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One Day National Conference on

Reimagining Literature : New Voices, New Visions

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हिंदी साहित्य पुनरावलोकन : नव आयाम, नव दृष्टिकोन

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Subaltern and Marginalized Voices in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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Abstract:

Both the terms subaltern and marginalizedare used interchangeably,as these terms highlight people in society who have no dignity, power and status.The term subaltern refers to the silenced voices.These silence voices are of those people and communities who are treated as sub-ordinates and low ranked,whereas marginalizedrefers to the group of people who are marginalized because of their class, caste, ethnicity, race and religion. Subaltern and marginalized both these terms highlight the oppressed people in the society who are neglected in society. Mulk Raj Anand is known forhis realistic depiction of poorer and neglected classes in the traditional Indian society. The novel *Untouchableof* Mulk Raj Anand is an attempt to eradicate the caste system in India for establishing equality in the society. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* portrays realistically the suffering condition ofuntouchables by highlighting the protagonist sweeper Bhaka,who represents the pathetic condition of subaltern and marginalized voices. Thesocial condition of the pre-independent India during British rule is depicted in the novelhighlightingthe oppressive caste system in India.

Keywords: subaltern and marginalized, silenced voices, traditional Indian society,untouchable, oppressive caste system

Mulk Raj Anand is a well-known writer whose fiction is dominated by his voice and realistic presentation of pathetic predicament of a vast segment of the society labelled as subaltern and marginalized who struggle with poverty and suffer from injustice.Mulk Raj Anand was influenced by western thinkers like Rousseau, Tolstoy, and Gorky.His works represent his ideas of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, modernism, Marxism, Gandhism and Nehruvian socialism. The impact of Mahatma Gandhiji on Anand is witnessed through his works. The heroes merged in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand were the reflections of real people experienced by the writer during his childhood and youth.Anand's humanistic concern and his attempt to project an untouchable adolescent sweeper as the protagonist of the novelto highlight the predicament of Indian societywith a burning social consciousness accords a special status to

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him as a writer.

The setting of the novel *Untouchable* highlights sweepers' colony. It is separated from upper class quarters. The rigid caste system and social practices in the society during pre-independent India during British rule is highlighted by the writer skillfully through the actions and incidents. It is Mulk Raj Anand's first and most accomplished novel which follows unity of time, place and manner. The action of the novel takes place in a day at a few places within a small town and it highlights the struggle and humiliation of Bakha as an untouchable. The inner struggle of Bakha and his helplessness expresses the psychology and sufferings of untouchables.

Bakha is the protagonist of the novel. He is strong, sensitive, hardworking, styish and obedient. Bakha shades light on subaltern and marginalized voices in the novel through his way of living, thinking, actions, expectations and mindset as an untouchable. Anand presents him as the voice of the voiceless oppressed class in the society. The minor incidents in the novels focuses caste discrimination in the society. The beginning of novel highlights the life of sweepers in their colony. Bakha is presented as a young sweeper who lives in outcasts' colony in a small contentment town in northern India. He is referred as the jemadar of all the sweepers in the town and officially he has been given the charge of cleaning three rows of public latrines in the extremist end of the colony. shows the pathetic condition and social status of the protagonist who is a lower caste. Bakha works honestly and his daily toil turns into a dexterous art. Though he does the job of cleaning the dirt he remains clean. Bakha loves soldiers and wishes to be modern. He is very much impressed by the life of British soldiers. He likes their breakfast, smoking habits and style. He thinks that these styles are needed to become a special person like them.

Bakha desires to see Shanti Deva and Narayan in the temple, but being an untouchable and as it is against the custom, he is not allowed to enter in the temple. It shows the shocking reality in the society that the untouchable is forbidden the entry in the temple and can't worship the gods in the temple. The incident in the life of Lakhais also shocking when Lakha's child was suffering from fever and became unconscious and needed urgent medicine. He finds himself in a stressful condition because of his lower caste, he finds it difficult to convince Hakim and others to let him take medicine to save his child from a critical condition. It shows that lower caste people don't get help even in an emergency. When Lakha tries to enter in the medicine house of Hakim for the medicine for his child, there is uproar Bhangi, Bhangi, because Lakha is an untouchable and does the work of cleaning latrines. Even Hakim calls Lakha chandal when he tries to touch the feet of Hakim to get medicine. The word Bhangi is repeated in the novel to show the caste, profession and status of Lakha. This incident sheds light on caste discrimination in society. It shows inequality in the society. Even saving the life of the child becomes difficult for Lekha due to being untouchable.

Gulabo requests the priest by calling him as pundit jito allow her to take some water first but the pundit, who is a brahmin and belongs to upper caste allows Sohini as he is very much attracted by her beauty and wants to seduce her. Even the priest tries to harass her sexually and dares to criticize Sohini by shouting: Polluted, polluted. It shows that women like Sohini suffer in society and aredenied justice as lower caste. Sohini tells Bakh not to fight against him because lower caste people cannot blame or complaint against upper class people It shows that upper class people like priest have power and status in the society and can do anything. It shows that lower caste people like Sohini are molested by the upper-class people and suffer from injustice. Bakha is slapped by a high-class Hindu man in the market when Bakha unknowingly touches him. That manshouted: Polluted, Polluted and gathered the crowd against Bakha for polluting him, thoughBakha apologized to him for touching him.

The writer makes us think about the mentality of both upper- and lower-class people through the incidents in the novel. Upper-class people like Pandit don't hesitate to harass Sohini sexually because

upper-class people don't treat the lower class equally. Even lower-class people also hesitate to complain against them. Though, the temple priest tries to rape Sohinishe didn't make any complaint considering that it is against their custom. It shows that lower class people are nottaking care about their rights and are not ready to fight against injustice as justice is denied to them.This mentality needs to be changed.

Bhaka wants to eat some special Bengali sweets like gulabjamans and rasgulas butbeing a poor person, he can't afford. He has only eight annas in his pocket,therefore he gets jalebis the cheapest form of sweets. It shows the pathetic condition of poor people who cannot buy sweets of their choice due to lack of sufficient money.

Bakha wishes to follow the style of the British people. Bakha is offered a cup of tea by the havildar and this act surprises Bakha and he thanks the havildar and shows his gratefulness because such acts are never experienced by Bakha.Bakha is very much surprised to see Colonel Hutchinson, who tries to speak Hindustani and mix with people. It shows Bakha's desire to mix with people and live a happylife.

Bakha is influenced by the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and wishes to work as a weeper in the ashrama as he thinks of the ashrama as the best place to work. Bakha is very happy when he hears about the flush toilets. He thinks that technological developments may bring social changes and sweepers work will be done by machines.

Bakha is hopeful and believes the words of congressmen who talk against untouchability and try to point out that Harijans touch to Hindus cannot pollute them. Bhaka finds comfort to listen to the volunteers of the Mukti movement who say Bharhmins and Bhangis are the same.Bakha becomes hopeful to imagine that untouchables will be treated equally in society.

Mulk Raj Anand has used some Indianized English words and phrases to highlight caste discrimination in society. The words: Sahib, Babu, Pundit ji, Memsahib,Sarkar, etc. are used for upper-class people.It shows their dignity, power and status in the society. On the other hands words such asSudras Bhangi, Chandal, Kala admietc. are used for lower class people. The abuses and words used for the untouchables and upper-class highlight their social standing in society.Food is served for brahmins in a very special way.It shows discrimination in society on the basis of caste. Bakha becomes a target of the prevailing caste-system and therefore, he feels suppressed in his life.

Mulk Raj Anand has presented very effectively the caste discrimination thatdehumanizes poor people like Bakhaand denies them equality and dignity in society.Bakhahighlights the class struggle,social injustice,exploitation and humiliation of marginalized people who suffer in the society. Religious hypocrisyand snobbery are also hinted at by the author showing that untouchables are forbidden entry in the temple.Colonel Hutchinson tries to convert Bakha into Christianity for getting protection from unteachability.The author is hopeful and wishes that all communities,classes and castes will treat everyone on equal ground and respect human dignity.

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