

Some Dramatic Scenes and Their Significance in Mulk Raj Anand's Novel Untouchable

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Abstract

This paper discusses about the dramatic scenes and their significance found in Mulk Raj Anand's first novel Untouchable. From the deep study in the novel, the early morning scene, the well-scene, the touching scene, the most pathetic scene, the pollution scene, the Chapati-throwing scene and the hockey match scene are found to be focused. Bakha is a key person of the novel who is enthusiastic to hire his senses to adore the satisfaction of environment. His vocation-the duty of searching has destroyed his preferred senses. He discovers happy in nature which influences him, but he notices the impact only in a confined superficial way. It is the tiring schedule and the dirty job of cleaning toilets that have made Bakha unfit of admiring natural prettiness. Thus, the match provides the novelist with yet another occasion to depict the inhumanity of the caste Hindus and the degrading and demoralising effect of untouchability.

Keywords: Morning Scene, Well Scene, Touching Scene, Population Scene, Hockey-Match

Introduction

A famous novel of social protest 'Untouchable' by Mulk Raj Anand whose hero is Bakha. Many of Anand's novels in the future may be studied as novels of protest and resentment against evil traditions, narrow minded outlook and conservatism. In each of his major novels, Anand shows his sympathy for the poor and the down-trodden, protest against the injustice done to them, and expresses his resentment at their plight by showing the ugliness, and misery of their lives by showing that it is all the result of the injustice and exploitation to which they have been subjected by more affluent and influential sections of society (Paul 102). In Untouchable, he has expressed his resentment at, and has protested against the unjust and oppressive caste-system which has compelled millions and millions of people to live like pigs in a sty. E. M. Forster calls it a devilish system which could have been contrived only by Indians (Sinha 56).

There is no doubt that Anand did not believe in the theory of "art for art's sake", but he wanted to make use of his art for the sake of man's progress as a means of alleviating the suffering of his fellow men. He was interested in the condition of man, and his purpose as

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a writer was to improve that condition. He was a committed writer. a writer with a mission, his mission being social reform and the alleviation of the sorrow and suffering of the under dogs of society. But the choice of a particular theme by itself does not make a writer a propagandist. All art propagates certain view of life and in this sense all art is a propaganda. All arts are propaganda (Anand 93). The art of Ajanta is propaganda for Buddhism, the art of Eldora is propaganda for Hinduism and the art of the Western novel is propaganda for humanity against the bourgeoisie (Dhawan 78). Gorky as a humanist dared to speak of man, man's condition, only not to say how awful it is, but he also suggested what man could be. And thus he did propaganda for man.

Untouchable is constructed in scenes. One vivid and graphic scene follows another in quick succession. As a building rises brick by brick so the action of the novel moves forward scene by scene. Some of these scenes are most pathetic and heart-touching. They arouse our sympathy for the untouchables who are the victims of age-old exploitation and oppression on the part of the caste Hindus. The plight of the Harijans has been presented realistically, and it moves us to tears, such is the authenticity of Anand's narration (Arora 91). A brief consideration of some of the more graphic scenes will fully bring out the pathos of the lives of these waifs and outcasts of society.

The Early Morning Scene

First, there is the early morning scene, with Bakha being roused from sleep by his father Lakha and then by the voice of Havildar Charat Singh calling him to come out and to clean the latrines. To begin his work, Bakha jumps and takes up his broom and basket. He has to look after three rows of toilets. On his work, he shows dramatic quality and superfast quality in. "Each muscle of his body, hard as rock when it came into play; seemed to shine forth like glass. He must have had immense pent up resources lying deep.... "The Havildar seeing this and his uniform remarks: "You are becoming a gentleman: ohe Bakhya..." (Anand 107). Then with a grin which symbolizes "three thousand years of racial and caste superiority", he asks Bakha to see him in the afternoon and take a gift of hockey-stick from him., Men keep on coming and going. Bakha performs four rounds of his cleaning operation with the same earnestness and alacrity. Then as is the daily practice, he burns the heap of the rubbish that he has collected from the latrines.

Its Significance

The scene brings out Bakha's efficiency at his work. It also brings out his uncommonness, his superiority to the other untouchables, like his father and brother. We are at once made to feel that he has immense capacity, and that given opportunity and a suitable environment, he can rise very high. Our attention is at once captured by his godlike figure and our interest is aroused. It also brings out the influence of the English soldiers upon Bakha. He wants to imitate them and thus be in fashion. He is happy despite his

poverty and degradation. The scene, in short, forms a very effective exposition to the novel. It stresses the salient features of the character of the hero, as well as suggests the theme of the novel.

The Well-Scene

The early-morning scene is followed by the pathetic and heart rending well-scene. Sohini, the sister of Bakha, goes to the well with a pitcher to fetch water so that she may prepare tea for father who is dying of hunger. However, she being an untouchable cannot draw water herself; nay, she cannot even climb the steps to the well, for her very shadow will pollute the water in the well. There are a large number of other outcastes, like her, also waiting by the well, waiting and waiting for some kind-hearted Hindu to come and draw water for them. (Berry 82)

There are a number of other outcaste women. Gulabo and Waziro are prominent among them. Gulabo feels jealous of Sohini for she is growing into a beautiful woman. She fears that her own importance shall be eclipsed by this sweeper girl in the near future. So she, without any provocation at all, begins to abuse and harass her. The innocent, poor Sohini bears all her bullying most patiently. This Sohini-Gulabo episode throws ample light on their respective characters and adds dramatic touch to the scene. (Hutton 34)

They wait for hours before a priest Pandit Kali Nath appears on the scene. They pray to him to draw water for them. The sickly ill-humoured old devil' draws, to relieve his constipation, and not out of any humanitarian considerations. With considerable labour, he draws out a pail of water. His bowels stir inside to his great delight. The outcastes rush with their pitchers. The Pandit castes a cursory glance around and marks out Sohini for his favour. Her beauty attracts him. He does not listen to Gulabo and other women who say that as they have waited longer, they should be served first. He simply dismisses them and pours water into Sohini's pitcher. Then he asks her to come that day to the temple and clean his house.

Its Significance

Thus, Sohini returns home after hours with a pitcher of water, and then do the poor ill-treated outcastes have their tea and clean their utensils. There is no question of any bath for them. If they are dirty it is the caste Hindus who have compelled them to be so. The denial of water is the most inhuman and degrading part of untouchability. They suffer from hunger and thirst, and are compelled to live in dirty, ugly, sordid mud-walled cottages unfit for human dwelling. They are treated worse than pigs, and are considered to be mere dust by the caste Hindus merely because they clean their dirt. Their suffering is pathetic and heart-touching. Our sympathy is thus aroused for these under-dogs of society.

The scene also brings out the jealousies and rivalries that prevail among the untouchables (Pradhan 119). The scene also marks a significant stage in the development of the action of the novel, for it leads directly to the 'molestation scene' or the pollution scene in the temple. The untouchables are denied not only the basic amenities of life, but are also exploited sexually. At least, this used to be so in pre-independent India.

The Touching Scene

Another pathetic and heart-rending scene in the novel is the "touching-scene" in the market of the town of Bulashah. After having this tea Bakha goes to the city to officiate for Lakha and sweep the Bazar for him. Overjoyed at his possession, he forgets to call out "posh, posh, sweeper coming" and accidentally touches a caste Hindu. He earns for his transgression much abuse from the public and slap from the man he has polluted. A hell is let loose upon him. A number of persons gather there in no time, each taunting, abusing, and cursing Bakha. The poor boy has no way out of the surrounding crowd. He is at his wits end. Nobody is prepared to take pity on him or to forgive him. Finally, a tongawalla comes, the crowd disperses and Bakha becomes free. But just then the touched man (Lalaji) slaps him smartly; undoing his turban, scattering his jalebis in the dust (Anand 42).

Its Significance

Bakha was humiliated by the circumstances of the day-the touching of a caste Hindu and molestation of Sohoni. When he reached his home, he had very little food but his brother Rakha had gone to the Sepoys' mess and had brought a lot of food from there which the family ate with relish. As Bakha was down east, his father asked the cause, and Bakha poured out the story. He advised Bakha never to hit back. Then, he narrated his earlier experience. As a child Bakha was dying and his father Lakha went to fetch the hakim but he could not enter the premises because he was an untouchable (Naik 75). So after hours, he rushed in and eagerly requested the hakim to save his son's life.

The Most Pathetic Scene

It is the most pathetic incident in the novel showing the inhumanity of the caste system. Bakha could have retaliated for he was tall and strong like a giant, but "servility of centuries," which is ingrained in him, paralyses him even when he vaguely thinks of retaliation. When he accidentally touches and pollutes a man on the street, a crowd gathers round him: Then, "his first impulse was to run, just to shoot across the throng, away, away, far away, from the torment. But then he realized that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the Hindu merchants, but a moral one" (Khan 115). In short, the touching-scene is not only pathetic and heart-rending it also reveals Anand's full grasp over the psychology of both the untouchables and the caste Hindus.

Its Significance

The scene describes the real tribulation of the failures, the untouchables, and the abused who have been forced to live in dirt and dingy. They have been refused the rights of living human beings.

The Pollution Scene

The 'pollution scene' or the offence scene in the temple is the touching scene where Sohini goes to drift the patio of the house of Pandit Kali Nath. Bakha also goes in the temple to clean the outer drift. Saros Cowasjee considers this scene. His caste has alienated him from this religion, and these deities themselves are subject to defilement. For his kind, only religion is to keep others pure and clean, and with a sweeper's instinct his gaze falls on the bird-droppings and the leaves and the dust he has come to clean. As he attacks his job he hears from inside the temple the names of the various gods-only a few of which he recognizes.

Bakha's tribute to his idols is responded with the weep of "diluted! diluted!" questioned by the temple priest to detach himself from the alarm Sohini has questioned to shield off his immoral progress close to her. The worshippers rush out to see Bakha cowering on the steps and gives vent to their own cry that temple is being defiled. In the beginning Bakha is completely unnerved. Bakha's moment of action has come and gone, and it is in his failure to act that the fidelity of the novel lies. The episode shows that weakness corrupts and absolute weakness corrupts absolutely (Singh 64). It also shows that eternal servility is the price of untouchability. Bakha may be a tiger, but he is a tiger, in a cage, helpless and at bay.

Anand grimaces at the religion that does not allow its devotee to have a free access to his divinity. The low gruff cries "Polluted! Polluted! Polluted!", rudely shakes him. To his amazement, he discovers that his entry has defiled the temple of his idol. He is dazed and his blood is congealed. His discovery of the priest's attempt to molest Sohini rouses not only the hero in him to strike back, but also his indignation at the cold lifeless gods who fail to protect an innocent girl from the indecent advances and lusty clutches of a devil. Anand mocks at the hypocrisy and hollowness of hindu religion, for its curse of "pollution by touch" which baffles all reason, sensibility and good sense in contrast to the allowance of all sorts of unclean practices like gargling and spitting in the stream, relieving in the open, swindling by the money-lender as Ganesh Nath does, and manipulation of the scales by the confectioner (Singh 64).

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The Chapati-throwing Scene

The temple-scene is followed by another humiliating and traumatic event which may be called the "Chapati-throwing" event. A hypocritical and good-for-nothing sadhu gets much better attention. A woman throws a chapati down her roof for Bakha. It declines on the moist and filthy spot under where some minor is comforting himself. He takes it up and without any more strives to gather meal from other houses.

Its Significance

The episode shows that the untouchables are treated worse than dogs, that the caste-system is really devilish device of which only man is capable; the animal cannot even dream of such hellish ways of keeping people in a perpetual state of servility and degradation.

The Hockey Match

Another dramatic scene in the novel is that of the hockey match in the evening between Bakha and his intimates. The players collect in the ground close the fugitive's camp for the competition as the time fixed. As the time for the election of the team comes, a babu's little son brings a new hockey stick for Chota, the virtual skipper of his side. But Chota does not take him in the team. The boy feels dejected. Bakha pleads for him but fails. He has all sympathy for the poor thing. When the competition starts, Anand represents a natural photograph of it and said "it was an amazing comedy. The group of players in the field hopped to and fro like orthopterans. There was no organization in the game they played. The rules of the game had hardly any meaning for them. When Bakha is about to win and drives the ball into the space between the posts, the goalkeeper (of the opposite side) spitefully strikes a blow on his (Bakha's) legs. The game at once turns into a fight. The boys of the two sides attack each other scratching, hitting, kicking, yelling. Sticks and stones come in full use" (Anand 77). What have you done to my son? She accuses him of defiling her son and her house. Bakha hands over the child, and afraid, humble, silent, withdraws. He feels dejected, utterly miserable.

Its Significance

The scene enables the novelist not only to complete his picture of the miserable life of the untouchables and the inhumanity of the caste Hindus, it also provides him with an opportunity of giving graphic pen-pictures of the beauty of nature. As Bakha goes up the Bulashah Hills, with his friend Ram Charan and Chota his two friends go on ahead of him, and he is left alone. The hockey-match is the best example of it in *Untouchable*. The two teams have been described as a 'throng of youths in the region' that 'desired to and fro like orthopteron' (Singh 202). The scene of marriage at Ram Charan's house is another fine example. His role as a 'ceremonial little mischief maker' for being the bridge-

groom's brother is quite comic. The place where Bakha talks to Bara Babu's elder son about teaching him some 'tishmish, tishmish' (English) and the discomfiture of the Babu's younger son at being ignored, is also charged with humour. Anand is adept in building up delightful situations.

Conclusion

Untouchable is a realistic novel. It depicts the social conditions of the thirties in India. It is constructed in scenes, and the scenes are pathetic and dramatic. But it does not portray the total social or political or economic scene. Whatever its reflection is partial and of a segmentary nature. Nevertheless, the picture of the outcastes is true and real and faithful. It further evokes sympathy and pity. The influence of Western culture on Indian cities are delivered to stress in the novel. The young man like Bakha was delighted by Western fashion of dress and living. They aped their British rulers. Anand seems very attracted to the mentioned scenes but as he knows that the change of heart is the thorniest way of all in an age devoted to the God's of money and power, he introduces the machine. The poet's solution to the problem of untouchability is in line with Anand's own prediction for the machine as revealed in *The Big Heart*. In general *Untouchable* is characterised by social protest and humanism. Anand demonstrates the Bakha is also a human being and all his sufferings relate to the fact that he is an untouchable.

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