**Comilla University**



**Post-Colonial Literature(South Asian**)

Subject Code: EMA-009

 **Presentation on**

**Untouchable as a postcolonial Novel**

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**Untouchable as a postcolonial Novel**

The aim of this research paper is to examine Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) novel in the light of post colonialism. This novel shows a realistic picture of all the oppressed section of the society during the pre-independence period of India. The pre independence seen through the curious eyes of young boy Bakha and as the story unravels, it brings out the multiple post-colonial themes like loss of culture, identity crisis, and the discrimination. Anand’s *Untouchability* is unique in the sense that it tells the story of under privileged and exploited society who has no voice for themselves. However, *Untouchable* novel by Mulkaraj Anand draws our attention towards the main concept of post-colonialism. The novel explicitly mirrors the idea of post colonialism. The whole novel *Untouchable* built on the aesthetic grounds of post-colonial theory. In fact, many aspects in the novel portrayed by Mulk Raj Ananda cling to bottom roots of colonial and post-colonial theory. One must acknowledge the truth that, Mulk Raj Anand demonstrates the grimmer realities of society through the aspects of post colonialism. The idea of post colonialism played a significant role in many works of Mulkaraj Anand, especially in *Untouchable* novel. Anand used his novel as a tool to demonstrate the theory of post colonialism simultaneously he exhibited reality behind the scenes. The *Untouchable* novel created a platform for Anand to expound theory of post colonialism. My aim is to demonstrate the theory of post colonialism with reference to Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* novel*.*

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the most prolific writers of the period who is best known as a social realist and a humanist. He is an innovator in Indian literature. He is one of the first Indian authors write in English about the humanitarian dilemmas facing India during the mid-twentieth century. His compassionate objective is to produce an awareness of the cruelty and inhumane practices of untouchability and social class distinctions and to seek the enlightening prospects of progress and modernity*.* Mulk Raj Anand is considered by many as the father of the Indian novel. Many of his works address the concerns of colonized as well as postcolonial India including the issues of the collision of the two cultures, the observation of the “other” by the natives, the function of racism and the dilemma presented by the Indian caste system, as well as the quandary of preserving Indian traditions while moving forward with progress. Anand sought to enlighten the worldly public to the predicament of the Indian population. Anand’s most famous novel, Untouchable, was written in this fashion as he recounted the goings on of a single day in the life of the protagonist, Bakha.

We have to acknowledge the truth that without colonialism there would be no post-colonialism. Colonialism is about the dominance of a strong nation over another weaker one. Colonialism happens when a strong nation sees that its material interest and affluence require that it expand outside its borders. Colonialism is a process where the sovereignty over the colony is claimed by colonizer. If we look at the roots of colonialism and post colonialism we can’t find much difference. Its roots were in the Columbus arrival for the new found land. Simply we can defines the colonialism is physical occupation territory and post colonialism deals with the effects of colonization on culture and societies. Once-colonized countries can be seen as properly post-colonial. Post-colonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony.

Post-colonial theory critically examine the ways in which writers from colonized countries attempt to articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities and reclaim them from the colonizers. They also examine ways in which the literature of the colonial powers is used to justify colonialism through the perpetuation of images of the colonized as inferior. It focuses particularly on the way in which literature by the colonizing culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority, of the colonized people on literature by colonized peoples which attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness. It can also deal with the way in which literature in colonizing countries appropriates the language, images, scenes, traditions and so forth of colonized countries. Postcolonial writings can be considered as the historical marker of the period because it deals the literature which comes after decolonization.

The theory of post colonialism doesn’t only confine to English literature but it also became a prevalent subject in Indian literature. Postcolonial era was a significant development in Indian English literature. There are many authors come up with idea of post colonialism, among them Mulk Raj Anand is one of them. Mulk Raj Anand presented the radical social and national issues in his novels. Untouchable novel deeply rooted in post-colonial perceptive. Anand mainly focus on common issues such as the struggle for independence, caste system, discrimination and sufferings of lower caste people, and social identity. These issues depicted in the novel Anand displayed in the light of post-colonial perspective.

We have to realize the truth that post colonialism doesn’t only talk about white men suppressing the black men, but it has several other faces to this relation. Dalit’s in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* can be taken as the subjects of colonization under the rule of Savarna Hindus. Caste is “the most telling reminder of the postcolonial character of India’s Contemporary predicament” (Nicholas dirks 294).This binary relation between classes and castes, dominating and dominated, can also be studied under the lens of colonial structure.

The notion of the subaltern became the issue in post-colonial theory. In literature, subaltern is a post-colonial concept, which is generally used for downtrodden belonging to the lower cast and class, weak sex and economically poor group .This binary relation between classes and castes, dominating and dominated, can also be studied under the lens of post-colonial structure. The novel explores the tension between the caste system, with its division of human beings into high and low based on birth and caste. Through the *Untouchable* novel Anand tackles the India’s most enduring demon, Untouchability and it discovers the tension between the caste systems.

This novel shows a realistic picture of all the oppressed section of the society during the pre-independence period of India. Bakha, the protagonist of the novel, is representative of all the downtrodden people of the country who faced discrimination and suppression due to their caste. Bakha and other characters in the novel suffer due to the fact that they belong to the lower caste. We get a bleak vision of their place in the beginning of the novel. The novel *Untouchable* opens with a description of the outcaste colony, where they were living without any facilities, since thousands of years. Their colony is portrayed thus in the novel. The out caste, were the lowest stratum of Indian society, they suffer extreme economic and physical deprivation. He paints a stark picture of the condition in which these people live. “The outcastes’ colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society.”

These sections of people suffer because they are by birth regarded as outcastes by others. Anand demonstrates the idea of colonialism and caste discrimination through the eyes of Bakha. E.M. Forster describes him in the Preface to the novel

“Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive; we can recognize his broad intelligent face, graceful torso and he does his nasty job or steps out in artillery boots in hope of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper packet of cheap sweets in his hand.” (Preface to Untouchable: Forster).

The novel begins with an autumn morning in Bakha's life. He is in bed, half-awake. "Covered by a worn out greasy blanket, on a faded blue carpet which was spread on the floor, in a corner of the cave-like, dingy, dark, one-roomed mud-house."

The morning abuses starts his day and he welcomed by the abuses of his father and is forced to clean the latrines with a brush and a basket. Bakha comes out of his reverie as he hears the shouts: "Ohe, Bakha! Ohe, Bakha! Oh, scoundrel of a sweeper's son. Come and clean a latrine for me!" from the upper caste person (15). When he gets to the end of his work in the third row of latrines for the second time during the morning, he feels a cramp in his back and stretches himself out from the bent posture he has maintained all the while. After the process of cleaning the latrines in the final fourth round, he feels extremely exhausted but he is intuitively reminded of his next job. The real suffering for Bakha begins when he goes into the town to sweep the street as a substitute for his father who has said that he was not feeling well. When Bakha is going in the streets for sweeping unfortunately he touches the Hindu merchant. Bakha is not only scolded but also slapped by a Hindu merchant who alleges that Bakha has touched him and thus polluted him. He called Bakha “You son of bitch why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock-eyed son of a bow-legged and scorpion! Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was Characterisation a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning.

Bakha is completely taken aback and his hands an instinctively join together in apology without uttering a single word. He only bends his forehead over then and mumbles something but the 'touched' man does not care to hear what he says as he is not satisfied with Bakha's dumb humility. The people gather around the scene and abuse Bakha. He pleads but no one feels pity for him. The defiled man gives a slap on Bakha’s face and leaves the place. That domination of upper caste people extremely disturbs Bakha’s mind but still eventually he feels that he is helpless.

Through this pathetic incident of Bakha’s life Anand exhibit the idea of domination of upper class people over on untouchable’s life. They were not allowed to speak or raise the voice against the upper caste people. Anand demonstrated the idea of colonialism through this incident. Colonialism is about the dominance of a strong over another weaker one. Here Hindu merchant represent the image of colonizer and Bakha represent the image of colonized. For the first time in his life Bakha is made aware of his status as an untouchable. The cruelty and orthodoxy of the Hindus is thus sharply focussed.

Bakha is reminded that his father has asked him to collect food for the family. He goes to backstreet for begging food. He starts shouting for food but nobody responds. Tired of the hectic schedule he sleeps on the wooden platform in front of a caste Hindu’s house. A high caste woman comes out of the house on the call of a Sadhu. She shouts at Bakha for polluting her house. She asks him to clean the drain to get a piece of bread. She is a high caste woman comes out of the house on the call of a Sadhu. She shouts at Bakha for polluting her house. She asks him to clean the drain to get a piece of bread. She considered his touch and presence is made her home impure.

After the humiliation of Hindu caste women Bakha psychologically disturbed. And in order to get rid from that disturbance Bakha goes to the playground to play a hockey match. The son of a high caste Hindu is hurt in the quarrel that takes place after the match. When Bakha takes the wounded boy to his house, his mother, instead of giving thanks shouts at Bakha for defiling her son and the house. This confuses his mind and infuriates his heart. Bakha is ill-treated by people even though he showed his compassion, love and concern towards them.

We witnessed the worst situation of Bakha in the streets of Bulanshahar. With his own money he buys jelebis from the sweets shop but the owner of the shop has thrown it at him, as if he was a street dog. It was believed by the upper caste that by the direct touch of untouchable would be defiled. After getting Jelebis in his hands, Bakha was lost in his own world, thinking of the taste the sweet syrup. Unknowingly he touched the caste Hindus consequently both his Jelebis and felicity mixed into dust.

Sohini bore all humiliation and insult patiently due to her helplessness. The idea of exploitation is best expressed through the character of Sohini, Bakha’s sister. She not only exemplifies caste exploitation but also sex exploitation. As a caste-exploited, she I shown waiting patiently for a long time when she goes to fetch water from the caste well. “She had in her docile and peaceful bearing.” Gulabo, a washer woman, a caste superior to all other outcastes Gulabo, a washer woman, a caste superior to all other outcastes exploits Sohini. “Now Sohini, being of the low caste among the outcastes would naturally be looked down upon by Gulabo”. (34) She not only abuses the sweeper girl but also rushes to hit her. She becomes the victim of sexual exploitation due to her caste and poverty. She is very beautiful but she has not enough clothes to protect her beauty from the hungry eyes of the male.

We cannot do that. They are our superiors. One word of theirs is sufficient against all that we might say before the police. They are our masters. We must respect them and do as they tell us. Some of them are kind.”

Bakha is a representative of all the underdogs who suffer at the hands of the society for their low caste. Throughout the novel we see that Bakha struggles for the search of his own identity and tries to find the significance of his life. Bakha is an exploited person in terms of oppression, injustice and humiliation. All these issues inflicted upon him and made him rebellious. Excessive abuse and insult makes his think about retaliation. At such moments, he feels like a tiger at a bay. Though Bakha has a number of characteristics of a hero, he cannot revolt openly against exploitation due to their helplessness and because of their limitation of caste.

At one point we can notice that, due to the domination of Hindus over on untouchables lives brought certain kind of an abominable outlook in Bakha’s mind on orthodox Hindu system. Bakha most of time asks himself why he was treated in such an abusive and insulting manner by the Hindus.

“Why are we always abused? The sanitary inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. 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”. (43)

Bakha’s life is full of alienation that results in identity crisis. His alienation occurs in every stratum of his life. And Bakha’s life is accursed caused by the unavoidable conflict between the individual and the society. The cruelty of Hindu orthodox system led him to deviates from the notion of caste and religion. The upper class society became an oppressive weapon always looks down upon him and constantly reminds him of his lowest origin that results in his complete alienation and identity crisis. Thus Bakha becomes a nonhuman and stranger to the society, family and even to himself.

Bakha in most of his actions tries to imitate the British culture and their customs. He has strong desires, ambitions, and sensations to live "the Whiteman’s life." He is eager to wear western dress, study English.

Perhaps the psychology behind Bakha’s acceptance of a white man’s culture and system may be his desire to beat his oppressors at their own game. Bakha preference for the Tommies over the caste Hindus is likely the natural outcome of his hatred towards his oppressors. "In Bakha’s scale of values, the White Sahib is far superior to a caste Hindu, and so in his land of the heart’s desire, he would like to be not a caste Hindu but a White Sahib."(34). We see that Bakha in every attempt tries to get out of the clutches of an orthodox Hindu society tries to become a White Sahib rather than a caste Hindu.

Religion played an important role in the novel; we see its influence upon the people of the society to a great extent. Col. Hutchinson urges Bakha to adopt Christianity to overcome his deplorable condition. Bakha was advised by Col. Hutchinson to convert to Christianity that is devoid of any caste system and he would never face discrimination in his life any more. However Bakha is skeptical about converting his own religion and is suspicious about the missionary’s intention. More than Christianity Hinduism played a significant role in all untouchables lives. The whole lives untouchables experienced through the eyes of high caste Hindus. All the immoral and hypocritical activities of Hinduism made him to walk out from the religion. In fact Bakha has lost the respect in religion by experiencing the harsh realities of the society. Anand tries to present a harsh reality that not all the preachers of religion are morally right at their heart and that we should not welcome blind beliefs and caste discrimination in the name of religion. His primary concern was to uplift this lot of people who were socially unaccepted and isolated.

Anand feels that somehow Hindu religion itself is responsible for this social discrimination. He condemns the temples as being the instruments of exploitation. He makes sarcastic remarks on Hindu gods and rituals. He laughs at the multiplicity of Hindu gods. The high castes use their gods for their own advantage. They create fear in the minds of the outcastes. While going to the temple Bakha feels ‘The temple seemed to advance towards him like a monster”. Anand expresses his anger, agony and despair of the exploitation of the outcastes in the name of religion. Through the miserable plight of untouchables he wants to make the reader aware of the horrors of the poverty and sufferings. He makes us sensitive to

Gandhi regards all Indians as equal and expresses his desire to be reborn as an untouchable. He addresses them with a new name ‘Harijan’ and considers them to be the cleaners of Hindu religion. Although Gandhi’s words instil a ray of hope in Bakha and other people but Bakha “…began to move. His virtues lay in his close-knit sinews and in his long breath sense. He was thinking of everything that he had heard though he could not understand it all. By Gandhi’s spiritual message, Anand brings Bakha back to his normal senses. Gandhi’s words ‘Harijan’ and ‘cleaners of Hindu religion’ (194) replace his humiliation by pride. The discussions which follow the speech make us realize that Gandhi’s spirituality, supported by modern technology can give us a genuine solution of using flush system to the problem of Untouchability. However on one occasion Bakha gets inspired after listening to Gandhi’s thoughts about untouchability which he regarded as a malpractice and wanted people to get rid of it.

As mentioned earlier, we have to realize the truth that post-colonialism doesn’t only talk about white men suppressing the black men, but it has several other faces to this relation. The untouchables in Mulk Raj Anand’s novel also can be taken as the subjects of colonization under the rule of Savarna Hindus. Once-colonized countries can be seen as properly post-colonial. The Post-colonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony. In the novel Mulk Raj Anand Anand analysed all these issues in the light of post-colonial perceptive.

The primary concern of Post-colonial literature is to demonstrate the consequences of the domination or colonization. In the novel Mulk Raj Anand vehemently traces out the significant consequences, after the Hindus domination over on untouchables. The first significant result in Bakha’s life is giving up the religion. And another significant change is fascination towards British culture. Further the untouchables lost their identity in the society. Their whole life is dedicated to serve for the upper caste people. And here the upper caste people represented as “colonizer” and the untouchables represented as “colonized”. The so called Hindus look down upon untouchable’s lives and they treated them like slaves. The Colonizers {Hindus} imposed many rules on colonized {untouchables} people. And the untouchable’s lost all the charm of life and they are not allowed to enter into the main stream society.

Eventually, we notice that *Untouchable* novel is a faithful record and a transcription of the pathetic plight of untouchables who are subjected to immitigable social indignities, "only because of their lowly birth." It can be understood from this paper that the struggle of the subalterns cannot end so easily. The writers have expressed their hope for the future relying on their own times’ expectation. Anand tries to pin his hope for betterment of the situation on the dream of Ghandhian ideology and vision. Anand not only throws light on their abject poverty and suffering but also focuses its attention on their low-caste. The novel has a tragic beauty of its own. The will to revolt and the sheer impossibility of successful doing so under the circumstances constitute the basic tension in the novel. The hero is simultaneously a rebel and victim. His anguish becomes our sorrow. But Bakha has no tragic status as scapegoat and a victim, tyrannized by a recalcitrant society. He is the lowest of the lowly whose destiny does not suffer any appreciable erosion. Ultimately we notice that the theory of post colonialism is the most prevalent subject matter in Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* and simultaneously we have to agree that this novel establishes post colonialism in the significant manner.