

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 6, Issue 12, December 2018

www.ijellh.com

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Voice of the Voiceless: A critical analysis of select novels of
Mulk Raj Anand and Chinua Achebe

Abstract: Literature has a great responsibility of bringing forth the voices of marginalised and depressed community. It can recognize the truth outside the ability to grasp of presence of mind, learning, human science and culture. It deals with social issues which are a sort of propagation of existing issues. The impact of western culture on India and Africa completely revolutionized the entire outlook of the Indian and African intellectuals. It is a mode of discursive articulation always endeavours to give voice to the marginal. Mulk Raj Anand and Chinua Achebe write mainly for their own nation and for their own community. They are basically nativist writers. They give voice to his country. Through their writings they attempt to arouse for a vision of life, for a duty of reconstructing humanity in India and Africa. This

paper attempts to highlight the voice of the voiceless in the select novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Chinua Achebe.

Keywords: Voice, tradition, downtrodden, untouchable, culture.

Introduction

Literature can recognize the truth outside the ability to grasp of presence of mind, learning, human science and culture. It deals with social issues which are a sort of propagation of existing issues. The impact of western culture on India and Africa completely revolutionized the entire outlook of the Indian and African intellectuals. The novelists present various social issues like caste system, cultural exploitation; corruption, untouchability etc. formed the basic novels and stories. Social and cultural issues become the major themes of the novels. Literature has a great responsibility of bringing forth the voices of marginalised and depressed community. It is a mode of discursive articulation always endeavours to give voice to the marginal. Mulk Raj Anand and Chinua Achebe write mainly for their own nation and for their own community. They are basically nativist writers. They give voice to his country. They are humanist. Through their writings they attempt to arouse for a vision of life, for a duty of reconstructing humanity in India and Africa.

The novelist gives a voice to what is voiceless; a name to what is so far nameless. Literature carries out forms of language, vision, reflection and imagination and makes a model of qualities that are moral and tasteful in the meantime. It is not an authorisation of values and acknowledgment of power, but a criticism of the world and out way of looking at the world. The novelist deals with reality but with a reality which is reflected of the particular. Joan Rockwell states: "Fiction is not only of social reality, but also necessary functional part of social control, and also, paradoxically, an important element in social

change. It plays a large part in the conduct of politics and in general, gives symbols and modes of life (4).”

India has great literary culture of its own. Anand takes up the issue of caste discernment in India. The caste system in India is originally formulated, based on one's profession and not by birth. It has a hereditary basis. The low caste is to identify the untouchables. His prominent commitment to Indian novel in English is the digestion of the best of Indian and Western techniques in his novels. He is the novelist of characters and social reality. His characters are genuine and true. He demands the dignity of man independent of standing, doctrine, class, or riches. His novel *Untouchable* communicates some fundamental patterns of humanism.

Anand has revealed the pathetic characters and victims of Indian society. Bakha, the protagonist of the *Untouchable* is the lowest of the lowest caste. He is regarded as an untouchable by the caste Hindus. *Untouchable* conveys that the lower class has also dignity and the poor untouchables likewise should have the privilege for education, entrance in temples, blending with the high caste Hindu. They should get equivalent and good treatment, food and housing and clothing. The fundamental human values like freedom, fraternity; equality, which can be the key elements of low castes, is a search for identity in the society. It endures as perpetual in the outlooks of the voiced towards the voiceless. Anand is viewed as extraordinary novelist for his effort to signify the depressed and the subjugated people who are struggling for their reality.

Bakha is accountable of keeping the public latrines clean and tidy. He represents the down trodden society dwelling in India. Anand offers voice to the voiceless by raising the issue of caste discrimination. He hates to clean the dirt of others. But, he is bound to do so

just because he is conceived as an outcaste. People from the higher caste believed that it was the responsibility of Bakha to keep the public latrines clean and tidy. He begs thus, “Bread for the sweeper, Mother. Bread for the sweeper... The sweeper has come for the bread, Mother! The sweeper has come for the bread” (Untouchable 74). He begs for the food as a payment of his work. The outcastes are not allowed to draw water from the public wells and they are severely punished if they go against the rule. They have to wait near the well for some Hindu to come and pour water into their pitchers. Bakha utters a telling indictment of his fate: “Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable” (Untouchable 57).

When Sohini, Bakha sister goes to Pandit Kalinath, the priest’s house, he tries to molest her. She screams loudly. Suddenly he shouts at her and accuses her for polluting his home. A crowd of angry caste Hindus gathers there to scold her. This incident clearly shows that justice is denied to the untouchables’ even though they are right. Anand raises a question. If an untouchable boy touches a caste Hindu, it is considered as pollution. But a priest like Kalinath tries to touch an untouchable girl for his physical need is not considered as pollution.

Anand’s Coolie gives new eyes to see and opens up a whole new world. He endures with his protagonist. He views the poor, the downtrodden, and the outcaste with uncommon eyes of compassion. The whole novel brings open the exploitation of the downtrodden poor by the set up rich. Munoo is forced to run away from his village to earn money just because of poverty. Munoo moves from place to place from village to the town, from town to city and then to the mountains in search of livelihood and finally puts a full stop to all his troubles with the help of the ultimate, that is death by suicide. Munoo’s aunt curses him,

Vay, you shameless, shameless, vulgar, stupid hillboy! May the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence! May you die! What have you done!

Why didn't you ask me where to go? May you fade away! May you burn! We didn't know we were taking on an animal in our employ, an utter brute, a savage! (Coolie 17)

Bakha in *Untouchable* and Munoo in *Coolie* recreate the changes in their lives. They can't lead an independent life. They always have to depend upon others for food, water, clothes. The obstacle of untouchability brought divisions in caste all over the nation. They are uneducated, identity-seeking protagonists. They suffer at the hands of several forms of society. They suffer because of the caste, class, the capitalism, industrialism and communalism. As C. J. George observes:

The novel presents a chain of adventures in a picaresque manner. But Munoo the hero is not a rogue. He is only a victim of the world's rogueries. His search for bread, in a world where a poor man's flesh and blood is treated as cheaper than bread, makes him restless and it forces him to move from place to place. (53)

Bakha suffers that his caste is responsible for all his problems. Munoo suffers that his poverty is the root cause of all his troubles. Anand stresses on the dignity of man regardless of caste, poor, rich, his appeal for the practice of compassion as a living value, his conception of the whole man constitute his humanism. The painful sufferings undergone by the poor and untouchables have found voices of indignation, anger and complaint in his novels. He reflects the stressful horror of untouchable life in India. Anand gives a conscious voice to the sufferings and protect of the socio-politically marginalized sectors of the society.

Chinua Achebe is a strong voice for African literature. His novels gain perception into the politics of the country revolutionary elite, and, in particular, into the conflicts between his cultural background and professions of political conviction. Achebe voices his concern on the

need for African writer to help restore the dignity and self-respect of his tribesmen. Although Achebe's statements are primarily triggered by his concern for his own community, the means that he uses to restore confidence are those other African writers also incorporate in their works. Achebe believes that the purpose of writing is to rekindle the active instinct in his people and preserve his cultural heritage.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* gives us almost a very truthful account of the Igbo community in Umuofia. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, is a representative of native African culture. He is a great wrestler, a brave warrior, a wealthy farmer, a husband to three wives, a title-holder among his people and a respected member of the clan who actions to sustain its traditions, culture and customs. The respect to the god and the ancestors can make a difference in the life of Igbo people. Ezeani says, "You will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries" (*Things Fall Apart* 28).

The arrival of the missionaries is regarded as the chief cause of the confusion resulting from their intrusion in Igbo culture and tradition. He is dealt with consciously by the elders on account of his affinity towards the way of life, culture and inheritance of Igbo people, therefore Okonkwo's identity rests upon the social morals of the society. Achebe explores the unheard voices of the native people. The Igbo people are not, independently of having a voice or not, ready to have a discussion with the White Missionaries because they do not listen. The fact that the European people are still unfit to hear the voice of the African characters in Achebe's story is very important since the subordination of the subaltern is to a great extent done by ignoring the subaltern's story and culture. Achebe condemns his own people who converted to Western Christianity blaming them for dismissing their confidence and embracing another, as well as of rejecting their cultural traditions and customs.

Conclusion

The British rulers subjected the poor to slavish, subhuman existence the rigid class and caste structure of India and Africa itself caused intolerable sufferings to people. The exigencies of the situation demanded a revelation of these evils and confrontation against them. In post-colonial literature, indigenous people from colonised and marginalised countries have gradually found their voices, endeavouring to emphasise their individual visions, speak their personal stories and regain their histories. Anand and Achebe feel their characters agony, speak their distresses and become a voice of the voiceless. Both their works record the sequence of political crises which has beset their own community, country and finally the whole of the continent of Asia and Africa.

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