

Human Rights of Dalits and Untouchables : A Review**Amardeep Singh**, amardeepsingh1101@gmail.com**Abstract**

Human rights are held by all persons equally, universally, and forever. Human rights are those basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. To violate someone's human rights is to treat that person as though she or he were not a human being. Mulk Raj Anand is one of the few prolific Indian writers in English who have earned a good name as major novelists. He still continues to enjoy the reputation of being a stalwart in the field of Indian writing in English. Perhaps no other writer has been so intensely and actively associated with literary creation, with arts and with the cultural mainstream of the country as Anand has. His novels and stories are read and admired all over the world. All his novels deal with the underprivileged sections of Indian society. The most recurrent theme in his novels that strikes the reader is his treatment of the oppressed and suppressed classes of society. His subject is man. It is this kind of Anand's love of humanism, a principle of all embracing humanity, and his immediate and ultimate concerns as a writer and passionate sincere sympathy for the downtrodden sections that continually inspire and stimulate him to write continuously and prolifically. In *Untouchable*, human rights appeared to be restricted to those who control the civil society based on religious interpretations and the political regime. Hinduism prevents the Hindus from touching the sweepers or even touching anything a sweeper has touched. For example, in *Untouchable* we see the confectioner throws the "jalebis" to Bakha and his assistant splashes water on the nickel coins Bakha has placed on the shoe-board. Furthermore, human rights are denied and abused because of the social and religious structure in India during that time. The high castes Hindus are given the authority to degrade the lower-caste.

Keywords: Human Rights, Humanistic Writing, Hinduism, Violations Of Human Rights, Untouchability ,Colonial System , Upper Castes, Out Castes, Low Castes, Values And Ethics , Caste Differences etc.

Introduction

The media assaults us daily with horror stories regarding violation of human rights. One cannot sit silently and feels that something must be done.

Here one confronts the question of relationship between the theory of human rights and its practice, as the relationship between the theory and practice of human rights problematic. The principle that human rights must be defended has become one of the common phrases of our age.

The very first Article of the UNDHR clearly mentions: 'All human beings are born, free and equal in 'DIGNITY' and 'RIGHT'.' But where are the rights of the weaker sections of the society: women, poor, children and dalits?

All human rights derive from the dignity and worth inherent in the human person.

Evolution of Human Rights

In ancient scriptures, there have been references to the basic human rights, though they were not referred to by that name. Modern historians credit the origin of the concept to Magna Carta in AD 1215, which was basically a petition urging the King to concede rights to particular sections of the people. Its contents neither had the universality of application nor direct relevance to common man's basic freedoms.

The term 'Human Rights' was introduced in the United States Declaration of Independence in 1776 and then the U.S. Constitution embodied a 'Bill of Rights'. The French Revolution gave birth to 'Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizens' in 1789. In 1929 Institute of international law, USA prepared a 'Declaration of Human Rights and Duties'. In 1945 the Inter-American Conference passed a resolution seeking establishment of an International Forum for the furtherance of human rights of mankind.

Civil Society and Human Rights

Civil society is based upon the concept of human rights which are essential not only to fulfill biological needs of mankind but for the dignity of men as well. Without recognising the concept of human rights no polity can be considered as democratic. Every democratic constitution tries to recognize the concept of human rights in one way or the other. Broadly speaking, human rights. Fall into three categories:

- a) First generation rights or civil and political rights,
- b) Second generation rights or social and cultural rights, and
- c) Third generation rights or Group rights.

These rights are based on the following principles:

- (a) all human beings, without distinction, are brought within the scope of Human Rights instruments,
- (b) equality of application without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, and
- (c) Emphasis is on international cooperation for implementation.

The United Nations held that all Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms are indivisible and interdependent, equal attention and urgent consideration should be given to the implementation, promotion and protection of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Indian Scenario

India has played the most significant role in the promotion of the cause of human rights and is the greatest champion of human rights in the Third World. India has not only incorporated an elaborate Bill of Rights in her constitution but efforts have been made to translate these into reality.

This was necessary too as, is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 'a man comes into this world through no fault of his own, since he has no option of choosing the caste, class and the family of his birth, since he is a joint inheritor of the accumulations of the past and since these accumulations are more than sufficient to satisfy the claims that are made on his behalf, it follows that every man, without distinction of race or colour is entitled to all human rights, including the right to ... dignified life.'

In a country like India whose constitution makes provisions not only of human rights but their protection also, human rights of dalits and untouchables are still in a sorry state. In no other part of the world has so much injustice and systematic discrimination been done to a particular group of people for thousands of years as has been done in India with dalits and untouchables. The basis of injustice or discrimination is not religion or language but 'caste' over which a person has no control.

More than 50 years have elapsed since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations and the Indian constitution was enacted. In all these years a democratic country like India has done little to enforce the rights of dalits and untouchables. In spite of many idealistic provisions in the basic law of the land human rights of these people are violated time and again and only a few of them get reported.

Practice of Untouchability

By the practice of untouchability we mean the avoidance of physical contact with persons and things because of popular social beliefs and practices.

No doubt India has a rich and glorious cultural legacy to be proud of but still more important fact is that nowhere in the world can be found the extent of discrimination perpetuated by one group against the other as it is found in the case of low caste untouchables (by the high caste Hindus) in India. Caste system is a unique feature of India life. It is believed that originally there were only four castes, Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisayas and Shudras, 4 and this classification was on the basis of one's profession not birth. But over the past thousands of years these four castes have been sub-divided into thousands of castes and sub-castes, and now the basis of classification is 'birth' rather than 'profession'.

There have been many empirical studies which make it clear that the practice of untouchability is still an important component of Indian society and is in a complex, dynamic situation of flux and transition (in spite of all the constitutional arrangements). Though from the public life, especially in urban areas, this practice has almost been eradicated but in rural areas 'dalits' still find only a very restricted entry to temples, drinking water resources and other public places. Dalits who have adopted other professions than the traditional ones are in a better position as compared to those who still have to practice traditional occupations such as scavenging and tanning.

Conclusion:

Gandhi ji is presented in this novel to establish a transformation in human rights. He provides an understanding of and empathy with people with different values or ways of life. Gandhi is very keen for uplifting the untouchables. He calls them 'harijans' meaning "men of god". He regards untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism, and asserts that it is "satanic" to assume anyone

in Hinduism is born polluted. Gandhi also prays that he gets to reborn as an out- caste untouchable. Bakha finds relief in Gandhi's words. Gandhi speaks to the common man mind in order to improve the effort of protecting human rights. He links emancipation of untouchables with the protection of the cow, which the Brahmins worship. In conclusion, this novel creates a link between fiction and politics through its promotions of human rights. It appeals to its reader that salvation of mankind depends on human rights adoption and actual practices. Anand's project was the first step to human rights in universal declaration

Bibliography:

- [1] Anand Mulk Raj, *Apology for Heroism, - A Brief Autobiography of ideas*. 1946. New Delhi – Arnold – Heirneemann, 1975.
- [2] Anand Mulk Raj, *Coolie*, 1936. London; Penguin, 1945.
- [3] Anand Mulk Raj, *Untouchable*, 1935 London: Penguin, 1986
- [4] Bama in *Storylines: Conversations with women writers* eds. Ammu Josepet al (Delhi: Women's world & Asneta, 2003) 115.
- [5] Bama, "Dalit Literature" tr. M. Vijaya Lakshmi *Indian Literature* (Delhi: Sahitya Academy 1999) Vol. 193: 98
- [6] *Dalit – The Black Untouchable of India* V.T. Raj Shekhara 2003 – 2 nd Print, Clarity Press, Inc. ISBN 0932863-05-1
- [7] *Untouchable: Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, by Barbara – R Joshi Zed Books, 1986. ISBN 0862324602, 97808622324605.
- [8] *An anthology of Dalit Literature*, by Mulk Raj Anand. 1992 Gyan Books. ISBN 8121204194. ISBN 9788121204194
- [9] *Dalits and the Democratic revolution – Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement is Colonial India* by Gail Omvedt. 1994 Sage Publications.