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Annand's Narrative Strategies, Sociopolitical Commitment, and the Symbolic Power of Language in the Novel of "Untouchable"

استراتيجيات اناند السردية والالتزام الاجتماعي والسياسي مع قوة رمزية اللغة في رواية "المنبوذون"

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Abstract:

Mulk Raj Anand's novel "*Untouchable*" was written in 1935, and it was the pathfinder literary work in India that bravely faced the brutal reality of cast-based injustice in colonial Indian. The novel tells the reader the story of a day in the life of Bakha, a young boy, whose suffering reflects the systematic injustice against the untouchables in Indian society. This study reveals how much Gandhi's influence on untouchables, examines the contradictions of British rule, and the invitation to human dignity.

Anand uses the English language with Indian idioms to show the Dalit character. He is inspired by Gorky and Dickens, and his aim is not only to write but to reform. Anand's novel challenges the established caste-system through the daily experience of the young sweeper boy, Bakha. The novel also documents how the writer manipulates language to express literary realism, advocating social reformation. The writer gives us a picture of human efforts to change. This change can be achieved through education, modernity, and Gandhian ideals in addition to that, there is a reference to call for justice and social equality.

Keywords: Dalit, untouchable, Anand, Bakha, and Gandhi.

الملخص:

رواية المنبودون للكاتب الهندي مولك راج اناند المكتوبة عام 1935 والتي تعتبر من الاعمال الرائدة في الهند حيث ابرز الكاتب شجاعة كبيرة في مواجهة الواقع القاسي للظلم الواقع على الطبقات في الهند في بعض المستوطنات حيث تخبرنا الرواية عن قصة الفتى باخا الذي كان صغيرا حيث معاناته من الظلم الممنهج ضد طبقة تسمى المنبودين في المجتمع الهندي. ان هذه الدراسة قد بينت اثر غاندي على هذه الطبقة كما وتدرس تناقضات الحكم البريطاني ودعوته الى الكرامة والانسانية حيث استخدم الكاتب اللغة الانكليزية مع مصطلحات من اللغة الهندية لاظهار شخصية الدالت حيث استوحى فكرته من الكتاب أمثال غوركى وشارلز دكينز حيث لم يكن هدفهم الكتابة بل الإصلاح كذلك وقد كانت رواية اناند هذه بمثابة تحدي للطبقات في المجتمع من خلال التجربة اليومية للصبي باخا كما توثق الرواية لنا اهتمام الكاتب في الأسلوب اللغوي للتعبير عن الواقعية الأدبية التي تدعى الى الإصلاح الاجتماعي كما يقدم لنا الكاتب صورة للتغيير الاجتماعي وجهود البشرية في هذا المجال الإصلاحي مؤكدا تحقيق الإصلاح والتغيير من خلال التعليم والحداثة ومبادئ غاندي بالإضافة الى وجود مرجعية تدعى الى المساواة والعدالة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الداليت، المنبود، اناند، باخا، وغاندي.

Introduction

Discrimination is one of the most oppressive social structures in Indian society. *Untouchable* is one of the most famous literary work that shows the harsh truth of social discrimination. The novel portrays the life of a sweeper young boys called Bakha who dreams to better his life situation.

Bakha is the major character of Anand's "*Untouchable*". He represents as a fictional hero and the results of the writer's childhood friendship. This friendship assists Anand to provide us a character that has a sweating face, solid hands, wears dirty clothes, and comes from lower class. Bakha has been introduced by Anand as a modern Indian boy, a young boy of 18 years old and willing to address modern dressing.

“From a Tommy 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 ‘fashun’.” (Ayengar, p. 336).

The novel conveys the suffering of the young boy, Bakha, due to his birth in a sweeper family. He is suffered according to Hindu’s culture. People make distance of him, they didn’t allow him to stand near by that’s why Bakha thinks *“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!”* (p. 43).

The writer wants the reader to participate the misery life of Bakha due to the Hindu Vedantic culture. They have bad treatment with people who are just like Bakha’s social level. The events of the novel happened in a village called Bulashah, far away of the city, in the state of Punjab. Anand’s sympathy with Bakha and his social state made him explain their condition. He comments:

“A group of mud walled houses that clustered together in two rows under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane,[.....], now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up[.....]and the biting, choking, pungent fumes that oozed from its sides[.....]And altogether the ramparts of human and animal refuse that lay on the outskirts of this little colony, and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it, made it an ‘uncongenial’ place to live in”. (p. 1)

Ill-treatment is directed towards both sexes. For example, Sohini, Bakha’s sister is treated badly by Hindu’s caste-based. So Anand mentions:

“The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform surrounding the well, because if they were ever to draw water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted. Nor were they allowed access to the nearby brook as their use of it would contaminate the stream. They had no well of their own because it cost a lot of money to dig a well in such a hilly town as Bulandshahr. Perforce they had to collect at the foot of the caste Hindu’s well and depend on the bounty of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitchers. p.26”

Methodology

The current research relies mainly on a qualitative textual analysis. It will adopt the framework of social realism, and postcolonial theory. Before the readers might raise a question, the research prefers to have some clues about social realism and postcolonial theory. Firstly, social realism is concentrating on conveying the facts of social matters. It often discusses the issues of social class and labor. Postcolonial theory reveals the influences of colonialism of the groups or societies as far as their cultures and habits. Both social realism and postcolonial theory could be utilized as tools to analyze social classes and power dynamics.

The first point of analysis is primarily stresses on narrative structures, characters progressing, and thematic embodiment in the novel. Secondary sources contain articles that have related to the topic especially articles that include historical and critical studies of literary works that show M.R.Anand as a cope with Gandhian's ideologies, and the broader anti-caste reformist.

Narrative Style of the Writer

Mulk Raj Anand uses a prominent literary narrative style to depict the daily-life of Dalit characters to ensure the participation and empathy of the readers. The writer's style in the novel is realistic and direct, focusing on the daily-life of the young sweeper, Bakha, the writer insists on tackling the topic of Bakha's story in a simple language to reflect the simple life of the character and convey the painful suffering to the readers in various levels. For instance, the writer conveys the harsh realities "*He had become an untouchable, a Pariah in the midst of his own kith and kin*" (Anand, 1935, p. 27), shedding the lights on the isolation due to the society's treatment of Bakha. The writer gives us another picture of hypocrisy of people who do not want Bakha to stand by theme because he is untouchable. From another aspect, the writer reveals the desire of the priest to make sexual action with Sohini, Bakha's sister. This type of duality and kind of hypocrisy is revealed by the writer:

'Polluted, Polluted, Polluted!' shouted the Brahmin below....Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony'. P.69

Bakha gets ill-treatment by the people as well as his father who wakes him up in the cold weather to clean the latrines saying: "Get up, ohe you Bakhiya, ohe son of a pig!" ..Get up and attend to the latrines or the sepoys will be angry." (Anand, 1981)

According to critics like K. Satchidanandan, in his book Indian Poetry: Modernism and After (1997) who glorifies Anand's style in the novel, mentioning him as "a stark and moving portrayal of the life

of a sweeper" (Satchidanandan, 1997, p. 92). Rai, 2001 also praises the style of the narrative by Anand who shows the impact of straightforward use of simple language on portraying the Dalit character. The writer succeeds in humanizing Dalit character and revealing issues that face such caste in the Indian society.

There are many keys of narrative techniques that are used in Anand's, Untouchable, The most important one is the stream of consciousness, which give the reader the opportunity to know what is going on in the mind of the main character, Bakha, Flashback also plays a vital role in revealing thoughts, and feeling of Bakha.

Bakha's Suffering

Through the lens of Bakha, Anand shed the light on the horror of untouchability. The dehumanization and ill-treatment of the Dalit plant the psychological and physical degradation of the Dalit. Anand's reality compels readers to the readers to face the caste injustice.

Bakha's status as an untouchable makes him condemn the actual situation that he surrounds. He lives a margin life with father and sister Sohini. There is a critical moment in his life for brushing a high-caste man. This tale portrays the harsh of caste practice:

“Why are you touching me, your swine?” (Anand, 1935, p. 46)

Here, the writer records the irrationality of the psychological trauma, and purity taboos they impact on a young boy like Bakha. In addition to that, Bakha has exhibits some kind of resistance by showing his desire of education and the wish of change into a better life.

The suffering of Bakha in the novel portrays two phases, the first one is represented by a personal tragedy whereas the second one is represented by political aspect. Consequently, the writer succeeded in manifesting the daily insults of the character and this made the writer call for rethinking of social norms in Indian society. Bakha's suffering started with the bodily requests of occupation as a latrine cleaner. He also suffers because he exhorts good efforts, no one thanks him. They look at him as a polluted person. (Anand, 1935. P. 44)

Themes and Motifs

Untouchable is a Novel from Indian literature that presents themes and motifs that gives us a clear picture in the life of Dalit. One of the major themes that is shown in the novel is the concept of untouchability and its influence on their character in life. Mulk Raj Anand as a social reformer shows the reader the problem in life representing in Bakha's character. It also shows how Bakha is forbidden from mixing with people in certain situation. He is forbidden from standing beside other castes even entering the temples. All these issues have negative impact on his character. (Roy, 1977).

Another theme in the novel is the flexibility and the ability to endure the oppression by other social classes. Bakha proves that he is courageous enough to face the behavior and the treatment of the society. He is in a marginalization, yet he attempts to improve his life and keeps his determination to reject the limitation that build by the society.

As far as motif is concerned, water represents the major motif in the novel since it symbolizes cleaning and purity. Bakha's goal is to be clean and accepted by the society.

Overall, the themes and motifs in Anand's novel participate in conveying the message in the novel showing that the oppression faced by Dalit people in the caste-based society and their challenge in the face of injustice. Thus, the writer displays the problem and put the right solution.

People Characterization

Anand is an outstanding figure of Indian English Literature. He is famous in portraying oppressed people. He uses power images of characters using them as tools in his literary production and to reinforce his subjects. For this novel he uses real names that are familiar with Indian culture.

Bakha: is the central figure that represents the victim of Hindu society. He is a young sweeper, active, and intelligent boy. He is longing to change the vision of the society. Anand comments that "He had learnt to copy the sahibs in every detail" (Anand, 1935, p. 18), He imitates colonial modernity. He keeps on suffering because he does not have the ability to stand against injustice. This issue represents the main core of *Anand's Untouchable*.

Lakha: The father of Bakha and the leader of the cleaners. He is an old and submissive man who resigned from his work. He always reproaches his son, Bakha, for questioning their life. Anand makes a comparison between the two generations, the old generation is represented by Lakha whereas the new generation is represented by Bakha. Bakha is a young boy who has wishes towards the change of life. (Mehta, 2004).

Sohini: the sister of Bakha who represents the victim of poor people. She is a symbol of a sexual harassment by the upper-caste priest. She suffers more than her brother, once related to the Dalit and other to oppression against females. Sohini is the voice of suppressed females in restricted environment. Satyanarayan (2007).

Hutchinson: Christian missionary who is called colonel. He attempts to exploit Bakha's poverty to convert him into Christianity. Then he offers Bakha into Hinduism. These alternatives that introduced by colonel Hutchinson became a kind of irony used by Anand. (Naik, 1973)

Mahatma: Linguistically, Mahatma refers to great soul, it represents a symbol of love and respect. This person called for eradication of social class discrimination including untouchability. Mahatma provides love and respect and this is contrasted with the type of Bakha's living. The writer presents Mahatma as a voice that called for saving Bakha and others. (Mukherji, 1994). At the end of the novel, Bakha feels with some sort of happiness when he heard Mahatma speech including of abolishing the untouchable. He hopes that he gains self-respect as a member of society. " We are all equal. We are all brothers. There should be no untouchability." (Anand, 1935, P. 137).

Social Context

Untouchable is a literary production by the Indian writer M.R. Anand was published in 1935. The novel was written in various cultural and historical contexts, which expresses the life and social situation of the Dalit inside Indian society. The major relation of the themes is connected with caste and identity. (Dhale, 2024). The novel shows the wider shift of culture towards questioning hierarchies, especially that related to caste.

This novel was written when India was under the occupation of England. It reflects the harsh treatment and social discrimination. This reflection gives us a picture of British dehumanizing on Dalit people. The image of Bakha is provided by the author in order to show the brutal and dehumanization realities that faced by Dalit. Through the context, the writer aims to challenge and criticize the social attitudes.

The novel consists of sorrowful events in the life of Bakha and these events reflect the suffering in the life of untouchables. The situation in the novel is not completely tragic, but there is a scene of hope that represents the open window in life. The hope represents by the mercy of some poor Hindu people like Singh, the Havildar, who respects Bakha and be generous with him. Bakha feels happy with Singh due to his kind behavior with him. (Kumari, 2019)

Conclusion

Anand's novel is not only a literary work, it is a courage stand against injustice in Hindu's society. It is an invitation towards bridge the social gap among classes. The author employs a narrative technique to generate a work that has double duty. The portrayal of Bakha's character gives us a picture of suffering to millions of people. The novel establishes a model of challenge of caste, colonialism, and inequality. It also represents a foundational text in the aspect of Indian English literature. It gives literature the role for empathy and transformation.

Bakha's suffering due to the accusation of being untouchable. This issue has its big dehumanizing influences. The writer tries his best to convey the internal and external suffering of such caste. They are human just like others. They have the right to live as equal as other people in the society.

The characterization in the novel represents Anand's attack of colonialism. Each one of the characters represents sample of Indian society. The creation of the characters give us social knowledge of Indian and literary achievement for the writer.

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