

Plight of Dalit before and after Human Rights: A Study of Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable

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Abstract: Any literature is the product of times. It is about people, their experiences, their Joys, sorrows, thoughts, actions, emotions or feelings. It is also about the society of which it is an integral part. Though society is an amalgamation of diverse sections, castes, creeds, religions, and their love to read and enjoy literature produced by writers belonging to any class, caste, religion etc. Its appealing value and universal character is one the main reasons for their acceptance. Thus we have British Literature, American Literature, African Literature, and Indian Literature. At the same time they also have feminine literature and Dalit literature. The former being confined to literature produced by women writers championing the cause of women. So Dalit Literature is about Dalits written by Dalits championing the cause of Dalits in any human society. This paper seeks to probe into the meaning of word “Dalit”, plight of Dalits before and after the introduction of Human Rights act, with a special study of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*.

Keywords: Integral, Amalgamation, Diverse, Universal, Dalit Literature, Championing, Human Rights.

Introduction: In the post globalization scenario, the human rights have become a serious topic for perennial debate among social scientists, scholars, philosophers, intellectuals, statesmen, when the issue of human rights is a focal point literary works about socially backward, marginalized, down trodden and oppressed classes have automatically acquired a great deal of significance. In recent times, Dalit literatures in India are on the rise to focus experiences of discrimination, violence and poverty of Dalits. Till now all their experiences without being highlighted were silenced often with social and religious sanction and they were dubbed as non-literary and unfit for reading.

The word ‘Dalit’ literally means “oppressed”. It is used as a synonym for “untouchable”. It also refers to casteless sections of India. Dalit is also called out caste. It is a self designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchables. Dalits are mixed population of various caste groups living not only all over India, South Asia, but all over the world. Etymologically speaking, the word “Dalit” comes from the Sanskrit word Dalit which means “down trodden”, “suppressed”, “crushed”, or “broken to pieces”.

As far as the human rights of Dalits are concerned, they are suffering with severe discrimination and repression even in contemporary India. They are living in a state of deprivation, marginalization, exploitation and poverty. The policies of governments aiming at inclusion of the deprived into the mainstream are proving unsuccessful and the trend of exclusion of the Dalits remains a reality. In such circumstances human rights seem meaningless for these people.

India where caste is a social concept, however, having no genetic basis constituted its own Constitution after getting freedom from British rule after a long struggle. India's Constitution came into application in 1950. At that time, position of marginalized sections of the society was very concernable in India. They were living a life of poverty, exploitation, humiliation, torture and deprivation for centuries. The architects of the Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in particular, were highly familiar with their miserable condition. Therefore, during framing Constitution, adequate attempts were made to safeguard the human rights of the citizens.

Framers of the Constitution made provisions of social, economic and political justice, and liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. They emphasized on equality of status and opportunity to all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and the integrity of nation. For securing human rights, the necessary and basic rights were included as Fundamental Rights in the Constitution under Chapter-3 from Article 14 to 32. These are the Right to Equality, Right to Freedom, Right against Exploitation, Right to Freedom of Religion and Cultural, Right to Education, and Right to Constitutional Remedies.

Right to Equality has been provided under Articles from 14 to 18. Under Article 14, it has been provided that all individuals are equal before law. Article 15 provides prohibition of discrimination with individuals based on religion, race, caste, sex, and birthplace. Article 16 provides equality of opportunity for all. Untouchability has been abolished under Article 17. Article 18 provides for abolition of titles except the educational and military titles given by the state.

Thus, Fundamental Rights are provided to protect Indian citizens from injustice, humiliation, exploitation and marginalization. These rights have been provided to Indian people to live their lives with liberty, equality and dignity. However, it is noticeable that even after 66 years when Fundamental Rights were provided through a written constitution; a lot of Indian people have been denied and deprived of human rights.

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silenced often with social and religious sanction and they were dubbed as non-literary and unfit for reading.

There are several questions about the social position or status of the downtrodden, which have been answered by several intellectual and scholars from time to time. Out of them, Mulk Raj Anand, a notorious novelist, has put some light on the denial of human rights and social position of the downtrodden through his novels. The writer has evinced keen interest in the eradication of social evils and his novels are artistic attempts to arouse 'the slumbering consigns of people'. Anand's feeling of sympathy for the downtrodden was so intense that he started his career as a novelist with the novel *Untouchable* which presents the miserable condition of an untouchable. This novel is a literature of protest and resentment in which the sufferers are not the victim of fate or god but of society which is manmade. Social forces play the role of villain. The novel is woven around the happening of a day in the life of a sweeper boy where he gives the description of the Bhangi Colony outside the holy-precincts of the city. Bakha, the protagonist belongs to the lowest dregs of the society, is a young, sensitive and an intelligent boy who is subjected to the cruelty and pathos which is common in the life of a low caste person. The novelist tries to reveal the humiliation with a sharp sense of social anger when he goes to clean the street on behalf of his father, Lakha. Bakha was highly insulted and abused when he walking along a footpath touched by mistake an upper caste person:

*...keep to the side of the road, you, low caste Vermin!
He suddenly heard someone shouting at him.
Why don't you, call, you swine, and announces your
approach! Do you know you have touched me
and defiled me, you cockeyed son of a bow-legged scorpion!
Now I will have to go and take bath to purify myself. (Untouchable 38)*

The novelist shows how the depressed people, Dalits in particular, were maltreated by the caste Hindus. How they were made physically and mentally weak and helpless. How these people were denied of human rights. According to the story of novel, Bakha had inherited from his ancestors: the weakness of the downtrodden, the helplessness of the poor. Bakha was sad and angry at his humiliation but was helpless. He could not retaliate. His father Lakha, hearing of the incident, reacts in the following words:

*"My son", said Lakha, with a forced mixture of anger and
kindliness, "did not you give a warning of your approach?"
"They would ill-treat us, even if we shouted. They think
we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt." (Untouchable 20)*

Unfortunately, such incidents are also happening even today in some part of India particularly in villages. Thus, this story of Mulak Raj Anand seems fresh even at present.

Anand deeply penetrates human heart when he gives expression to the hypocrisy of caste Hindu which is elaborated in his expression that the very caste Hindu employs these guys of low born to clean their toilets. Can it be feasible that a person who cleanses the waste of other is polluted because he does cleanse their dirt?

The caste system and untouchability are bitterly castigated by Anand. He brings to the light the evil effects of the bogus and hollow social and religious customs of Hindu society. He presents the hypocritical figure of the caste Hindus. At one hand they get defiled by mere accidental touch of dalits and on the other hand they themselves try to be physical with the dalit ladies to fulfill their sexual desires. In the novel, the priest, Pandit Kali Nath, tries to harass Bakha's sister physically but when he did not succeed he cried:

*...polluted, polluted, polluted:
Get off the steps, you scavenger!
Off with you! you have defiled our
Whole service you have defiled
Our temple. (Untouchable 53)*

Mulak Raj Anand is considered as a champion of the rights of human beings as he pleads against the practice of untouchability, class-distinction, and against the tyrants, exploiters and evil doers as it is proved from the exposure of Pandit Kali Nath. He attacks the counterfeited sainthood as for Anand real Brahmanism involves renunciation, responsibility of guiding and shaping world.

In contemporary times too, some of the caste Hindus do not seem to give up such type of mentality that the Dalits and poor have no right and dignity in the society. The incident of Amarpura village of Rajasthan as reported and shown on NDTV on June 4, 2006 presents the reality of the Hindu Feudalism, and atrocities against the neglected sections show the denial of human rights to Dalits in India. It was reported by the channel that a groom named Bansi of Meghwal society was disgraced and forcibly made climbed down of a mare. He was deprived of fulfilling his dream of riding a mare as groom, which everyone deserves. Bansi, a Dalit, as reported by NDTV, was an educated boy and dreamt of beginning a revolution to ride a mare as a groom as Dalits were not allowed to do so there for centuries. However, this was indigestible for the self declared uppers and they not only disgraced Bansi but also pelted stones at *Baratis*.

The latest example of such incident was in news on 16 Dec 2016 in Dainik Bhaskar. The incident was of some Negroon village of Jawra in Madhya Pradesh. From dalit community, a father (Poora Lal Malwiya) of a groom (Prabhu Lal) demanded police protection so that the groom could ride on mare for the *ghurchadhi* ritual. More than 30 policemen gave him security and more than 60 so-called uppers were detained till the departure of the *barat* to avoid any ruckus.

Other incidents compiled from different newspapers and other literary sources are of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Odisha, which show how the Dalits are still denied of human rights and

struggling for honourable identity or dignity. Their human rights are under threat. For instance, in a school of Gujarat, the Dalit students were asked to stay away from upper caste Hindu students. They were taught separately without allowing them to sit beside the uppers. In the case of Rajasthan, the Dalit students were denied touching water pots. To quench their thirst, they had to wait for another student belonging to the upper caste who pours water into their hands(NDTV December 05, 2006).

The case of Odisha presents a miserable and shameful picture of the denial and violation of human rights of Dalits. The upper Hindus did not allow Dalits to enter the famous Jagannath Temple. They had to take *darshan* of Lord Jagannath through the nine holes made on a wall. After the issue was highlighted by the NDTV on December 05, 2006, the administration of Odisha came into action on December 14, 2006 and encouraged Dalits to enter the temple under the administrative protection. However, all limitations of discrimination against Dalits reached to the height when the temple management decided to close the temple until it was purified (NDTV December 14, 2006).

Another incident is of Bhandra town of Maharashtra where the well educated people, teachers by profession, belonging to so-called upper castes seemed to believe in untouchability. The story is that Mrs. Tilottama Tembhurkar was a headmistress in a school of Surewada village near Bhandra town. When, as soon as she was transferred out from the school, the caste Hindus did the process of purification of the school by chanting *mantras*, conducting *pooja* and sprinkling cow-urine in the school premises. They sprinkled cow-urine in the office used by the dalit headmistress, on furniture, in classrooms, and even upon the students. (The Tribune, April 23, 2007.)

These incidents show the true colour of the Hindu society where the Dalits are supposed to have no right to avail their human rights. They have been treated worse than the animals. It is interesting to see that in India, the alleged uppers take dogs in their luxury cars but they do not tolerate Dalits riding on a mare. The merit of Dalits is not merit at all. For the caste Hindus cow-dung and cow-urine are much more pious in comparison with the Dalits.

More than 70 years have passed when India got freedom. Still, the Dalits and some backwards have not achieved the real freedom in the society. They are still living a life of insecurity. They are insulted, tortured, disgraced and boycotted by the so-called upper castes whenever they do what the upper Hindus do. They are victimized. They are not allowed to enter a temple. Dalit women are paraded naked and raped brutally in the villages by the people of dominant sections of the society. Rape of any woman is a cruel crime, but in case of Dalit woman, it is not only a sexual violence but also caste-based violence.

Ghanshyam Sah, one of the authors of the book “Untouchability in Rural India” said, “While he did agree that untouchability has declined to some extent, but the change was small and insignificant. All Dalits do not suffer equally. The educated ones who have government or private jobs are less discriminated than those who are agriculturists and scavengers.”

Conclusion: Concluding we can say that the caste-based atrocities and untouchability, which is a serious offence under article 17 of the Constitution of India, are still going on in India. The reservation policy has changed economic and political plight of Dalits. However, their social plight is still a matter of concern. They are struggling to achieve respectful life, dignity and human rights in the Indian society. It can be said that some parts of India are still not safe for Dalits, and their social prestige is nothing in the sight of the caste Hindus. Caste-based atrocities and practices of untouchability are real cases of denial and violation of human rights regarding Dalits. Laws and Acts alone cannot be of much help in such cases. These atrocities can be overcome only by sensitizing the society.

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