

A Sordid Reality in the World of Dalits: A Critical Study of Mulk Raj Anand's Coolie and Untouchable with An Evaluation of Wretched Condition in Arundhati Roy's the God of Small Things

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Abstract:

Dalits are treated as the worst as they are not. They have to misinterpret in the world of a so called sophisticated society of India by the upper caste ones. They have been called a slice of sordid reality which symbolizes the sufferings stigma in which the Dalits are doomed to live as the result of the present ideological assumptions about caste which has been very so deeply ingrained in the Indian mind that one has wrestled with oneself to feel free from the change of this thousand years old rotten system. Through this paper I want to lay down some of my points that have been expressed in Mulk Raj Anand's novels Untouchable, Coolie and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things where both of the authors have presented Dalit's sufferings, struggle and exploitation. The God of Small Things presents an ill-condition of a poor male who is tormented by the ill system of the upper caste people for his crime of love affair with an upper caste girl. In Untouchable, Bakha, a young sweeper from the outcastes' colony of a north Indian cantonment town bears daily torments like a missionary tries to persuade him to embrace Christianity, he listens to Gandhiji, who advocates social reform and so on. There is a quest in life of Bakha where thinking of everything he had heard,

though he could not understand it all. In fact untouchable is a contrast between rural and urban India and race-relations. Coolie is a pathetic odyssey of Munoo who suffers a lot during his life in the hands of the upper caste and even by his relatives. Life seems to him a very struggled and hard to live in this wretched and bad condition of the so called highly generated world of peoples who consider themselves as the people of the supreme power or the world of oppressor. Munoo is an orphaned village boy who sets out in quest of a livelihood but he is treated as an animal in all spheres of the society. He has to work as a domestic servant, factory worker, a rickshaw-puller which earns him consumption and untimely death because of sufferings and exploitation by the upper caste peoples. Here in today's so called modern India, the status of the Dalits is not as good as we dream living in the age of technology and information.

Keywords: Ammu, Bakha, Caste, Dalit, Munoo, Police, Rural India, Urban India, Untouchable and Velutha.

'Dalit' is a word which is defined as other, inferior, sufferer, exploited, oppressed or downtrodden bird of the society. Dalits are treated as the worst as they are not. Mahatma Gandhi named them as 'Harijan' (The People of God). Most of the Dalits live in rural India and more than are landless labourers. In many parts of India, land is still held by the upper castes that use the ideology of the caste system to economically exploit low-ranking landless labourers. Actually the word caste has been derived from the Portuguese 'casta', which means breed, race, or kind. In India, castes are ranked, named endogamous groups, and membership in a particular caste comes through birth. Actually they have to misinterpret in the world of a so called sophisticated society of India by the upper caste ones. They have been called a slice of sordid reality which symbolizes the sufferings stigma in which the Dalits are doomed to live as the result of the present ideological assumptions about caste which has been very so deeply ingrained in the Indian mind that one has wrestled with oneself to feel free from the change of this thousand years old rotten system. Through this paper I want to lay down some of my points that have been expressed in Mulk Raj Anand's novels *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) where both of the authors have presented Dalit's sufferings, struggle and exploitation.

Here in today's so called modern India, the status of the Dalits is not as good as we dream here living in the age of technology and information. Being *Untouchable* means that one cannot be touched, or touch others. In *Untouchable* there is a contrast between rural and urban India and race-relations where Bakha, a

young sweeper from the outcastes' colony of a north Indian cantonment town. It highlights the cause of the dumb and the deserted, the lowly and the loss of an adverse society. Bakha's occupation of cleaning toilets makes him an outcaste which brings insulted words of people. He was forced to beg food, and was not allowed to touch higher-class Hindus. Even he was not allowed to make his entrance or appearance in the temples. *Untouchable* illustrates a day of great difficulty for Bakha and accidentally he touches an upper caste Hindu and earns a slap for having polluted the man. Later on the very same day when he was cleaning the gutter for a lady, she threw the food on him rather offers him in his hands. His sister is molested by a priest on that very day. He was blamed for harming or injuring a young boy after a hockey match. As the day goes on, it becomes worse and the worst for him. The conditions were not in his favour, he was expelled from home by his father and he becomes frustrated and tormented by the societal issue on caste and occupation.

He thinks that his life is full of miseries and thorns. The action of the caste Hindu, touching of the lowest caste person, Bakha, is considered as a sin and if he has touched them by mistake then they need to sanctify. At this the anger of Bakha reveals as he says:

...all of them abused, abused, abused why are we always abused? The sanitary inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers, because we touch. They hate dung. I hate it to. That's why, I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high caste...I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable I am an untouchable!

(U 58-59)

Again on a wretched situation he has to control his anger but he reveals before his father after bearing the insult of his sister, Sohini, who has been molested by a Pandit. He is filled with anger and desperate mind which he bore at the time of his sister's molestation. He says:

...they think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt.

(U 89)

So the life of an untouchable like Bakha is full of miseries and anxieties. He is badly abused and tormented by the upper caste Hindus. Thus we see that he has to struggle a lot during his staying in the hands of the oppressors and they molest him at the every step of his life which is a downtrodden and a chilling exposure of the untouchable in the hands of the upper caste Hindu who thinks themselves as the emperor over the lowest caste peoples. E.M. Forster rightly says:

The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he can't escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. Unclean himself he pollutes other when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. This he is disgusting as well as disquieting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming...The sweepers were more sensitive looking and more personable than other servants and...had some skill as a poet. (U 8(Preface))

A writer, on the other hand, is the true voice of these unheard voices of the society and their voices prompt him to

deplorable description of the destitutes. An outcast has to lead a life meaner than the animals. He feels like a caged bird that flutters its wings for a free flight. So he decided to learn about Christianity and the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. He bears daily torments like a missionary tries to persuade him to embrace Christianity, he listens to Gandhiji, who advocates social reform and so on. There is a quest in life of Bakha:

...thinking of everything he had heard, though he could not understand it all.

(AHIEL 164)

On the other hand, Coolie is a pathetic odyssey of Munoo who suffers a lot during his life in the hands of the upper caste and even by his relatives. Life seems to him a very struggled and hard to live in this wretched and bad condition of the so called highly generated world of peoples who consider themselves as the people of the supreme power or the world of oppressor. Munoo is an orphaned village boy who sets out in quest of a livelihood but he is treated as an animal in all spheres of the society. He has to work as a domestic servant, factory worker, a rickshaw-puller which earns him consumption and untimely death because of sufferings and exploitation by the upper caste peoples.

Munoo is a poor adolescent who travels to the city, but unskillfully tortured at every level of the society. He attains the lowest jobs are available to him like the other boys who are treated as badly as the slave. His aunt and uncle use him as a money maker. They push him into the dirt, he was slapped and humiliated. And finally he is died of tuberculosis. According to Anand, Munoo suffers because of fate but because of society. It is the society which leads him to the tragic end. Unlike Bakha in

Untouchable, Munoo was the high caste; because of the poverty, the society did not consider him as a human being. Early in the novel he realized the truth, as he says:

Whether there were mere rich or more poor people, there seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world. Caste did not matter. 'I am a Kshatriya and I am poor. No, caste does not matter. The Babus are like the sahib-dogs, and all servants look alike. There must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor'.

(C 55-56)

At fourteen, he is forced to work in the house of Babu Nathu, a worker in Imperial Bank in Sham Nagar where the wife of Babu Nathu abuses and curses him without any reason. In fact he is a burning symbol of millions of unfortunate souls like himself-lost and bereft, abused and down-trodden. He has to exploit greatly in one or another, by one person or another. Actually his story is full of the saga of sufferings and exploitations which the world brings for him where he lives with his other friends. He attains an untimely death due to poverty and hunger. He is mercilessly treated as a slave at each sphere of the societal ground which is a doomed stigma on his life.

The God of Small Things presents the ideology of a marginalized, humiliated and segregated person Velutha who is tortured and exploited by the police of the upper caste group because of his illicit relationship with an upper caste woman, Ammu, who feels an irresistible attraction for Velutha, the untouchable carpenter of Paravan which is ranked as the lowest in the Indian society. As Arundhati Roy responds on a question in an interview about her attraction towards Velutha:

It is not compassion or pity that attracts Ammu to Velutha. It is not

subservience that delivers Velutha to Ammu. It is Ammu's anger at the society she lives in and is shunned by that seeks out and recognizes Velutha's anger. They are united in anger as much as in love...in The God of Small Things Velutha and Ammu's relationship is a battle-cry. There is no way that he could use that relationship to make his way up the caste-ladder instead she would make her way down-and she did.

(Arundhati Roy in an Interview with Out-Caste)

Velutha, the God of Small Things, commits a crime by establishing norms of society by having an affair with a woman of high caste. The relationship between a Syrian Christian woman and a Dalit man disrupt the existing order and notions of the society. As Arundhati Roy says in her novel:

They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tempered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much.

(TGST 31)

On the other hand, Velutha is a wonderful man who is endowed with excellent skills as a carpenter and most intelligent in handling the machines but his qualities are not accepted to the touchable workers in the factory of Mammachi. The social strictures and norms are seriously violated by his 'illegitimate' love for Ammu, a divorced touchable woman and he is punished for this crime. The most of the Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas live in the Malabar region who had converted to Christianity in order to get rid of untouchability but after this result less effort they are treated as segregated.

The final chapter of the novel, 'The Cost of Living' brings sad news for Velutha, Ammu and her children, Rahel

and Estha. This chapter illustrates the huge cost of living that Velutha, Ammu and her children have to pay. They wanted to live in accordance with their own choice but they are treated because of a man, Velutha, who is untouchable. As the writer says:

They know there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to small things

(TGST Chapter 21, 338)

Velutha and Ammu are treated as the beasts, tortured and humiliated by the police because they have broken the social and moral code, Velutha is killed for his raised voice in order to keep it subjugated, silenced and effaced from the elite discourse. He is discriminated, hated, humiliated and segregated by the Syrian Christian. His voice is oppressed by the oppressor because of his lowest status in the society.

The Dalits remain to be the most oppressed section of the social order in India. This caste stratification of the Hindus has rendered the Dalits as untouchables. The upper caste people treat them as other, subhuman beings and try to avoid their contact with them and if by chance it happens they need to sanctify. Our constitution has provided the right to equality, education opportunity, social justice but these have proven as mere a drama. In reality their status is as bad as worse-scattered in some states like Madhya Pradesh, Bihar or Rajasthan, they are denied to their rights in the so called society of our Modern India of Information and technology. They have to be pressurized, humiliated, tortured and abused because of their lowest status in the Indian social order of castes. In the Indian constitution of 1950 the Untouchability is legally abolished.

Today in India, any discrimination due to the caste system is forbidden by law. But the caste system has not been disappeared from everyday life. Even today in villages the untouchables are still excluded from the society and live in separate colonies. They are also human-beings, if they are educated and hailed respectfully, they may be uplifted on their lowest corner which is considered as a doomed stricture on their face and personality. They must be promoted for attaining higher education as the upper one get in their life. They must be given the equal rights and opportunities as we provide them to the upper one. If we really want to see our nation a developed one then we have to vanish this blot that is a rock in the path of development. There are so many persons like Munoo, Bakha and Velutha who suffer a lot during their work and even in their life; their talents are despised and denied due to their lowest status in the society. We must always remember this dictum “Change is one thing. Acceptance is another” (TGST 208) where Arundhati Roy has tried her power to depict the reality of the Indian society.

Note: I have used some abbreviation(s): U stands for Untouchability, C for Coolie, AHIEL for A History of Indian English Literature and TGST for The God of Small Things.

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