ignored by most of the Indian novelists and creative writers, but he also presents a very realistic account of incidents that take place in the life of its hero Bakha. E.M Forster has rightly observed, "*Untouchable* could only have been written by an Indian, and by an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no Untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in the indignation and self-pity. Mr. Anand stands in the ideal position. By caste he is a kshatriya, and he might have been expected to inherit the pollution-complex. But as a child he played with the children of the sweepers attached to an Indian regiment, he grew to be fond of them, and to understand a tragedy which he did not share. He has just the right

mixture of insight and detachment, and the fact that he has come to fiction through philosophy has given him depth.”ⁱ

Mulk Raj Anand does not portray something unusual; on the contrary, he deals with situations that are common in an Indian community. The incidents that take place with Bakha are not rare; they might happen in the lives of any of the outcasts. What is important is that Anand has tried to weave all these incidents (which contribute to the mounting embarrassment of Bakha) in a time-span of one-day. He is not only condemning the Indian customs but he is also trying to tell his readers which customs are a scar on society and ought to be abolished. However, as Bruce King says in his essay “New Centres of Consciousness”ⁱⁱ.

“Colonial literature often treats of manners, morals, politics, religion, and most other interests of European literature, except that such concerns are explored within the possibilities, contrasts, and cultural hierarchies of local societies and their relationship to Europe. Most colonial and early independence fiction is written within the conventions of realism and social comedy.”

The theme of the ‘Untouchable’ may be seen as a paradigm of the relation between the colonizers and the colonized — the upper class Hindus acting as the colonizers and the untouchables being treated as the colonized. Like the Hindus (who treated the outcasts as untouchables), the English treated the Indian or the colonized as untouchables. Bakha is also a typical example of the ‘**cultural cringe**’ⁱⁱⁱ – he not only cringes before the English but also in front of the upper class Hindu masters who act as colonizers. This is not the extreme. Bakha is also required to accept the authority of his masters without questioning the same. Bakha has been socialized by his masters as an untouchable, and to a large extent even his father is responsible for his inhibition for it is he who imposed his views about class-distinction upon Bakha and the unchallenged power of the upper class Hindus who treat them as objects and not as human beings.

Bakha’s active sense of self is eroded by his experience of enslavement and “*cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model.”^{iv}

Anand’s treatment of the theme becomes all the more effective because of the language he uses in the novel. In his essay, ‘Language, Orality, and Literature,’^v Chantal Zabus says : “The Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand has used Indian locutions that are rendered directly into English and his way of writing has been described in terms of a fast, galloping ‘tempo’,

which Raja Rao in his preface to *Kanthapura* (1938) defined as ‘the tempo of Indian life’, which ‘must be infused into one English expression ...we, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly; there must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on.’ Upon closer scrutiny, it turns out that Anand’s ‘Indian English’ is made of transliterations or calques from Urdu and Punjabi.”

The orality of the novel can be seen through Anand’s use of Hindi words like ‘Acha’, or English words with Indian pronunciation as ‘fashun’. The contexts at times becomes specifically Indian in places where he translates expressions from Hindi to English, specially as we find in the abusive language used by the upper-class Hindus:.

“You annoy me with your silence, you illegally begotten! You eater of dung and drinker of urine! You bitch of a sweeper women!”^{vi}

Even Bakha is usually addressed as ‘Eater of your masters!’^{vii}

These instances which are more Indian than English have been adopted by Anand to convey the emotional and social set-up of his characters. All these abuses and the language in which they are expressed are quite culture-specific. Though it is not impossible to find expressions in English which are equivalent in meaning to these expressions; such expressions would lose their significance and effect which they are required to produce if translated in English. Anand appropriates English to cope up with the situations which he wishes to portray. As in the *Empire Writes Back*, the critics feel, “The development of independent literatures depended upon the ... appropriation of language, and writing for new and distinctive usage.”^{viii} The ‘appropriation’ of language by Anand is one more feature of the novel that makes it post-colonial.

Mulk Raj Anand also makes use of contextualization, which “consists in surrounding the indigenous word with a halo, and area of immediate context that involves the reader in some sort of guessing game.”^{ix} Some culture-specific words like Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudras etc. have been left for the readers to understand by themselves. It might be difficult for readers, not familiar with the Indian culture, to arrive at the meaning of these terms,

However, at this point, it should be stated that despite all these inventions Mulk Raj Anand’s language in ‘*Untouchable*’ is typically different from that of Raja Rao’s in *Kanthapura*. Raja Rao used simple English to convey the Indian culture. Raja Rao also appropriates the use of English to convey his expression but the degree of appropriation differs from that used by Mulk Raj Anand. This difference may also be present as a result of difference between the narrators of *Untouchable* and *Kanthapura*. In *Untouchable*, the author himself becomes the

narrator whereas in case of Kanthapura, the narrator is an old village woman speaking for the most part in her own native language.

Mulk Raj Anand deals with the 'colonized within the colonized.' He portrays that for Bakha the English are for better than the Indians. At least the Englishmen do not believe in untouchability. However, the situation also becomes ironic for the English treat the Indians as Untouchables. The same dichotomy has been used between English and Indian as between upper-class Hindus and Untouchable. Bakha, who right from the beginning is shown to be highly impressed by the English way of living, feels that anything English is good. Even an Englishman speaking Hindi would be speaking the 'Good Hindi.'

"And hadn't he heard the strange, squeaky voice of the Englishman speaking Hindustani? good Hindustani, Bakha thought, considering it was spoken by a sahib, for ordinarily he knew the sahibs didn't speak Hindustani at all, only some useful words and swear words."^x

What is important to note in these lines is that even the Englishmen learn 'some useful words and swear words' spoken in Hindi so that they had not only its meaning conveyed but also the intended effect created. However, many words are contextualized in the novel like Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vedanta, Upanishads etc. and any reader, with insufficient knowledge of Indian culture, would find difficulty understanding these terms along with the cultural context they wish to convey.

Anand's depiction of the Indian society and culture is very specific. Anand has very consciously portrayed the caste system that prevailed in India. Bakha belongs to the lowest strata among the outcastes. Even his touch defiles the high-caste Hindus. When Bakha accidentally touches a caste Hindu, he is abused thus:

'Keep to the side of the road, you, low-caste vermin!...Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cockeyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning!'^{xi}

The discrimination is so deeply-rooted that it affects even the basic necessities of the outcastes like water and food. It is, therefore, that Bakha's sister Sohini has to wait at the well for some high-caste Hindu to fetch water from the well for her. Not only this but Bakha also has to receive bread which is thrown at the pavement by the lady who accuses him of defiling the house for having slept on the pavement of the house. Even the hypocrisy of the Brahmin is brought to light when he molests Sohini and accuses her of defiling him.

Bakha is a handsome boy of eighteen years. He is not able to understand why there is discrimination in the society and why he is treated as an untouchable. Throughout the novel he seems to seek answers to these questions. Even Colonel Hutchinson, the padre cannot satisfy his queries and Bakha finds that conversion to Christianity will neither change his fate nor get him a better position in the society.

Conclusion

The strong appeal and heart-rendered voice of Mahatma Gandhi is of little use to Bakha as he is not able to understand the fancy and thought-provoking words used by him. Thus it can be concluded that Anand is of the view that the big changes in the society can be brought by simple steps and simple language which can be understood by the lowest strata of the society. Bakha is left with the hope that soon there will be a machine (the flush system) which will remove the human waste and he will not have to clean the toilets any more.

¹ Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*. (Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 2001) p. vii.

¹ Bruce King, "New Centres of Consciousness," *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed. Bruce King, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc.) p. 5.

¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*. (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004) p. 12.

¹ Ibid, p. 9.

¹ Chantal Zabus, "Language, Orality, and Literature", *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed. Bruce King, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc.) p. 34.

¹ Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*. (Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 2001) p. 17.

¹ Ibid, p. 106.

¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*. (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004) p. 6.

¹ Chantal Zabus, "Language, Orality, and Literature", *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed. Bruce King, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc.) p. 35.

¹ Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*. (Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 2001) p. 114.

¹ Ibid, p. 38

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