
**Resistance and Struggle in Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand
and Joothan by Om Prakash Valmiki: A Comparative Study**

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Abstract

On 26th January 1950, an independent India adopted the new constitution, and untouchability was legally abolished. But the Dalits continue to face the pain of oppression socially, economically, and politically. Dalit literature emerged in the 1950s and revolted against the dominant ideology and the unjust social order. **Untouchable** by Mulk Raj Anand (1935) belongs to the pre-independence era, whereas **Jonathan** by Om Prakash Valmiki (1950) belongs to the post-independence era. Both works deal with the life and struggles of the low castes, with their quest for identity, dignity, justice, and equality. One cannot help but feel restless while reading between the lines in the two novels, The comparative study of these texts is a sincere attempt to give expression to the sufferings, tortures, social discrimination, oppression, and inhuman treatment meted out to them by the upper castes. They portray their struggle for social equality and individual dignity. This paper tries to delve deeper into the horrors of discrimination faced by the characters in the novels and reopen the dialogue in the realm of Dalit literature.

Keywords: Caste, Untouchability, Protest, Exploitation, Dalit

Introduction

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar argued in *Annihilation of Caste*: "**This is only another way of saying that, turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform unless you kill this monster.**" It is sometimes said against the mainstream Indian writers that they can give only the external picture of the Dalit life and culture. It is argued that to write about Dalits is not enough because they cannot articulate, like the Dalit writers themselves, what it means to be a Dalit in Indian society.

discussion

According to Premila Paul, "**Untouchable is the result of an impassioned obsession and has no story interest as such, since it records a day's events in Bakha's life which serves as a mirror to the pathetic condition of the untouchables who form not only the lowest stratum of our society but also the bottom of the moral scale.**" Mulk Raj Anand wanted to create in his readers a strong awareness of social evils like the caste system and untouchability, which he found pretty dehumanizing. He had very intimate personal experiences because, as a boy, he had played with the untouchable boys of the sweeper colony, which was attached to the regiment where his father was working. His novels clearly show that he is inspired by the love of man when he incorporates the philosophy of humanism in them.

The autobiographical account of **Jonathan** portrays the pain, poverty, and humiliation that the author and his community had to undergo just because they belonged to the untouchable Chuhra community of Uttar Pradesh. They had to depend on the Joothan of the upper caste Tyagis of the village and were treated like lifeless objects by them. For centuries, Dalits have not only been compelled to consume but also relish this Jonathan. Valmiki gives the example of his community

and how Joothan became a part of its folklore when, during the marriage season, their elders narrated, in thrilled voices, stories of the bridegroom's party that had left several months of Joothan. The author's struggle to get an education in the school where upper caste Tyagis dominated was exhausting. The fact that the untouchables should be given opportunities to get education and become their equals made them the victims of the wrath of Tyagis. Valmiki narrates an incident that throws light on the upper caste teacher and a Dalit student relationship. He writes: One day, headmaster Kaliram called me into his room and asked, **“Abey, what is your name?”**

“Omprakash,” I answered slowly and fearfully.

“Chuhare ke?” The headmaster threw his second question at me.

“Ji.”

“All right.... See that teak tree there? Go. Climb on that tree. Break some twigs and make a broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is, after all, your family occupation.”

Mulk Raj Anand's **Untouchable** is the story of one day of Bakha, the protagonist's life who represents the trauma of being a Dalit in pre-independence India. He lives in the separately marked colony of the outcastes in the village of Bulandshahr, located in the interior of Panjab. Living in this colony, a living picture of misery and insanitation, Bakha carries out his task of cleaning the public latrines of the upper caste Hindus. He gets up early and works efficiently and sincerely from morning to evening. But still, he is treated in a very humiliating way, and no one recognizes his worth. He doesn't get angry when Havildar Charat Singh says, **“Oh, Bakhya! Oh, Bakhya! Oh, you scoundrel of a sweeper's son! Come and clear a latrine for me!”** (7) Humiliation, trauma, and exploitation of the Dalits are visible in these words. Anand gives a detailed description of the life being led by Dalits in the following words: **"The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform**

surrounding the well because if they were to draw water from it, the Hindus of three upper castes would consider the water polluted...So, the outcastes had to wait for chance to bring some caste Hindu to the well, for luck to decide that he was kind, for Fate to ordain that he had time- to get their pitchers filled with water.” (14-15) Anand attacks the social, economic, cultural, and political exploitation of the Dalits. Pandit Kalinath represents the high-caste Hindus who get polluted by the very touch of the untouchables, but they do not mind seducing a sweeper girl like Sohini. This picture Anand presents is no different from the one presented by Valmiki in Jonathan.

Whereas Valmiki is successful in showing resistance, Bakha also wants to protest against caste discrimination but ends up as a victim and a passive sufferer. He is dissatisfied with the life he is compelled to lead and dreams of changing society. The author vehemently describes his anguish when he tells his father that they think, **"We are mere dirt because we clean their dirt."** (70). Anand writes, **"But there was a smoldering rage in his soul. His feelings would rise like spurts of smoke from a half-smothered fire, in fitful, unbalanced jerks when the recollection of some abuse or rebuke he had suffered kindled a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him."** (42) Unlike Valmiki's father, Bakha's father lacks courage. When Pandit Kalinath tries to molest his sister, Sohini, Bakha becomes so aggressive that he wants to kill him to take revenge. But he somehow controls the anger because he is just reminded of his low caste. He comes back home very upset. When his father comes to know about everything, he tries to pacify him. Anand writes, **'No, no, my son, no,'** said Lakha, **'we can't do that. They are our superiors. One word of theirs is sufficient to overbalance all that we might say before the police. They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us...'** (71). Bakha wants to revolt, but he is rooted in a society where he is reduced to being a silent rebel. So Bakha is

both a rebel and a victim at the same time. It is, therefore, only in the end that he sees hope in Christianity, Gandhi's movement against untouchability, and the modern sanitary system.

Conclusion

Though Valmiki and Bakha represent the Dalit psyche, a close study of these two characters shows that resistance and protest are rising as we move from **Untouchable** to **Jonathan**. This is reflected in their behavior, frustrations, and aspirations. Bakha only dreams and then accepts everything as his destiny. However, Valmiki successfully breaks the caste-based social and economic order traditions by attempting to get an education, become a writer, and refuse to become a sweeper in life.

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