

Exposure of Evils in Mulk Raj Anand's *The Road*

¹Bela B. Kadiya & ²Dr. R. K. Pujara

¹Ph.D Scholar of Rai University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat (India)

²Professor, M.G. Science College, (English Dept., HOD) Ahmedabad, Gujarat (India)

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*Corresponding Author

Email: belasathwara8687[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper is a sincere effort to plan the novel as almost something new to India a bit away from the traditional writing in Indian English. It beautifully analyses the dominant role of M. R. Anand in the current literary scenario of Indian English. He skillfully handled a variety of social problems exposing a number of evils spread in the society rather imposingly in a humanistic style and leading the Indian English Fiction to uncovered areas where the oppressed and suppressed section of people were ignored by the most of the writers with reforming zeal.

Bhikhu, a protagonist of the novel *The Road*, at the end of the novel leaves for Delhi town from the village, in search of his freedom from the bondages of various evils spread in the society highlighting his inability to cope the dominancy of the upper castes who treat the oppressed and marginalized with certain kind of prejudices.

Anand's precocious, preconscious and sensitive acts of getting rid of widespread evil practices made him express such evils as caste system, untouchability, religious hypocrisy, exploitation of the poor, corruption, decline of values, injustice and inequality, illiteracy, poverty, traditional belief and social taboos, dominancy of the upper castes, violence, humiliation, rejection of community, selfishness and individualism, egocentrism, greed, crime, immigration and so forth. He was in reality enraged towards such evils and found that they are the instruments and root cause of the problems of the society. He intended to suggest that oppression and subordination of the untouchables lead to humiliation of spirit.

Anand in this novel exposes the cruelties and sudden desires of the higher castes who believe that it is their divine right to exploit, abuse and mal-treat the subordinates, have-nots and untouchables in the society and thus the atmosphere of sub-humanity is created in the society. It causes the misery among the poor and downtrodden. Being an emancipator of the downtrodden and untouchables, Anand shows most of the evil aspects and afterwards represents the society dominated by the upper castes Hindus where the untouchables are regarded as slaves and sub humans and deprived of human rights. The oppressed live under the mercy of the rich people and request for their help. The untouchables are not allowed to enter the temple and when they try to enter the temple, they are abused and treated badly. Bhikhu says, to his mother when she goes to temple, "Ma, they have never allowed us to enter the temple and they will not let you do so today (1)".

When Laxmi, Bhikhu's mother hears these words, she shows her capitulation to the upper castes, her superstitions, her inclination to the social customs and how she is exploited in the society in following words:

Love them even if they hate you. Love them as Krishna loved the whole world.... Love everyone and everything..... Then through our good deeds shall we rise from our low caste and be born into a higher caste (1).

Instead of protesting the wasted customs and beliefs, she surrenders to the customs and beliefs which are the basic evils that cannot allow the untouchables to enter the temple. One can see the miseries of the untouchables stemmed from the age old tradition and it does not relieve them from their adversity. The opening of the novel expresses the necessity of the freedom of untouchables from the bondages of age old custom, humiliating misery of obedience and inhuman social oppression.

Let me focus on some of the evils which are responsible for the miserable condition of the dalits. If a person wants to go to the heaven he has to die otherwise he cannot reach his destination. In the same way for the emancipation of the untouchables they have to be literate, they must be conscious about their own status and they have to discard their bad habits prevailing in their community. They must be conscious of their status and their human rights.

Bhikhu, being born in lower caste, has to suffer a lot in the society. Being chamar, he is untouchable and untouchability is nothing but humiliation, inhuman oppression and degradation on a section of human being. The enmity found against each other in terms of various prejudices such as economical, cultural, racial, political and social is really inhuman. All human beings are born equal but it is found that there is discrimination or inequality. Untouchables live their life without identity. They are considered a miserable lot everywhere in India. They are not treated as human beings but as sub humans.

Bhikhu is completely a frustrated person. He is not ready to believe in God because he has done plenty of good but he has not got the result of his good deeds. Bhikhu and his lot are poor. They expect that the road could be built by helping the Sarpanch and his brotherhood. Inhumanity is seen when the upper castes deny touching the stones because the stones are

dropped by untouchables and they earn wages. The upper castes think money is the matter and they are jealous of untouchables' wages.

And now they won't touch the stones because they are felled by us, untouchables and we have earned wages! And you are preaching "Love them even if they hate you." Since money came into the world, there has been less and less love..... (2).

Now man becomes selfish and egocentric and he is not interested in the decline of value and humanity. They only think of themselves and never think of the welfare of the other people. The upper caste is very aggressive and dominant while the lower ones surrender to them mutely without raising their voice against them. The untouchables are totally surrendering to the upper caste in the same way as Gandhi asked our forefathers to surrender to the British Government without raising voice. They are expecting the fruits of their ' karmas' either now or in the next life.

Caste discrimination is one of the evils. Here in this novel one can find the unfair treatment of a group on the basis of a number of prejudices. The untouchables are not allowed to enter the temple and even if they try to enter they are cursed and abused and sometimes they are beaten. When Laxmi attempts to enter the temple and finds her son's friends threaten to kill her son, she saves the life of her son instead of entering the temple. She accepts her defeat believing in age-old custom. Bhikhu while escorting his mother to the temple, the twice born Hindus bar his way and threaten him to kill. When Bhikhu attempts to push his friends away by touching them, Laxmi shrieks as her son touches them. And she says, ".....And we will not go to temple if you think we will pollute it--! Son we are chamars, And they are twice born! (4)". When Dhooli Singh appears to pacify them, Sajnu shouts at him and says, "Take your ward away, this cow eating chamar! Go make him break stones for the road! (6)".

Sajnu and his friends use insulting words to humiliate Bhikhu and his mother, Laxmi. Bhikhu is by profession a leatherworker but he is not chamar by birth. Each one is born with equal rights and he confuses why he should suffer humiliation now. He is never disallowed to walk on the village earth and they do not mind to touch him while playing with them. His soul feels equal to life that is not from his status in the world.

Diwan Roop Krishna forecasts that the caste Hindus will object the handling and breaking stones for road-making is really true. The caste Hindus does not touch the stones quarried by the untouchables and more than that they resent the untouchable getting money by working on Government jobs. The superior ones expect that the untouchable should work on their farms only and they must not be the servants of the Government and earn wages. As the money wages come, the superior start worrying and feel that the untouchables become arrogant. Their colony is set on fire by Lachman and Sajnu with vengeance. The untouchables bear a number of humiliations.

At the end of the novel Bhikhu is again targeted by Sajnu when the brass cup from the hand of Bhikhu is kicked out and he is reminded about his status even if they have worked together in building the road. He is humiliated and finds that the evil of caste discrimination cannot be demolished, he starts walking towards the road that leads him to the capital city of Hindustan expecting that he would enjoy emancipation from various bondages and there would be no caste or outcaste.

Money is a matter and everything is based around money. If you have more money you can feel more successful. And that is the reason why Thakur Singh and upper castes feel jealous of the untouchables who help Dhooli Singh to build the road and start earning money. People are greedy and so there is a pressure on them to acquire more and more money. It is said that there is no gain if the wages are small. Dhooli Singh says that it is only roads and roads and more roads and electricity that will bring prosperity. Thakur Singh says theirs is a self-sufficient village before the Government start interfering there and reminds that these chamars work for them. Now these boys start earning wages and walking on the heart of their whole caste brotherhood. So it is seen that consumerism and greed is one of the evils which gives misery to the people.

Individualism and selfishness are exposed in this novel. Thakur Singh is a man who increasingly looks after his interest without considering the benefit of the society. He never thinks of the welfare of the untouchables. He thinks the untouchables are given jobs and wages by the Government so they may not work on their farms and they should feel bigheaded and equal to upper castes. He treats them inhumanly and never thinks of their betterment. He is always egocentric and thinks of his own comfort and success. Being a sarpanch he wants to earn the name and fame by administering. He gives more important to his own family. He does not like the way in which Dhooli Singh works and mixes with the untouchables. He wants his children should marry the children of Dhooli Singh so that money of dowry should be saved. He desires that Rukmani should be married with the help of her sister-in law's dowry. He feels proud when his son Sajnu and Lachman set fire to the colony of the untouchables and he convinces the priest to excommunicate Dhooli Singh. He is a stern believer in caste and hates and humiliates the untouchables. Even he abuses the supporters of the harijans. He wishes to continue his authority on the harijans.

Decline of certain values is disclosed by describing various incidents. Some characters in this novel are seen pursuing their own desires regardless of the possible harm to others. Growing individualism and selfishness are the root cause of their decline. They lack honesty, tolerance, respect, compassion and sympathy. They are egocentric and think about their surroundings. Thakur and his son are the examples of lacking values. They are dishonest, cruel and inhuman in their behavior with the untouchables. They are not ready to tolerate the progress of Dhooli Singh and become the hurdles in his ways and in the way of the untouchables. They use various kinds of tricks to excommunicate Dhooli Singh with the help of Pandit Suraj Mani. They both are very hypocrites and jealous of the others. They bring the damaging consequences for the untouchables and they are responsible for the family

breakdown of Dhooli Singh. They object the construction of the road which can bring the prosperity to all. Bad parenting is said to emphasize many other social problems. It is necessary to have proper guide line to the children. Sajnu and Lachman are the result of bad parenting. They do inhuman work by firing the colony of untouchables. Lachman leaves his father and becomes the victim of alienation. If there is strong and stable family, the young men should not do any harm to society. They ill-treat, torture and torment the untouchables. The decline of family creates problems in the society. Religious hypocrisy of Pandit Suraj Mani is magnificently elaborated at various places. The Pandit is in favour of the purification of the village and Thakur Singh's house as they are defiled by Bhikhu and his lot.

The young are really victims or villains in the society. They become the victims of the circumstances, the age-old traditions, the customs, and prejudices. They are anti-social and take the laws in their hands and create problems in the society. They have no manners and behave violently. They do not control themselves and have no respect for anything. Lachman insults his father and joins the hand with Thakur against untouchables. Sajnu supports his father but he insults Bhikhu when he comes to his house. Sajnu behaves with certain prejudices with the downtrodden, ill-treats them and abuses Laxmi in the opening of the novel and neglect Bhikhu and his lot. They take the shelter of violence to threaten the subalterns and to make them leave the place where they live.

Poverty and inequality are also evils. Poverty control people's lives and limiting their aspirations. Generally the untouchables are poor and it is this poverty which leads to other problems. The dalits have to suffer and struggle throughout their life because of their poverty. They became the

victims of the upper castes. They survive on the mercy of upper castes and they plead for their help. They have to work on the farms of the upper castes. They are dependent on the rich people. They are not treated equally and they are tortured and mal-treated on their farms. They are treated as sub-human and humiliated whenever they get opportunity.

The evil of immigration makes Bhikhu desert his village. Bhikhu is made to immigrate towards Delhi where he hopes freedom and no caste or outcaste. There may be more competition for limited resources such as housing and job but he is hopeful of some economical and social benefits. He starts walking on the road of freedom, equality, humanity, success, comfort, convenience, benevolence, honesty, sympathy, compassion, respect, non-violence, and zero-exploitation leaving behind him all the evils of the world which are the most responsible for the misery of the untouchables.

The unjust treatment of the untouchables by caste – Hindus is seen through various incidents. Anand concludes the novel with the rebellious act of Bhikhu reaching the house of Thakur Singh, he asks for drinking water and takes the brass cup in his hand forgetting about his status. He realizes the equality but unfortunately the cup is kicked out of his hand by Sajnu reminding him his status and abusing him for spoiling his house. He realizes his strength and feels that he must leave the house before either of his hand strike on Sajnu. He prefers the road towards Delhi, the capital town of Hindustan where he can find peace and there would be no caste or outcaste. He expects that it is a road of eternal freedom, equality, humanity, comfort, peace, sympathy, compassion, respect and much more than zero exploitation and non-violence leaving all the evils behind him.

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