

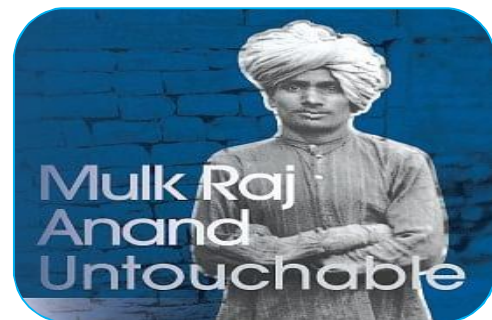


MULK RAJ ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*: PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT :

Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable uses psychological exploration and the stream-of-consciousness technique to present the inner workings of the protagonist Bhaka's mind. The novel realistically brings forth exploitation, torture, and the resultant anguish of the untouchables in India. This paper examines the psychological interpretation of the novel by keeping the original matter intact while presenting it within a formal research structure.



KEYWORDS: Psychological Interpretation, Stream of Consciousness, Caste System, Untouchability, Humiliation, Trauma.

INTRODUCTION

Untouchable is probably the first ever novel in Indian English literature to use psychological exploration of the characters in the novel. It uses stream of consciousness method effectively to unveil its characters inner working of the psyche. It is a narrative technique through which the author attempts an access to characters past, present and future course of action. Instead of third person narrative, the character himself steers the action back and front. The novel, *Untouchable*, begins with the much contemplation of its protagonist Bhaka. He thinks of his home as he lay half-awake in the morning of an autumn day, covered by a greasy blanket. Anand is quite careful not creating confusion relating to the outer action and inner working of Bhaka's mind. The common reader has to be alert and conscious while reading the novel. It's challenging and checks alertness of the readers at the point of shifting scenes.

Background and Review of Untouchability in the Novel

Untouchable is Anand's attempt to provide artistic face to his observation of life in India. It deals with India's most common problem of untouchability. The novel realistically brings forth exploitation and torture and the resultant anguish of the untouchables in India. The narrative technique stream of consciousness helps the writer to peep deep into the psyche of his characters, allowing him to unearth the hidden torture and insult. Anand had adopted this technique from a study of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. And he frankly accepts in his book entitled, *The Story of My Experiment with A White Lie*:

"Another coincidence was my introduction to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, through a borrowed copy of his banned book which I got from the library of my friend and literary mentor at that time, Bonamy Dobree. The fascination of this novel for my generation is absolute. We accepted Joyce's defects of obscurity, overwriting and formalist imposition of the Homeric symbolism on contemporary reality. (179)

Psychological Exploration of Bhaka

James Joyce's *Ulysses* allows the writer to use the modern technique of shifting scenes from outer action to the inner conscious of his protagonist Bhaka. He meets with continuous humiliation throughout the novel; this crosses the limit to force him to take decision of escaping the white man's world. Finally he takes decision to return to his home, but this time with a new hope of talking to his father about what he has seen that and heard that evening. The end is not the complete disillusionment but a hope of accepting new change.

Untouchable is all about psychological happenings in the mind of the protagonist rather than the actual actions. The novelist painstakingly explores the inner working of Bhaka's mind. The action continuously moves forward, backward and sometimes surprisingly enough in future in the story. Breaking the rule of the traditional novel writing, the novel focuses on the internal actions more than the external actions. Anand focuses more on the working mind of Bhaka and not on the action. Although Bakha, the protagonist, is poor and works as a sweeper, is a slightly sensitive type of person. Due to his sensitive nature he thinks and thinks about the things that happen to him. His life journey is made up of insults after insults therefore he is often obsessed with unbroken thinking process. The narrative technique miraculously helps the writer to unfold the inner drama of his soul, the suffering that an outcast in Indian society is destined to suffer on account of the inhuman and insensible caste-system that we have so religiously been observing for more than two thousand years. The suffering and humiliation find no mark or injury on Bakha's body, but his soul is completely torn and burnt which can be seen and experienced by his words only:

"Here is your portion, said Ram Charan,
Unfolding the handkerchief which he carried.
There were three sugar-plums in it, all slightly broken.
Throw me one, said Bakha.
Take it said Ram Charan.
But Bakha hesitated and didn't hold hands out.
Take it, why don't you take it? Ram Charan grumbled.
No, give it to me, throw it, Bakha said." (P.87)

Trauma, Humiliation, and Inner Conflict

Bakha had never behaved like this before, Ram Charan and Choutu were quite surprised with this. He had remembered the incident happened to him in the Bulashah market when he touched a Hindu caste person and earned lots of abuses and slaps. Though he was beaten on the face but the scar was on his mind and psyche. Transgression or breaking the rules of the society is not acceptable in Indian society. Bakha's soliloquies poignantly show his troubled heart and mental collapse due to ruthless and merciless caste system in the society. The narrative technique gives a peep into the troubled psyche of Bakha. The following soliloquy explains the torture, pain and anguish an out-caste feels at difference in human beings on the basis of caste:

"Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him! And to think that I was so eager to come to the town this morning. Why don't I shout to warn the people of my approach? That comes of not looking after one's work. I should have seen the high-caste people in the

street. That man! That he should have hit me! My poor jalebis! I should have eaten them. But why couldn't I say something? Couldn't I have joined my hands to him and then go away? The slap on my face! The liar! Let me come across him one day. He know I was being abused. Not one of them spoke for me. The cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused. Why are we always abused"? (P.43)

Fantasies, Dreams, and Flashbacks

The writer takes great pain in explaining the dreams, fantasies and nightmares of the protagonist. He often had fantasies like reading Waris Shah's *Hir and Ranjah*, and a burning desire of speaking tish-mish, tish-mish English. But his father told him that "schools were meant for the Babus, not for the lowly sweeper". Though at the age of six he had started his hereditary business of the craft, cleaning latrines, but he had dream of becoming a sahib. Unfortunately, not being admitted to the school, as was a rule in India that the out-caste cannot have education, he hadnot proceeded his education beyond familiarization of the alphabets.

At the time of Ram Charan's sister's marriage Bakha fanaticizes or rather romanticizes due to his childhood memories related to his sister. In childhood games he used to play the role of husband and Ram Charan's sister used to play the role of wife. These roles were given to them because Bakha used to wear gold-embroidered cap and Ram Charan's sister a skirt. But when he contemplated more he had thoughts of abducting the girl and having complete possession of her. The stream of consciousness technique helps at times to unveil the minds of poor people. Hunger, starvation, unemployment and unequal treatment meted out to the out-castes makes their lives more severe. They can die for the piece of bread. One such incident is narrated by the writer in the novel that reveals the stage of poverty of the downtrodden people in India. Once Lakha, Bakha's younger brother is away to barracks to fetch the left-over of the sepoy's launch, the hungry Lakha wistfully remembers the left over of fests that he had seen in the cantonment and the town. His mind travels to the great big piles of cooked food, which he had received on the occasion of marriage in the alleys of the city. There were fried bread and chingri puffs, vegetables, curries and semolina pudding, sweets and pickles. Even he recalled how the wooden box, where his wife kept sweets was never empty that year.

Caste Cruelty and Social Injustice

Lakha's another experience is also harrowing and heartfelt when he narrates his past memories of Bakha's illness. The flash back technique allows the writer to go back into Lakha's past and collect those memories. Lakha narrated his nasty experience to Bakha, when Bakha was ill with fever.

"Babu ji, Babu ji, God will make you prosperous. Please make my message reach the ears of the Hakim ji. I have been shouting, shouting and have even asked some people to tell the Hakim Sahib that I have a prayer to make to him. My child is suffering from fever. He has been unconscious since last night and I want the Hakim ji to give him some medicine."

"Keep away, keep away," said the babu, "don't come riding on at me. Do you want me to have another bath this morning? The Hakim Sahib has to attend to us people who go to offices first and there are so many of us waiting. You have nothing to do all day. Come another time or wait."(P.71-72)

This horrible incident makes one cry one's heart for the inequality and inhuman treatment given to the out-castes. Even an animal can receive treatment at the time of need or when it groans with pain and suffering, but human beings were treated cruelly in pre-independent era in India. *Untouchable* is a ballad born out of the freedom. Anand himself admits this in his article entitled, "The Story of My Experiment With A White Lie", "I had tried to win for truth against the age old lies of the Hindus by

which they upheld discrimination. The profound thoughts of the upper orders in an ancient India about caste were often noble. Someone in the great *Mahabharata* had cried, „Caste, caste---there is no caste! And I wanted to repeat this truth to the dead souls from the compassion of my self-explanation in the various Hindu hell, in the hope that I would myself come clean after I had been through the swear, as it were.” (181) The use of the stream of consciousness bares before the readers the brushed mind and soul of Bakha, his fears and anxieties, his feelings and emotions, his ideas and reactions. Anand uses the stream of consciousness successfully, to show that A Man is a man--- and he is born equal to all other men.

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