



BAKHA IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S UNTOUCHABLE & VELUTHA IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS : A COMPARISON

November, 2010



* Thorat A. C.

* Asst. Prof. of English, L. B. S. Mahavidyalaya, Dharmabad Dist. Nanded (M. S.)

After attaining political freedom in 1947, India has come a long way in terms of development. The parochial, frivolous considerations on the grounds of caste, religion have by and large diminished. But can we for sure say that we have secured the ideals our freedom fighters dreamt of? There is huge difference between pre-Independence and post-Independence India. Indo-Anglian literature largely discusses the issue. Though Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy belong to different periods and milieu, they raise the voice of the underdogs and the poor in India in realistic terms. Roy also shows sympathy for them. The inhuman, savage practice of untouchability has been in the Indian society for ages. The so-called elites and touchables have not accepted the untouchables with equality. It may be observed that Mahatma Gandhiji's idea of ameliorating the untouchables through changing Hindus' hearts has not succeeded, as untouchability exists even now in some form or the other. Both Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy condemn tooth and nail the ill-treatment against the untouchables, the children of India's ghetto. Anand, the Charles Dickens of India, as E.M. Forster calls him, has penned the character Bakha, the protagonist in his first novel *Untouchable* (1935), observing himself the anguish the untouchables have had to put up with. Roy also gives the character-velutha, the protagonist in her magnum opus *The God of Small Things*, a tinge of reality.

The social disgrace Anand attacked most was casteism. Gandhiji also believed that it was the most indelible blot on Hinduism. Anand perhaps knew that India cannot develop without the eradication of the most pernicious practice against very humanity. Anand, it may be mentioned, was convinced that the practice was a wicked lie by the established and the dominant in the society against the depressed classes to perpetuate discrimination and ineradicably damn these weaker sections of the society. His first novel *Untouchable* is a social document, which exposes the snobbery of the touchables. It is a critique against inhumanity imposed by the prevalent in the society against the defenceless and the unarmed. The novel

is an intense cry against the cruelty by man against man. It is a satire against the injunction that low jobs should be done only by the low strata in the society. The novel describes one-day incidents in the life of Bakha, the protagonist in the novel. He is a young, eighteen year, able-bodied sweeper devoted to work he is put to shame by the uppercastes only because he belongs to a low caste. He listens to the speech by Gandhiji and is deeply impressed. He becomes happy because Gandhiji calls upon people not to observe the evil practice, and also because of the fact that technology is going to relieve him of the tedious and monotonous drudgery. Bakha has to undergo stiff humiliation in the Well-Incident, the Temple-Incident, the Bazar-Incident and the Hockey Match-Incident. Bakha is rebellious, but circumstances get the better of him to suppress his rebellion, with his self-realization of being untouchable.

Arundhati Roy, in democratic India, focuses on the evil practice of untouchability through her novel *The God of Small Things*. Velutha, an untouchable, is the protagonist. The novel is the story of Ammu, a widow with two children-Estha and Rahel. She comes close to Velutha so much so that a physical relationship is established between the two. Ammu is touchable, but Velutha is not, which violates the injunction of the scriptures. The so-called society takes a strong objection to the liaison and eventually, at the end of the story, Velutha is killed. The novel displays the socio-political reality in independent India. It records love and cruelty; the cruelty against a low caste. Velutha's killing is a testimony of the prevalent orthodoxy in the Indian society. Velutha is the second generation, that is reincarnation, of Bakha. Many parallels may be drawn between the two protagonists, though they belong to different periods and conditions. The former is an untouchable and is abhorred by the high caste. Similarly, the latter is an untouchable belonging to the Paravan community in Kerala. Both of them are physically powerful and sturdy. They have to work in trying working conditions. The fathers of both are scared of the uppercaste community,

but they react differently. Bakha's father instructs him to obey the uppercastes; but Velutha's fails to follow suit. Both Bakha and Velutha are attached devotedly to work, in fact, they are work-maniac. They are craftsmen, with Bakha doing miracles with be old and shabby dress and Velutha taking great delight in making boats for Ammu's children. Velutha can make intricate and subtle toys, small windmills and jewel boxes of dry palm reeds. He is also dexterous at repairing radio sets, clocks, water pumps etc. Both of them are more or less the characters which are confronted with different situations and circumstances. Whereas Bakha stands for innocence and gullibility, Velutha embodies experience and maturity. They are both damned by their social stigmas and are not entitled to touch anything the so-called touchables are supposed to.

The idea of rebellion is identical between them. Velutha is unmindful of his father's worries. Vellya Paapen, his father is concerned as Velutha grows young. This gap leads to a kind of estrangement between the father and the son. Things take a different shape and he disappears one day. A canard is spread for four years that he is working on a building site for the Department of Welfare and Housing in Trivendrum. He remains ignorant of his mother's death (Chella). He is uninformed of his brother's having fallen off a coconut tree and having damaged his spine. He learns of it after a year only. He does not divulge anything about his sojourn when he returns to Aymanam. Having once returned, Mammachi makes him in-charge of the general maintenance of the fac-

tory which causes resentment among the touchable workers. Mammachi pays less wages to Velutha to keep the touchable workers silent. Velutha grows dangerously which his father knows full well. But he cannot tell Velutha anything. Soon terror takes over him when "he saw what his untouchable son had touched, more than touched". Velutha is well up to face any challenge. Velutha, the reincarnation of Bakha, is been conscious enough to handle anybody in any condition.

It remains to be seen that both Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy have closeness to the characters of their respective protagonists. Arundhati Roy's confession of the fact that she grew up in a pickles' factory at Ayamanam has also been recognized as real. Similarly, Mulk Raj Anand's affinity and association with the children of the sweepers attached to an Indian regiment is conspicuous throughout the characterization of Bakha. Both the novels bear a true stamp of reality. The delineation of the character of Bakha was the need of the hour and that is the reason why Mulk Raj Anand is called a historical writer. One may, likewise, find traces of the conservatism still prevalent in civilized society like ours. Both the novelists occupy a special position in the history of the Indo-Anglian fiction writing, though they emerged almost in mutually exclusive times. The reason for this is that they celebrate a common concern, that is the dumb, speechless untouchables in the Indian society.

REFERENCE

1. Mulk Raj Anand: *Untouchable* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Pvt. Ltd., 1981)
2. Arundhati Roy: *The God of Small Things* (New Delhi: India Ink, 1997).
3. K. R. S. Iyengar: *Indian Writing in English* (Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1983).
4. M. K. Naik : Mulk Raj Anand (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Pvt. Ltd., 1964)
5. N. K. Sinha : Mulk Raj Anand (New Delhi, Kalyani Publications, 1998).
6. H. M. Williams : *Indo-Anglian Literature – 1890-1970: A Survey* (Orient Longman, 1976).