

## **Empowering Marginalized Communities and Anti Brahmanism in writings of Mulkraj Anand**

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### **Abstract**

The Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu, the Self respect movement and the non Brahmin movement in Maharashtra are the ones that have played a significant role in promoting Anti Brahmanism. Within years they have made significant changes in the Indian politics, have reshaped it and have led to various social reforms with discourses on caste and inequality. Mulk Raj Anand's novel "Untouchable" is a key example of anti-Brahmanical politics in Indian literature. The novel exposes the brutal realities of the caste system and the plight of untouchables, challenging the dominance and privilege of the upper-caste, particularly Brahmins, in society. Through realistic portrayals of characters like Bakha, Anand highlights the systematic oppression and discrimination faced by lower castes, which was often ignored or downplayed by other writers at the time.

**Keywords:** identity. loss, social discrimination, Dalit politics, Anti Brahmanism.

In order to answer back the caste based social hierarchy Anti Brahmanism emerged as a movement in the 19th century. It was a result of the pre colonial circumstances that opposed the caste division and its system in India right from the time of British rule. The theory found its place in the writings of many pre colonial and post colonial writers who had a tint of reformation in their art of writing and who wished to bring about revolutionary changes in the society by propagating a spiritual idea that God is present in all beings therefore no one should be hated or looked down upon in the world.

Mulkraj Anand was one of the prolific writers of Indian writing in English. He was born and brought up in pre independent India at Peshawar into a family of metal workers. During his early ages he had witnessed the country's struggle for freedom including the Jallianwallan Bagh Massacre in which thousands of innocent people were gunned down and brutally killed at Amritsar. He joined Mahatma Gandhi's Non cooperation movement and at times was jailed by the

British when he openly reflected his agitations against them . He was not just a writer and novelist but a great lover of his nation India as he perceived India belonging to all irrespective of caste creed and race , this was the true light of freedom in which he wanted his country to shine. As he reflects :

I had grown up in the ferment of a great moral and political movement in which I had learnt that alien authority constricted our lives in every way. I can't say there was no bitterness in my hatred of imperialism, because I remember how often waves of fury swept over me to see hundreds of human beings go to jail daily after being beaten up by the police for offering civil disobedience.(1)

Anand was though born in a Kshatriya warrior caste family but he never counted caste as a hurdle in the path of his life or career and right from the time of his childhood his friends came from various sections of the society which included the sweeper class also. The idea of segregation based on caste always disgusted Anand and he blatantly opposed the communal forces and religious segregation. Though his father was an active member of Brahmo Samaj which was greatly contributing in the reformation of the society still it had a motto of re converting Muslims to the religion of 'true faith' regarding which Anand 's perception was different as he felt this action to become anti Muslim sentiment in future. His work Untouchable had placed him into the category of those writers who wrote not just for entertainment but for a social and political cause.

By the time in 19th century the Brahmins had acquired a dominant position during the British Raj , Anti Brahmanism caught the wave which believed Brahmanism as a corrupt religious practice imposed upon the Indian masses. Not only Dr B R Ambedkar but the reformist group of Hindus also worked upon the same principle. In the year 1938 in a Conference at the GIP Railways Depressed Caste Workers, he stated “when I say that Brahmanism is an enemy that must be dealt with, I do not mean the power, privilege or interests of Brahmins as a community”. On November 25, 1949, he stated :

“I am of the opinion that in believing that we are a nation we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? The sooner we realize that we are not as yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the word, the better for us. For then only we shall realize the necessity of becoming a nation and seriously think of way and means of realizing the goal. The castes are anti-national in the first place because they bring about separation in social life. They are anti-national also because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste.”

On the same occasion similar remarks were made by the reformist Jyotiba Phule who regarded the religion of Aryans as selfish where the Brahmins considered Shudras as low, unworthy and unmindful and in turn shudras considered Mahars as low and so on this continued. He expressed his surprise on forming one nation with so many caste and class divisions (*Mahatma Phule Samagra Vangmaya* (Marathi), p 407, Government of Maharashtra Publication )

Mulkraj Anand was one of the leading writers of India in English who had touched the subject of casteism in Indian society and had thrown light upon its repercussions through his writings by making it the prime subject of his novels. Just like Charles Dickens Anand is also one of the reformist writers who had an aim of utilizing his talent not for selfish purpose, pure entertainment but to reform the society. According to Promila Paul Anand in his novels conveyed the a lively image of India in such a way that it reflected his passionate concern with the social reality. Reflecting his great sympathy of the downtrodden and untouchable Anand and his writings greatly supported the idea of anti Brahmanism that voiced the great reformers like Jyotiba Phule and Dr B R Ambedkar.

Anand wanted to a see his free nation as free in a true sense , a country that has attained freedom from all the chains and restrictions of caste, creed, race and colour that discriminate the society. His novel Untouchable acclaimed worldwide fame on account of the issue of casteism raised by him through the protagonist Bakha who is a sweeper and is mistreated by the high class priests and people in the society. The language and style of Untouchable has a spark of revolutionary fire within that lightens up the passive spirits of the sufferers and those onlookers who are helpless in one or the other way to eliminate this evil from society. His anti Brahmanical voice is strengthened when he openly rejects the idea of secluding one human from other on the basis of caste superiority. He completely denounces the idea in the novel on which E M Forster comments :

– “have evolved a hideous nightmare unknown to the west: the belief that the products [of excretion] are ritually unclean as well as physically unpleasant, and that those who carry them away or otherwise help to dispose of them are outcastes from society. Really, it takes the human mind to evolve anything so devilish. No animal could have hit on it.” (Forster,6).

The protagonist Bakha undergoes insults inflicted upon him from dawn till dusk and is compelled to think twice about the life he is leading and his birth in the family of an untouchable. He is puzzled at the idea that how one human being can be touchable and untouchable at the same time when the high class priest molests his sister Sohini. His is isolated and secluded from the

mainstream, has no opportunity as he is restricted from gaining education which can be a reason for him to change his profession in future.

Havaldar Charat Singh comes to Bakha's house and shouts at him – “Oh, Bakhya! Oh, Bakhya! Oh, you scoundrel of a sweeper's son! Come and clean a latrine for me! Why aren't the latrines clean, you rogue of a Bakhe! There is not one fit to go near!” (Anand,16).

Deeply hated and insulted by all Bakha leads a deserted life on which his answers related to being born in a low class family is unanswered. It was not his choice to take birth in a high or low class family. The incident of touching someone in the market was one of the most humiliating experiences of his life and through this incident Anand points to the age old custom in the India of 30's when the sweepers went around the town announcing their achievement on the drumbeats. Most humiliation was done on the sweepers on whom the high class and caste people had put restrictions for not even crossing their shadows or else they will be doomed for the present as well as their next life. . Once when Bakha accidentally touches a high caste man Lalaji on his way in the city he is facing a very abusive situation which makes think twice about the human values and their existence.

Lalaji, a man of upper caste, accidentally gets touched by him. The Lalaji begins to hurl at him abuse and rebuke: “keep to the side of the road, you, low caste vermin. Why don't you call, You swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cockeyed son of a bow-legged scorpion! Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! The offspring of a pig! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning. (Anand, 38)

There is a realistic portrayal of the low class and downtrodden through the character of Bakha in the *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand. The condition of such people was pathetic and they suffered numerous insults and abuses hurled upon them every now and then for one or the other reasons. Bakha's father Lakha is also a passive character who seems to have submitted himself to the fate as he does not struggle to come out of the bad situations arising in his life due to the problem of caste discrimination. He seems to have quietly accepted the truth that there is no silver lining for future and that is the reason why every morning when he awakens his son Bakha from bed during early hours, it is not for studies or going school but to clean the latrines. Bakha like an obedient boy obeys his father's orders and submits himself to the fate.

Everywhere in the novel Anand cuts abuses upon not the high class but on the high caste and in particular only the Brahmins who are present in his plot as high caste priest or rich privileged people who become an idealistic class to create discrimination in the society on the basis of high birth. In the Well scene of Sohini, it is Pandit Kali Nath who is reflected as a villainous character having wasted interest on Sohini treating her as a 'juicy morsel' to satisfy his sexual appetite. In all the possible ways Anand has criticized Hindus and Brahmins as much as he can, if he wishes he could have made some other person of some other caste also as a villain in the novel like he did in his work *Two Leaves and a Bud* in which the white manager of the tea estate rapes a young Indian girl working in the estate, but with his main intention of exposing the hypocrisy of casteism, for which he feels the Brahmins as mainly responsible, he switches to the idea of presenting them as the main villains of the novel *Untouchable*.

Even in the present times the Dalit perspective seems to be marginal in the mainstream political and social scenario. According to Aijaz Ahmad, the postcolonial perspectives and aspects are basically caste and class centred as they have contents that critique those classes that derived benefits from the system appropriated by them. As the aspects of class and caste are centre to the society and are its integral parts therefore the perspective cannot be definitely ignored.

The main writers of the postcolonial era consist of some prominent names like R K Narayan and Mulk raj Anand who basically worked upon the perspectives related to these systems existing in the society. With the revolutionary and fiery tone of their writings they tried and struggled to change the existing situations in the society. Anand focused upon the marginalized groups and Anti Brahmanism was the most prominent aspect of his novel *Untouchable* that acclaimed world wide name and fame.

As per E M Forster's view the aspect of untouchability as reflected in the work of Anand is '*condemned to silence and passivity with no power of agency*'. Karl Marx had mentioned in his works on peasantry in France in 18th century as '*they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented*' (2008, 124). It was impossible to imagine that even the Dalit can speak therefore it was Anand who initiated the task by first speaking and representing the Dalits by voicing their feelings through his novels.

The idea of Anti Brahmanism or anti manuwaad opposes the ideologies of Brahmanism which mainly manifests itself in the form of hatred and prejudice against the brahmins. The colonial period witnessed various anti Brahmanical movements amongst which the most counted is the

Dalit movement that raised voice against the low class people who were at the lowest ladder of the society. The movements were basically led by the downtrodden sections assuming the names as Mahar movement, Ambedkar's advocacy which were directed against the beliefs and philosophies of Brahmanism.

Satya Shodhak samaj formation by Jyotiba Phule in 1873 aimed at the idea of liberating the low class people from the clutches of untouchability and caste discrimination by the high caste. But the protest was not lasted only from freeing the clutches of casteism and even the holy Veda and Puranas .

The Aryans were regarded as destructive agents against the native culture. The DK movement and SNDP movements in South India again opposed the Brahmanical philosophies and beliefs. The lower society was much protected towards the interest of the Dravidian culture and religion and in the self respect movement started by Ramaswamy Naicker rendered priests to its own followers. The movements were greatly supported by the low cast people and the subalterns rejected by the mainstream society.

In present times Anti Brahmanism has become symmetrical to Anti Semitism as it happened in past when the Jews were persecuted for their success, and as per the anthropologist Ajantha Subramaniam Brahmins deploy the 'politics of meritocracy' unknowingly due to their gifted minds that are intellectual enough to think, act and wonder the future consequences.

The parallel situation between the Jewish and the Brahmins is developing a social system like patriarchy which reflects oppression for being at the zenith of the caste system . However Anti Brahmanism is not justified in the true sense as the oppression of the low caste is done by all the high caste people and not specifically by the Brahmins and despite all anti Brahmanical movements the Brahmins still are outstanding as the elite due to their access to education, religious authority , economic power and social prestige

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