

Golden Research Thoughts

Abstract:-

“Literature does not see the individual as something apart from society, but considers him as a social unit, because his existence is dependent on the society as a whole. Taken apart from society he is mere cipher and non-entity.” –said Premchand.



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VOICE IN LITERATURE AGAINST CASTE DISCRIMINATION WITH REFERENCE TO MULKRAJ ANAND'S UNTOUCHABLE AND BALLAD OF THE LANDLORD BY LANGSTON HUGHES.



INTRODUCTION

During the rise of the nationalist movement, there was a trend in Indian literature to reflect social concerns. The organization that spearheaded this reform was the All-India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA), who believed that writers had the social obligation to not only reflect on their reality but to also “question orthodoxies and existing power relations to reveal something problematic about life” said Ahmed Ali. Ahmed Ali, a progressive writer, stated the importance of the collaboration between the nationalist movement and literature in an address to the AIPWA conference: And as progressive writers it is our duty to produce literature which will not be bloodless and anemic, but pulsating with fresh blood, throbbing with new life—a literature which will envisage the future... We should not write for just a section or class, but join hands with the struggling humanity, and address those millions of human beings who are living in hunger, poverty, and squalor, for they are our public today, and they are our audience of tomorrow. Through literature, the AIPWA attempted to repair the socio-economic adversities that many Indians faced. The AIPWA transformed the novel into a space where conversations about class, discrimination and poverty could be discussed in order to imagine a better future for India. The AIPWA believed that gradual reform would compel the privileged to make the necessary changes to approach the problems at the core of their society. The AIPWA defined the Indian literature as a text that engaged with the reader on a social and emotional level, thus provoking change on a national sphere.

MAIN TEXT:-

The emphasis on social protest during the nationalist movement allowed the literature to point out important flaws in Indian culture and society. For instance, there was a focus on the untouchable community known as Harijans in Gandhian terminology, and in the present day as Dalits. Traditionally, the Hindu caste system was a systematic way of implementing social structure. There are four varnas, meaning ‘kinds’, the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants) and Shudras (peasants). Dalits exist below this hierarchical system considering them ‘outcaste’. The system originally established non-kin dependent labor. This type of labor became an integral part of early Indian civilizations because it provided everyone a role that would contribute to the greater need of the community.

What problematized this social order was that it prevented upward mobility and ascribed prejudices to lower caste Hindus, in particular to the jobs they were allowed to have. For instance, they were required to perform manual labor, the least desired occupation. The Dalit community was also responsible for the removal of human waste. In the social structure, the Dalits’ positions were essential to maintaining public hygiene—they were responsible for cleaning the streets, the latrines and sewers (United Nations Commission on Human Rights). Dalits were considered to be a tainted demographic because of their proletariat position and social status. As a result, Dalits were commonly segregated and banned in Hindu social life. Priyamvada Gopal states in her article, “The Machine: Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable” that “Dalits were distinguished precisely by their invisibility and ritually enforced physical labour. To remain consistent, I will use the present-day terminology, Dalit, to refer to the untouchable community. Segregation from other members of society”. For example, Dalits were not allowed in publicly shared grounds such as schools and temples and they were forced to live outside of the community.

These forms of treatment restricted the Dalits from upward mobility and civil rights. The treatment of Dalits contradicted the mission of the nationalist movement. However, different nationalist leaders had different views on how to solve the problem of caste and unite the nation. Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), who was India’s first Prime Minister, proposed a secular government where national identity would supersede local identities. He wanted to create an ‘Indianness’ represented by the nation-state. He stated, “The hundred and eighty years of British rule in India were just one of the unhappy interludes in her long story; she would find herself again”. Nehru acknowledged the history of the British rule, but he did not allow its presence and effects to determine the identity of India. In Ashis Nandy’s article, “The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance,” Nandy describes the Nehru’s government’s efforts to create a secular nation. He shows how the ideology of secularism was associated with slogans like “we are Indian first, Hindus second, or we are Indians first then Sikhs”. Nehru’s push for secularism withdrew him from controversial conversations around caste because he championed equality for all Indians, including Dalits, and women. Secularism was Nehru’s approach to end caste discrimination and unite the nation. Nehru’s approach differs from that of Gandhi, whose “religious tolerance came from his anti-secularism, which in turn came from his unconditional rejection of modernity”. Gandhi grew up in an upper-caste Hindu family and was trained as a lawyer in England who then practiced in South Africa for twenty years. He returned to India in 1915 and became the leading figure of the Indian Nationalist movement. Gandhi was determined to turn nationalism into an ‘all-India’ phenomenon that would include not only the elites and upper castes, but also the poor and lower-caste citizens of India. Unlike Nehru, Gandhi did not want to modernize India. Instead, he wanted to revert back to the fundamental essence of India – an India rooted in simplicity and spiritualism. Gandhi stated, “I pray to Suryanarayan that India may not turn away from her civilization... please do not forget our ancient civilization”. Gandhi saw the essence of India in the villages but not in modernity. Gandhi went into the villages of India determined to unite their residents regardless of their caste.

Leaders like Gandhi attempted to eliminate the negative treatment of Dalits and declared it to be unethical and a sin. In his efforts to bring people together, he rejected Western clothing and only wore a loin cloth. In response to a Muslim who accused him of indecency, he replied: [The loin cloth] will go when

men and women of India help me to discard it, Gandhi wish to be in tune with the poorest of the poor among Indians, If we wear so many garments, we cannot clothe the poor, but it is our duty to dress them first and then ourselves, to feed them first and then ourselves. Gandhi's loincloth was an embodiment of the nation's poverty. He attempted to dismantle caste division through his clothing. The loincloth became a symbol for his ideas of the nation. Gandhi was able to physically wear his ideals for the future of India. He refused to wear any other clothing but the loincloth until Dalits were treated equally – which unfortunately meant that Gandhi wore it for the rest of his life. A third figure in this movement was nationalist leader B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar, like Gandhi, was also a major influence in the nationalist movement. He became the voice for the Dalit community and a leading figure for Dalit rights. He stressed his concern in his message. Through the novel, the nationalist message transcended the realm of politics and entered the homes and hearts of many literate Indians. Realism allowed writers to depict the lives of Dalits, thus illustrating the injustices towards this particular group. Through literature, Dalits were given a voice. Yet at the same time, it is important to point out that it was a voice constructed for them. Due to the strict social structure of the caste system, Dalits were excluded from receiving an education – with a few exceptions, such as B.R. Ambedkar. The lack of education prevented them from having agency over their own narrations, and because of this, progressive writers felt inclined to use literature as a tool for social change, on their behalf.

An important novel in this project was Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, published in 1935 at the height of the nationalist movement. Anand was born in Peshawar. He studied at Khalsa College in Amritsar before continuing his education in England. As a progressive writer, he used vivid realism to depict the lives of those in the Dalit community. In the 1930s, nationalist Indian literature focused on shaping Indian identity. To recreate an Indian identity there had to be a separation from colonial power, culture and ideologies. This separation is fundamental because it allowed people to define themselves outside of British constructions of India. For Anand, literature played an important role in the reconstruction of the Indian identity. As he stated to the second AIPWA Conference: The task of building up a national culture out of the debris of the past, so that it takes root in the realities of the present, is the only way by which we will take our place among The task of building up a national culture out of the debris of the past, so that it takes root in the realities of the present, is the only way by which we will take our place among 13 those writers of the world who are facing with us the bitterest struggle in history, the struggle of the people of the world against Imperialism. Anand suggested a universal objective to end imperialism through literature. He wanted to use realism in particular to depict the lives of the poor under imperialism. Realism allowed Indian writers to illustrate the problems in Indian culture and society under colonialism in order to expose the flaws that needed to be reformed in the new nation-state. This allowed literature to enter the world of politics and social change.

Anand's purpose in writing *Untouchable* was to change the perception people had of Dalits. This was inspired by a family tragedy caused by the strict laws of the caste system. *Untouchable* is the first novel by Mulk Raj Anand. It is over 60 years of independence and at least half of Indians are carrying the burdens of slavery in the name of casts. When will the government have the courage to abort the casts? Untouchability - the problem still prevails especially in the central belt of India. If you notice, Maoism only spread in these states where the emotionally enslaved people are ready to go any extent to get freedom. If there is Maoism, the soil for it was watered by the cast system. Cast system should go.

'*Untouchable*' is the story from the life of 18 year old Bakha, who lives in the pre independence era, as a Bhangi (one who clean toilets). Bakha is not weak, where he is 'strong and able-bodied'. He is all enthusiastic and has his own set of dreams. His dreams vary from to dress like a 'Tommie' (Englishmen) in 'fashun' to play Hockey. However, his limited means and the circumstances force him to literally beg for the food and get humiliated in each turn of the road. The 'dirty' nature of their work pulls down 'bhangi's to the last of the table of casts. They were not permitted even to take water from a well and had to wait for hours for the mercy of the upper caste. The food will be given to them by throwing and if they touch anybody by accident they will be punished. Even if they are ready to pay, nobody will teach them. The upper class however doesn't find this untouchability when they molest their teen girls. It is a typical day in the life of the Bhangi, mixed with hunger, hope, small pleasures, insults and set backs. Add to all the problems, they have no right to protest or express their emotions.

Deprived of hope and Fed up with humiliations, Bakha have a difficult day. Like in the story of good Samaritan, 3 options are placed in front of Bakha. First, a Christian missionary, who invite him to join Christianity so that the untouchability based on the caste can be removed. The second option he considers is the idea of sacrifice from Mahatma Gandhi, who came there to preach against the discrimination to the lower caste. The third option he considers as a solution to the entire problem is a flush system. Mulk Raj Anand considers that the caste system can only prevail with the job one carries and the easy way to remove it is to upgrade the work environment and bring dignity to each work. We have no right to downgrade any work. The novel simply shows a way to solve two problems still lingers India. 1. Sanitation. (No need of explanation for this problem, if one travel by train in early morning or walk in a rainy day through the roads of a not so clean Indian metro...). 2. Castism.

The Poem "Ballad of the Landlord" by Langston Hughes also depicts the plight of discrimination in America against the Black community. In the beginning Black Speaker makes an urgent plea that his roof is leaked and also says that he reminded his white landlord in the last week. It indicates the black speaker's astonishment for he cannot understand why his most genuine problems are not attended by his white landlord. He again pleads that steps are broken and it is surprising that the white owner never falls from those steps. The black tenant ask him whether he owe him ten buck and also expresses before him to pay ten bucks more, but first he should repair the house. This conveys the tenant's incredulity at what probably are

false claims followed by rising anger and spirit of rebellion. The black tenant tries to prove his fearlessness before the white landlord that the owner may bring eviction orders and he can also cut off his power. The landowner can also throw the furniture on the streets. If he does so and talk high and mighty; If he says a word than he will land his fist on him. Though without social power or influence, the black tenant is a man of immense physical power and which is his only protection against the harassment done by the white American landlord.

The White Landlord after irritated with the outrage of his tenant calls police and complains that this man is trying to break the law and not only he is breaking the law, but also threatening to bash him. The "Copper's Whistle" suggest the action is taken by the police and he is put in the iron cell of Precinct Station. Precinct here is an area of city or town as defined for policing or electoral purposes.

The next day there is headline in the news-paper that black tenant threatens white landlord and judge gives Negro 90 days in county jail without any bail. This brief and simple poem is strong opposition against the discrimination and ill-treatment given to the black Americans. The rebellious nature of the black tenant shows his earnest fervor in pursuing the goal of winning equality in society.

CONCLUSION:-

It is to be concluded that Novel "Untouchable" sympathetically portrays a day in the life of Bakha who as a sweeper and latrine-cleaner is on the lowest rung of India's caste system. Written simply and directly it captures the many humiliations, trials and tribulations that Bakha and his father, younger brother and sister experience at the hands of higher caste Hindus. Caste and poverty is an on going problem in India despite much fanfare in recent years in relation to India's high tech industry. The novel simply shook our conscience. The author criticizes the social injustice with his powerful words. He rips apart the hypocrisy of the powerful. Meaninglessness of worship and its uselessness when it is not practiced is stressed. The book is also a small reminder of ignorance of strength by the lower caste and the need for moral rejuvenation. Above all, 'any social revolution should be practical' is another message the book manages to convey. We don't have to imagine for the sake of it where the obvious give a handful of duty and responsibility.

There is another strong message from the novel. Most of the problems of India were self created. The British could rule India only because the masses were not seriously disturbed by their presence. In the novel, the protagonist is not fearful of the British. This view only reiterates the conclusion that political freedom will not solve human misery.

In the same way the Poem ballad of the Landlord highlights the harassment of the Black Community in America long after the abolishment of slavery and the declaration of equal rights. The black speaker in the poem shows courage as well as spirit that rebels against injustice and discrimination. However, his voice is suppressed by the socially powerful whites whose courts too deny him justice. Thus Literature is the voice to express discrimination in the society and in this way bring social awareness in the people through literature.

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