



Comparative Analysis of Mulk Raj Anand's “Untouchable” and “Coolie”

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Received: 12 Nov 2021; Received in revised form: 15 Dec 2021; Accepted: 22 Dec 2021; Available online: 27 Dec 2021

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Abstract— *Mulk Raj Anand is considered one of the finest novelists and one of the members of the amazing trio of Indian English fiction alongwith Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. Anand's novels are a portrayal of Indianness with its true essence. His novels put a direct question on the hypocrisy of the Indian society and its shallow beliefs. He challenges through his writings the narrow-mindedness prevailing in his contemporary society. Anand's first two novels, "Untouchable" and "Coolie" are the perfect examples of this. This paper tries to comparatively analyse these two works of Anand and highlights some relevant issues in both the works.*

Keywords— *Untouchable, Lower-Caste, Upper-Caste, Colonised, British Rule, Hypocrisy, Indian Society, Humiliation, Abuse.*

"Untouchable" the story of Bakha, an untouchable boy and it describes a day of humiliation in his life. "Coolie" on the other hand is about the pathetic life of Munoo a boy from the lower caste. One thing that is common in both these novels is the absurdity of life and the shallowness of our societal system. Both the novels are critiques of the caste system in India and how it affects these young kids. Caste system is an evil in any society as it brings discrimination and abuse for the people of lower caste. Bakha in "Untouchable" is a boy who was severely affected by the caste system as he was born into a family of sweepers (the lowest among all the castes), the novel revolves around a day in Bakha's life and these twenty four hours are enough to show the hollowness of the lives of low-caste people. Munoo in "Coolie" is also a boy from the Kahtriyas and suffered a lot under the British rule in India. A young boy of fourteen Munoo becomes the victim of the evils of society and eventually loses his life.

The comparative analysis of both the novels provide a deep understanding of the similarities and dissimilarities between these two. First point of comparison is the maintenance of the unity of time. While "Untouchable" follows or maintains the unity of time and is comparatively a tightly-knitted plot, "Coolie" doesn't follow or maintains the unity

of time and is a loosely-knitted plot which means that the events are not interlinked, they are random and independent. These two distinctions between the plots of these novels make them very different from each other in the technical terms still they have a lot of common things in them.

Starting with "Untouchable" Anand tried to put a direct question on the ongoing practices of caste-system in India. Though many critics find "Untouchable" a 'dirty' novel due to its descriptions of the unclean environment and the job of the sweepers but it is not really 'dirty', rather it puts forward the filthy mentality of the Upper-caste people.

"Viewing the cleanliness and dirtiness from a religious angle, Mulk Raj Anand has a dig at those Hindus who consider themselves clean from a religious angle but are dirty in their habits and manners. They are even dirtier than the Tommies whom Bakha wishes to emulate." 1.

Whether it be washing the latrines or cleaning the streets there is disgust and repulsion and young kids like Bakha and Munoo have to do such work against their will. One other aspect that is highlighted here is how these people have accepted their marginality and are not able to have the courage to fight for their rights. Bakha's father Lakha had no other choice than to put his children to this work as he

himself had none when he was young. This cycle continues forever unless there is education. Bakha just like other kids of his age feels the urge to go to school and study but he is not allowed to even touch the school premises. That longing in Bakha's heart arises a different kind of pain as well as curiosity to have the access to everything that the other kids are having. While playing with the children of upper-caste (without the knowledge of their parents),

"Bakha noticed the ardent, enthusiastic look that lighted up the little one's face. The anxiety of going to school! How beautiful it felt! How nice it must be to be able to read and write. One could read the papers after having been to school. One could talk to Sahibs. One wouldn't have to run to the scribe every time a letter came. One wouldn't have to pay him to have one's letters written. He had often felt like reading Waris Shah's *Hir and Ranjha!* And he felt a burning desire, while he was in the British barracks, to speak the *tish-mish, tish-mish* which the Tommies spoke." 2.

Munoo is just like Bakha but his life's journey is a bit different. This fourteen year old boy used to live with his uncle and aunt. But his uncle took him to city telling him that he will have a good life there and study in a good school also but later on he sold the little boy in exchange of a petty amount. Munoo's toughest life starts from here. He does every sort of work from being a house-helper to a sweeper to a coolie and what not but that little fellow was unable to fight the ills of our societal set-up.

Just like Bakha, Munoo too wanted to study but his circumstances didn't allow him. Both the novels throw light on the British Rule in Indian and how Indians were obsessed with them. In Bakha's case despite of his poor condition and all the humiliation he faced was fascinated by the Britishers because he thought them to be the superior and his disgust towards the people of upper-caste made his fascination stronger. This highlights the colonial mindset of the colonised people who are enchanted by the colonisers due to lack in their own system. For Bakha wearing the torn clothes of the British Sahibs was a symbol of pride and he could do anything for that.

"He was a sweeper, he knew, but he could not consciously accept that fact. He had begun to work at the latrines at the age of six and resigns himself to the hereditary life of the craft, but he dreamed of becoming a sahib. Several times he had felt the impulse to study on his own. Life at the Tommies' barracks had fired his imagination." 3.

In "Coolie" too we can see these obsessions in the minds of people. When Munoo's uncle took him to the city he was very excited about living there, he thought that he will live a life of prosperity there but all his dreams were shattered because there he was treated worse than in the village. The hypocrisy of the city people was higher than the villagers.

Munoo was a Kashtriya and still he suffered like Bakha who was a Shudra, so Anand in this novel has tried to put a point that class-struggle is still there if caste-struggle be demolished. Humans are treated according to their wealth and that's the harsh truth of the modern world. Munoo utters his disgust towards the class-system when he says,

"I am Kashtriya and I am poor, and Varma, a Brahmin is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. No, caste does not matter. The Babus are like the Sahib-logs, and all servants look alike: there must only be two kinds of people in the world, the rich and the poor." 4.

The owners of the house where Munoo worked treated him so badly that the little boy sometimes had to survive without food for days but the way they treated Mr. England when he came to their house was very different. They forgot their real selves and were busy praising the visitor to get the benefirs. This shows their colonized mindset. Another incident through which Anand highlights this issue is when the factory workers in which Munoo and Hari worked harrassed the employees. It is clear from Hari's words,

"My wages have been cut, Khan Sahib," said Hari, joining his hands with the note pressed between them. 'I had some money deducted for damaged cloth. I can't pay this month. I shall pay next month.' The short Pathan snatched the note out of his hand and the tall Pathan was about to kick Hari off, when Ratan walked up slowly, and caught hold of the Pathan by the collar." 5.

Bakha's bubble also burst out when the missionary took him to his place. At first Bakha thought that the missionary is different from the hindus but he was wrong. As soon as he came to his house, the latter's wife started abusing Bakha and called him 'untouchable', only then he realised that there are such kind of people in every society. That's how Anand while exposing the Indian caste-system also exposed the hypocritic British rulers. One thing that Anand has tried to depict through his writings is that how childhood gets impacted through such practices in the society and how they leave impact on the young minds. These kids Bakha and Munoo are the perfect examples of two kids who could have grown up to be talented youth but due to their traumatised childhood they couldn't and Munoo even had to lose his life due to malnutrition at such a young age. These are great satires on our society and where we lack as human beings.

Another point that both these works put forward is the treatment of women in Anand's tome. Both the novels show some female characters who are the silent victims of the caste and class system and gender biasedness. Women from lower strata of the society are doubly marginalized because of their caste and their gender. Bakha's sister Sohini used to do all the house-work after her mother's death, she too had aspirations to lead to normal life like other kids but seeing

the conditions of her home she couldn't do anything. Even when she was sexually harrassed by the Pandit she and her brother couldn't do anything because of their low social status. A where a woman couldn't even fight for herself is worthy of such criticism. In "Coolie" also though Gujri and the Bibiji had a lot of interference in Munoo's life and later on Prabh Dayal's wife and Mrs. Mainwaring provide him comfort but through Hari's wife Lakshmi we could imagine the plight of young women who were married at a tender age bearing children and have nothing to say in the matters outside the house.

Anand's portrayal of women as Michel Pousse put it in his essay, "Women in the early novels of R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand" is as follows,

Traditional women are present in every novel written in that period. Their daily lives are alluded to. Anand locates *Two Leaves and a Bud* and part of *Coolie* in areas with a large Muslim population. His allusions to the practice of purdah make it clear that women do not share the same social life as men. When Mr. England pays a visit to the Babu's family, the absence of the lady of the house has nothing to do with the shyness, it is well and truly due to the practice of purdah but Anand prefers not to refer directly to this practice." 6.

Through this comparative analysis of Anand's works one thing is clear that his works are based on reality. He has that power of mingling fiction with the real world. The two characters Bakha and Munoo have their own journeys and challenges but one thing that connects these two young fellows is their society, the disrespect they face from their fellow human beings is what makes them repel from their own society. Both these characters have nothing to decide in their lives they get run by other people, their fate is decided by other people. In today's world the situation is changing, the concept of untouchability and child labour is diminished but has not fully extincted from the mindsets of the people. It is still there in many parts of our country and the world. The most important weapon to counter these evils is education. Through education more awareness can be spread among the subaltern groups about the oppressions they face and what rights they have to fight against these oppressions. The analytical study of literary masterpieces can surely be a step in this direction as this paper tries to analyse various points of these two great works by Mulk Raj Anand and tried to connect it with the modern times and modern masses.

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