

A Critical Evaluation of Modernizing Impact of British Culture on Untouchability: An Indelible Problem in Anand's *Untouchable*

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Abstract

The Indian subcontinent faced the conflicts across its vast aspects not only in terms of political, economic domination but also in cultural and social contexts. Following the British government in India, the other invading European countries commenced to decrease their armies, providing the British East India Company supreme power in Asian counties. As Europeans spread their rule all across, Indian people started to lose their position as citizens of India. With their military strength, English people forcibly establish particular norms in Indian cultural and social milieu as well. Local people of India faced a diverse disposition of cultural and social power strange to them before.

*Mulk Raj Anand in his novel, *Untouchable* records chief protagonist's over-enthusiasm regarding British clothes and ways of life. The scavengers, other lower castes Hindus and Muslims encountered humiliating insults from the higher caste Hindus. Bhakha constantly inquires and raises question on the inequality within the society but never finds any solution. He intentionally wishes to separate himself from the society he lives in. He tries to dress like the Britishers wishes to be educated, and happens irked with his surroundings. Bhakha, however, cannot accept his father's acknowledgment to their sweeper status. He realizes that the Britishers had treated him as a human being and he had observed to find himself as superior to his fellow outcaste.*

Keywords: Colonizers, Untouchable, Impact, Indian Society, Caste.

The term 'culture' appeals to a state of intellectual advancement. The social and political strengths that influence the development of a human being declared the exact meaning as culture. Culture is unmatched human actuality. It originates from the harmony of humankind in nature, but it conditions itself as a meta-natural actuality. It is revealed in the

intellectual, moral, technological, aesthetic, social and spiritual accomplishments of mankind. Culture provides signification to our relationship with the other, as it also shapes our subjective identity. Culture, therefore, penetrates into the proceedings of social alteration in various shapes and at different levels. It defines the skill of social alteration as its guide. This also translates why in each mainstream of culture one may get existence of counter-culture and sub-culture.

Indian culture is diverse and as a consequence unequalled in its very own way. Our moral values, way of holding intercourse with one another, etc. are one of the significant constituent parts of our culture. Even though we have admitted modern means of growing our lifestyle, our moral values, faiths and beliefs still remain unaltered. A man can alter his way of eating, clothing and living but the values in a person can never be changed because they are deeply rooted within our mind, body, hearts and soul which we get from our culture. The Indian culture was moulded throughout different ages of history, all the while incorporating tradition, customs and views from both immigrants and invaders. Various cultural practices, tradition and languages are instances of this co-mingling over successive years.

Among the Indian Novelists in Indian English Literature, Mulk Raj Anand skillfully interpreted the Indian thought and culture. Raja Rao, too, dealt with the Indian culture. Anand's contemporaries like Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan presented the reality of south India. Mulk Raj Anand presented the social reality of North India. Mulk Raj Anand has woven upon several cultural fabrics in his writings. In this paper an attempt has been made to study cultural fabrics in the novel, *Untouchable* of Mulk Raj Anand on the basis of the delineation of characters, situations and the background:

The social deformity has taken the form of caste system in the Hindu society. There are four recognized classes called 'Varnas' and one unrecognized class called *avarnas*'.

They are Brahmins (priests, teachers and ministers), Kshatriyas (Kings and Warriors), Vyshyas. (tradesmen), Shudras (craftsmen) and panchamas (menial workers). Shudras and Panchamas are again divided into various castes and the castes are hierarchized.

(Reddy & Reddy 30)

There is an important relationship between man and culture. The two are inseparable in reality. The stream of culture sustains alterations of content as well as changes of form as it circulates. Old principles are dropped, new principles are added. It is a complex whole. We

can say that culture is a pattern that human deed perceives in a particular society. Culture can deny satisfaction or it can fulfil wishes. It is an integral portion of the individual personality. Thus the history of culture creates the history of person. Thoughts are the real basis of culture:

What we call culture is not an independent reality but is inseparable from the historical condition in which human beings create their own material lives: the relations of dominance and subordination which govern the social and economic order of a particular phase of human history will in some sense determine the whole cultural life of the society.

(Selden 24)

Literature emerging from bilingual cultures shows how the conflict or interaction between various cultures, languages and orders can be used for narrative purposes. Literature itself is a cross-cultural phenomenon. This follows the pattern of the West. It is the consequence of the interaction of the two cultures. Mulk Raj Anand as the first Indian successful novelist has a vast experience of languages, regions and cultures as he has travelled widely and in contact with various cultures of the different countries. As a consequence of his attachment to society, he reflects variety of cultural fabrics mingled up in the cultures of the world.

Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Untouchable* prominently illustrates the tension and interaction of two cultures and it has been demonstrated here how successfully the novelist has balanced the different cultural fabrics. Anand's master piece, *Untouchable* shows the example of Bhakha who came in contact with British rulers usually started imitating them. Anand might have tried to imitate Britishers with his father in the cantonment town of Punjab. This element of the East-West theme is demonstrated through Bhakha's admiration for the white people, his wish to be in fashion, and his urge for English garment. Bhakha lives in the cantonment town of Bulandshahar close to a regiment and this fetches him in contact with the Tommies (English Soldiers) quite early in life. The novelist comments:

Bhakha... had been caught by the glamour of the whitman's life. The Tommies had treated him as a human being and he had learnt to think himself as superior to his fellow-outcastes.

(Anand 11-12)

The English soldiers are liberal to Bhakha. He started liking them for they treated him as a human being. Therefore, he takes pleasure in cleaning the latrines for them and tries to look and act like them. Bakha's craze for fashion and ludicrous wearing of the English clothes reflects the influence of British soldiers. He receives from them the worn off cloths, blankets and boots. He has no qualms in utilizing them with pride. He wraps himself in just as insufficient blanket and shakes in cold and does not attempt to have quilt on because it is un-English. He drinks tea without blowing it cold. He smokes Red-Lamp cigarettes. We are informed that he didn't have affection for his home, his town because he had been to work at the Tommie's barracks and obtained the glimpses of another world strange and beautiful; he had grown out of his native shoes into the ammunition boots that he had secured as a gift and with this and other strange and comic items of cloth, he had created a new world which was commendable, if for nothing else, because it presented an alteration from the old ossified system and stagnating conventions of life to which he was born.

It is because his craze for fashion and English dress that he is nicknamed *Pilpili Sahib*. This craze for English dress and fashion brings out undoubtedly a comic element of Bhakha and is a rich source of humour in the novel. There is something ludicrous about an untouchable boy who omits his few homely comforts for what he calls *fashun* and who says to himself:

I will look like a Sahib.... and I shall walk like them, just as they do in, twos, with Chota as my companion. It is pathetic, too, when the imagination breaks down and he realizes that "except for his English Clothes there was nothing English in his life. (Anand 14)

But such incidents are few, and the Masters are a vital presence to him. Nevertheless, his contact with the English Soldiers provides him a kind of emotional awakening. In this case, the protagonist's awareness of the two cultures intensifies his concern for his own identity. He is in search of his own true image, torn between the traditional practices he has absorbed from childhood and the new practices of English culture have bestowed upon him. Whereas his father and brother do no bother about their miserable plight, he takes up the cudgels against it. Such an awakening is due to his contact with the English Soldiers. This influence is healthy and desirable, for it is a force operating for social alteration, a force which has gone a long way to improve their destiny fortune. In this connection Saros Cowasjee comments:

Bhakha's slavish emulation of the Tommies, though comic, is his first affirmation that the life he has been compelled to live

is monstrously unjust. Though he may cut a ridiculous figure as he stumps out in artillery boots, wearing discarded trousers puttees, breeches and regulation overcoat, with a Red-Lamp cigarette smouldering between his lips, it is all the same a manifestation of his tremendous strength and courage.

(Cowasjee 12)

The culture of English and India has also been analysed through Bhakha's contact with Colonel Hutchinson, the English missionary, the main of the Salvation Army in that part of the country. By and large Anand's British characters are demonstrated as callous and indifferent to the lot of their Indian subjects. But Colonel Hutchinson is a sympathetic character who attempts to console Bhakha's pained soul. He realizes that the only solution to the problem of untouchability is the conversion of these untouchables of society to Christianity. He is sympathetic to Bhakha, asks and invites him to church and his home, for Christianity regards all God's creatures as equals. However, there is a symptom of the comic about him as he tells to Bhakha about resurrection of Christ, of the original sin, and of the redemption of man through the crucifixion of Christ and unable to understand that all this must be only useless non-sense to an uneducated boy like Bhakha, and this comedy turns ridiculous when his ill-natured wife appears on the scene, rebukes her husband violently and frightens away Bhakha. Thus Colonel Hutchinson gives much needed support and comic relaxation after the strains caused by the earlier account of Bhakha's anguish:

Bhakha feels greatly frustrated and looks for a way to end his agony. He meets Colonel Hutchinson, the salvation list who offers him a solution for his problem. He is asked to get converted into a Christian to end to his caste. Many low caste people have accepted Christianity to attain a respectful status in Indian society. But Bhakha does not choose this solution.

(Reddy & Reddy 33)

Anand represented the traditional inferiority complex of the Indians before Britishers. The theme of domination is shown in the novel, *Untouchable* however, the relationship between the Britishers and the Indian is represented in various ways, yet the scene of this relationship has some goals which are emphasized in other writings as well. Anand seems to advice here, as elsewhere, that the Britishers and colonial Indian could not apprehend each other.

The culture of Britishers and Indian has been evaluated through the westernized Barrister M.A. Bashir also. Bhakha overhears the conversation between Bashir and Iqbal Nath Sarshar towards the end of the novel. Bashir too contempts Indian culture and life and looks upon the Indians with western glasses. He receives pride in pronouncing himself a desi sahib. But there is much difference about his thinking as well as personality. He is, therefore, badly refuted in the discussion with the young poet. The poet's suggestion to have the machine for the solution of the practice of untouchability is also due to his exposure to western ideas, science and technology. Bhakha is fascinated by this suggestion and comes back home full of hope for the future.

Mulk Raj Anand brings out the contrast and conflict of two cultures. He points out that the two are complementary to each other. In this novel, *Untouchable* Anand has tried to find the hidden strands that connect one culture with the other. In fact Anand's *Untouchable* is directed towards enlargement of the frontiers of human consciousness. *Untouchable* ranges helplessness against the cruelty and inhuman sensibility of the higher classes. It achieves unity by its creative vision of life.

Mulk Raj Anand presents the problems of human beings in terms of their existence in the society. He is the writer of the mass, particularly of underprivileged and town-trodden with moral concerns. His writings form a unique and an impressive achievement regarding the presentation of social activism. He travelled too much in his life and that's why he has presented himself as a close observer of human passions, emotions and motives in terms of social oppression initiated by large scale hunger which is predominant here and there with its devastating consequence. He got Sahitya Akademi Award in 1972 for his novel, *Morning Face*.

Poor people cannot afford nutritious food for their family members and for themselves. This creates them weaker and helpless to earn the money that would really prepare them to escape from starvation and hunger. In developing nations, peasants often cannot afford seeds, so they cannot plant the crops that would provide for their family members. They may have to cultivate crops without proper instruments and fertilizers they require. Others have no fields, water and systematic instruction. In brief, the poor people are hungry and their hunger catches them in poverty. They have to depend on the high class people and on the basis of this ground they have been exploited. What could be the source of getting nutritious food and seeds of crops? What is the role of government in this connection? What is the responsibility of social members?

Labourers in the society had heard of how the landlord had seized their father's acres of land because the interest on the mortgage covering the unpaid rent had not been

forthcoming when the rains had been scanty and the harvests bad. And they understood how their fathers had died a slow death of bitterness and left their mothers in poverty. Leppers, beggars and sick are in Indian society. Poverty demoralises them. The life-history of a labourer is the life-history of starving millions of India who are exploited from one place to another. They are over-worked and insulted. They are suffering from disease. The condition of one coolie represents the suffering and starving of millions of the nation. *Untouchable* is the tale of Bhakha's misery as well as the misery of the Indian masses.

Indigence is unequal status within a country. It is one of the primary problems of society. Individuals and society have reciprocal relationship with each other. Individuals receive rights and duties in the institutions of society. The theme of indigence can be traced in the writings of Mulk Raj Anand.

In *Untouchable*, the main protagonist is poor scavenger. Unwilling to clean toilets, the High caste Hindus created it necessary for Bhakha to clean. He does not get proper food to eat pure water to drink. He goes in the street of Brahmins to beg dry piece of bread. He pronounces his caste that sweeper has come for the bread mother. Untouchables were not allowed to draw water from the public well. They had to wait for someone belonged to high caste hindu to draw water from the well and give it to them.

Likewise in *Coolie* indigence compels Munoo to be apprenticed to conscious existence at the age of fourteen, and to be harassed even by his uncle. He only wishes to live, to know and work. His first encounter with the artificial urban world is in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram Sub-Accountant, Imperial Bank of Shamnagar. He creates a wrong beginning for he relieves himself near the wall of the house and is branded as a stupid and rustic boy. The wife of Babu Nathoo Ram, Bibi Uttam Kaur is snobbish and humiliates him. His Uncle, Daya Ram takes away the three rupees which he earns. He has realized finally his position in the society. He was to be a slave who should do the work and someone to be abused and even beaten. He was condemned by an iniquitous system always to remain small and abject. He observes that there are only two kinds of classes in the society; the rich and the poor Anand assails the social disapprobation and unreasonable prepossession of social community. He is an unremitting mouthpiece of human excellence. By means of his novels he has investigated to pinpoint those interdependent and frugal grounds that are distinguished enclosures in the footway of sympathy and human grandeur. Anand recognized, perceived, ascertained completely and intimately the prolonged pain of the soul of the rustic folk lamenting beneath degraded indigence, distress, incessant indignation of Britishers and landlords, the money bestower, the religious ministers. It is no matter of surprise that the protagonists of his novels are underprivileged and untouchable, the scavenger, the plantation coolie and the farmers.

Social injustices are rooted in the Indian soil, only a complete and systematized revolution can reform the prevailing conditions. Anand's novels end with tragedy. Only Bhakha achieves success, though marginally, Bhikhu, Gangu, Munoo and Nur all face death. Though all these novels are full of despondency having tragic endings, they are enveloped by hope not despair. Anand's aim was to infuse an optimistic note. He does not fail in it.

In his five novels, *Untouchable*, *The Road*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, and *Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts*, there were four Varnas in society: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Actually, the work of four varnas gave the name of their caste. But, more than that, there was the problem of injustice associated with the Shudras because this class was considered lowest in the order. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were the exploiters of the Shudras. *Untouchable* and *The Road* came in the category of the caste system and the tyranny of the class system is easily discernible in novels like *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud* and *Lament on the Death of Master of Arts*. Anand assails the social disapprobation and unreasonable prepossession of social community. He is an unremitting mouthpiece of human excellence. By means of his novels he has investigated to pinpoint those interdependent and frugal grounds that are distinguished enclosures in the footway of sympathy and human grandeur. Anand recognized, perceived, ascertained completely and intimately the prolonged pain of the soul of the rustic folk lamenting beneath degraded indigence, distress, incessant indignation of Britishers and landlords, the money bestower, the religious ministers. It is no matter of surprise that the protagonists of his novels are underprivileged and untouchable, the scavenger, the plantation coolie and the farmers. Social injustices are rooted in the Indian soil, only a complete and systematized revolution can reform the prevailing conditions. Anand's novels end with tragedy. Only Bhakha achieves success, though marginally, Bhikhu, Gangu, Munoo and Nur all face death. Though all these novels are full of despondency having tragic endings, they are enveloped by hope not despair. Anand's aim was to infuse an optimistic note. He does not fail in it.

Anand is very much a novelist of the world with certain convictions which are moulded in artistic beauty by his forming vision. He is a social novelist whose sincere love for the poor, the weak, and the down-trodden transforms the nature of the novel. He perceives full responsibility both as man and artist to strive for the fulfillment of his principles and ideals in *Untouchable*:

The theme of *Untouchable* is expressly authentic and eloquently public. The idea of untouchability as a social evil obsessed the minds of men in the 1930's. Gandhi called the untouchables Harijan (men of God), and fought for the

eradication of the evils of untouchability. He initiated revolutionary social reforms and won many rights for this neglected section of the country. Being a novelist of social action and conscience, Anand deals with the problem of vivid artistic terms. His treatment of theme in the novel implies moral seriousness of a high order.

(Singh 30)

Anand had a great affection and respect for ancient Indian culture which shaped and played a remarkable role in shaping his philosophy of life. In *Untouchable*, Bhakha is born and brought in a much difficult social condition. He could not go to school for studies because he could defile the students of higher caste by his touch. But many innocent children are still perceived willing to play with Bhakha in the evenings without being sense of defilement by his touches. Such circumstances and predicament of lower caste people make reader to feel intensely the miserable life of the underprivileged people.

Thus the modernizing effect of English culture in the novel, *Untouchable* is a good force. It may produce "Pilpili Sahib" like Bhakha and Bashir, scornful of Indian culture yet it is compelled to bring social awakening, broad-mindedness and a modern orientation to the orthodox and conservative set of Indians. It may serve purpose to eradicate some of India's social evils.

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