

Review

Depiction of Social Realism in Indian Writings in English: A Comparative Study of Selected Works of Mulk Raj Anand and Shyamlal Jaidia

Dr. Vinod Kumar

Associate Professor of English, Government Post Graduate College Ambala Cantt. Haryana, India
Email Id: vinodk.gahlawat@gmail.com

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The present paper attempts to give an insight in the approach of depicting social realism in Indian Writings in English, especially in the selected texts *Untouchable* (1935) and *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* (2001) written by Mulk Raj Anand and Shyamlal Jaidia, respectively. The motifs of writings of both the writers focus to depict the harsh realities of life in Indian society especially for the poor and the deprived people despite the fact they belonged to different times in India. Still the concerns of these writers primarily touch the intricacies of discrimination against Untouchables in pre-Independence days and in the post Independence times.

Key Words: Realism, Motifs, Deprived, intricacies, Discrimination

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INTRODUCTION

The depiction of social realism in Indian Writings in English reflects the diverse and complex nature of Indian society. Indian writers in English not only explore the themes of social issues in the diverse cultural fabric but they also capture the nuances, challenges and social transitions of routine social practices not only between the high and poor but also among the different social stratifications, especially known as the caste system. In essence, Indian writings in English serve as a powerful medium to capture the multifaceted nature of Indian society, offering readers both within and outside the country a deeper understanding of its social realities. These literary works contribute to ongoing conversations about identity, societal norms, and the ever-evolving

dynamics of India. These writings often highlight the rich cultural tapestry of the country wherein they depict the diversity of languages, traditions, customs, and religious practices in India. The Hindu social structure primarily rests on the graded inequality that has neither loosened its grip on the untouchables nor has given any respite to the Dalits even in the contemporary times. Rather, caste discrimination against Dalits has evolved in the most subtle ways. In the compilation of castes in the hierarchical order, the upper castes avail more privileges and contrarily the lower castes are imposed with more prohibitions. Furthermore, lower castes comprise a large number of sub-castes which comprise a sizable number of Indian demography who have long been deprived of human rights. Even in the post-independent period in the country (when they have been given equal rights like the

other citizens) either they get deprived of these opportunities or their pursuance get stuck into delaying tactics that has led to their incessant oppression in the Indian society. Unfortunately, Bhangis suffer the most in the graded inequality within the Dalit communities. Bhangis' long history of repression comprises numerous reasons apart from their long association with cleaning human excreta and filth from the public places in past times and their lack of awareness towards education and other corrective measures (in the post-Independence times). Dalit writers open a new perspective of describing social reality. A few other writers also describe the untold story of this subjugated community. Arundhati Roy quotes Gandhi's definition of an ideal Bhangi (in his essay titled 'The Ideal Bhangi'), wherein he says a person who takes care of "...the body of societywhile deriving his livelihood from his occupation, would approach it only as a sacred duty" (116-117). Dalits socio-cultural subjugation has not been a part of literary exploration in mainstream writings in India except in the writings of Munshi Premchand (in Hindi) and Mulk Raj Anand (in English) even that is a part of 'discourse of pity' (Mukherjee 1). Bhangis' sufferings hardly ever influenced any upper caste mainstream social reformer except Gandhi and he too discussed their problems in a 'holistic' supposition instead of situations in real life. After Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches, there came an upsurge in Dalit writings that put Dalits in the centre of their literary discourse. In Hinduism, untouchables have a long history of affliction in socio-cultural, politics, and economic domains in the name of religious sanctions. Either in the past (before independence under religious sanction) or in the present (in policy implementation in the post-Independence period), untouchables/Bhangis have suffered due to caste oppression in Indian society. In the post-Independence period, Bhangis are equally eligible to become beneficiaries of the provisions, especially in the Scheduled Castes reservations in getting education and government jobs. But the un-academic background of sub-castes like the Bhangis in the earlier and in the present times (due to their long associated traditional occupation), keeps them away from the benefits of the SC reservation policy.

Mulk Raj Anand and Contemporary Issues

The sensitivity of writers aptly captures the sensibility of the common man despite linguistic barriers to express the natural impression of situations in the foreign language. Still English writings in India not only helped to deconstruct the British colonial rule in India. The writers explore the themes of identity, cultural clash, and the struggle of independence. Out of the three big novelists in Indian Writings in English (that includes Raja Roa, R.K. Narayan), Mulk Raj Anand has primarily focused of the issues of poor and the marginalized people in Indian

society who often highlights the rich cultural tapestry of the country and delve into the diversity of languages, traditions, customs, and religious practices helps in breaking stereotypes and providing a nuanced understanding of the complex cultural landscape. Like many Indian writers in English, he not only focused on the themes such as identity, displacement, cultural clash, and the struggle for independence but pointedly describes the pervasive issue of caste-based discrimination and social inequality. He sheds light on the struggles faced by marginalized communities and questions the deeply entrenched caste hierarchy. After independence, certainly, the welfare policies (for the SCs) have become the big safeguard to ensure their upliftment, education and jobs in government sector but the caste biases against them still persist in different aspects. The academic environment for Dalit students shows that "Sweeping were invariably done by girls from the SC or ST communities....water was stored in clay pots, the SC and ST children were not allowed to touch it" (Ramachandran & Naorem 51). The caste discriminatory practices not only deprive these students from the constitutional rights but also demoralise them to get enrolled in first-rate academic institutions. Nevertheless, Jaidia's autobiography portrays that Dalits' higher educational standards motivate their political activism and boost up their confidence to seek the legitimate rights either at individual level or through social organizations. The Bhangis' long association with the traditional occupation constitutes their dual form of marginalization in the Indian society. The dominant castes like zamindars and the other upper castes having control over the resources do not wish to come out of their narrow-mindedness over the caste matters. Bhangi's lack of resources does not let the change occur at the individual level or at the community level which is the real cause of their incessant oppression in Indian society. Their socio-economic backwardness gives rise to different socio-economic problems leading to the Bhangis exploitation. Furthermore, due to no specific provisions for the Bhangis in distribution of the SC reservation policy, they also get deprived of the opportunities to get education and seek jobs in government sectors. Dalit writings divulge Bhangi's backwardness in the literary world and put forth the under-carpeted social realities in the erstwhile feudal society.

Jaidia's Description of Bhangis

The 'nucleus perspective of Dalit narrative' in autobiography does not recount the 'short-term author-narrative validity' rather it presents a long sharing of community afflictions. Dalits' narratives are unique in portraying their painful experiences to achieve the self-esteem against the set caste hierarchy. Dalit writers divulge how Dalits' human rights have not become a part

of the academic-literary discussion even after the Independence of India. Dalit writers go beyond the encircled literary delineation of Bhangis' backwardness in the context of the other scheduled castes so as to discuss their issues in the context of citizenship in Indian society. Although Dalits' face clash of interest in their claim for Scheduled Castes reservation, yet their opposition of the upper castes' biases give them a common collective identity of Dalits. Dalit writers dissect how in the name of culture, caste practices against Dalits' get religious sanction as well as sub-categorization in the Brahmanical construction. The societal issue involves untouchables' exploitation in financial and political rights that continue even after more than seven decades of independence in India. In the post-Independence period, the constitutional provisions including the SC reservation are provisioned to ensure their human rights and equality in India. However, the contradiction between the social constructions (due to getting immune to religious sanction of caste) against untouchables and their constitutional provisions (due to lack of social support system) succumb to new ideological interpretations. The underlying issues of Bhangis' sufferings are described in the autobiography, especially in the context of the Rajasthan society:

Let me give some idea of the type of house where I was born. The hut had a rectangular ground plan; the four walls were constructed of local stone. The walls were plastered with mud and cow dung. The framework for the roof was made up of bamboos. These were tied by a special type of rope called moonj ...Then straw bundles were placed on the frame all along the slopes for thatching. (6)

Bhangis' backwardness becomes evident through the condition of their bustees which are still devoid of any substantial housing schemes and are just scattered inhabitations without any housing amenities. The emerging Dalit literary activism in socio-cultural and political aspects counteract the mainstream writers' meta-narrative of social neutrality that intends to maintain literary standards of the contents instead of describing the social reality. The social disparity in which Dalits, particularly the Bhangis live in Indian society never gets any literary sensitivity. The writer describes the tricky working style of the University that had seen 19 VCs in total 38 years since its inception in 1962. Moreover, they had tarnished the image of the University by obliging the Rajputs, Jats, Oswals, Brahmins, and others for the political equations. He says:

When I joined the University a feud was going on between dictatorship and democracy. Dictatorship is based on not any moral ground but on arrogance. I took initiative and courage to

anchor the transformation of the University. This was the only reason, why I was strongly opposed and even criticised by those valueless and immoral elements in the University...I disapproved of the pro- Congress line. I did not subscribe to the outlook of B.J.P. as well. (173-174)

The writer maintained strict self-discipline in following the balanced approach to take many initiatives and bold decisions to strengthen the administrative system of the University. He managed to improve the law-and-order situation in the campus and modernized it leaving a long-lasting impact on the University system. His managerial skills reflected when "The University won the case and saved the money worth of lacs' being spent on irregular appointments of such teachers who had no sufficient work load...I strictly followed all the rules and regulations" (242). Despite, the instance of an attempt to lock the Vice-Chancellor in his office chamber (by some ad-hoc teachers led by Dr. Dunger Singh Khinchi over the demand) to regularize their services, he never succumbed to such undue pressures in his official capacity.

Mulk Raj Anand' Scientific Solution

Mulk Raj Anand is also a prominent Indian writer in English and his text *Untouchable* (1935) is one of his most well-known works. As a social realist, he describes the harsh but real life suffering of the protagonist Bakha, a young Dalit (formerly referred to as "untouchable") man who works as a sweeper. The novel explores the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination and untouchability in Indian society. The novel vividly portrays the discrimination faced by Bakha due to his low caste that not only pushes him into the degrading treatment and social isolation as experienced by untouchables in the pre-independence era. Anand's work highlights the broader social injustice and inequality prevalent in society. It critiques the oppressive caste system and its impact on the lives of marginalized communities. The protagonist, Bakha, becomes a symbol of the individual struggle against societal norms. The writer uses the narrative that explores his aspirations, frustrations, and efforts to break free from the constraints of his caste. The writer poignantly describes the backdrop of British colonial rule in India. It reflects the socio-political dynamics of the time and how colonialism intersected with existing caste hierarchies. Although the writer advocates for the recognition of the inherent dignity of every individual, regardless of caste and challenges the dehumanizing practices associated with untouchability yet Dalit protagonist lacks the essence of Dalit anguish that can make him to come a decisive approach to get rid of his exploitation not only from the drudgery of routine

life but from the oppressive caste system, Undoubtedly, the writer shows some flame of resentment in the Dalit protagonist but intensity of his thoughts never reached at the resilience against the caste system. The realistic portrayal of social issues and its contribution to the discourse on caste and social justice put the writer in the central space in Indian Writings in English but Dalits' protest has to cross a long journey to put a counter canon of Dalit literary corpus.

Dalit Writer on Dalit Issues

Jaidia's pertinently describes Dalits' real life challenges succinctly due to his experiences as a Dalits. The scarcity of resources, problems of getting education, and starting any entrepreneurship for Dalits becomes the focal point of literary exploration in his autobiography. The mainstream writers' description of Bhangis' backwardness and their exploitation in 'the construction of their social reality' is also a coercive narrative to undermine their human rights. The ignoring of Bhangis issues which have been sweeping the dust of Hindu society in many terms even before the recent Swachchhata Abhiyans, they get no sensitive literary description and their miseries continue in the society. He describes:

My publications on Bhangis produced widespread repercussions arousing the social conscience of the higher caste Hindus to the sense of injustice which they had inflicted for centuries upon the Bhangis. It indeed opened a new chapter in the history of down-trodden persons- especially the Bhangis. The impact of my publications was so great that Sociologists and Social Anthropologists ...were also moved. (102)

Jaidia's innovative research on Bhangis' issues and his literary exploration reveal his deep understanding of their socio-cultural oppression and adds a new dimension of social studies in India, particularly in Rajasthan. Professor Shyamlal Jaidia, an educationist as well as a sociologist, reached the top post of Jai Narayan Vyas University Jodhpur despite his birth in one of the most backward castes. Still, many Untouchable castes have not realized the importance of education. But going against the long persisting unawareness towards education among the Untouchables, he achieved educational as well as scholastic heights despite all odds of socio-economic barriers. Moreover, he published many books on the Bhangis issues and organized various deliberations based on his research study in this area. His achievements established him as a man of great understanding of the human relationship that he manifested during his struggle starting from Bhangi busti

to the highly sophisticated official residence of a Vice-Chancellor of a University. As a human being, he neither got entangled into any hypocrisy or any snobbery nor became vindictive despite his bitter experience throughout his journey. In his writings and research works, Jaidia neither shows any hostility towards the social organizations nor does he fall in any brawl with any community. Rather he continues focusing his point on Bhangis issues through his research. His soberness (either in the inter-personal relationship or as a committed scholar as well as an earnest teacher) evidently shows his maturity of an individual in different capacities. His judicious administrative decisions elucidate his managing skills despite his un-academic family background. His research work got rejected on the complaint of his supervisor. Furthermore, his colleagues and subordinates (at Government College Karouli) also treated him like a leper. Even on his joining as a Professor he had conflict with the then Vice-Chancellor of the University, which he resolved righteously with immense maturity. He even took the legal course when his genuine right of headship was being tried to be usurped by his upper-caste colleagues, hence, displaying biases towards the community he belongs to. He was always amicable to his juniors as well as the seniors. His appropriateness of behaviour and common courtesy not only impressed his colleagues but also saved his time and energy. He neither tried to give caste colour to the matter nor made a brawl that generally crops up in the caste atrocities against Dalits. Moreover, he interacted with the Maharaja (His Highness) as he was invited to attend the party at his palace. Jaidia's genuine approach to understand Bhangis' social issues and his administrative skills to work judiciously in favour of the University even in the pressing circumstances prove him to be a man who keeps humanity above all than other considerations.

Changing Occupation through Getting Education

For the Dalit parents, managing resources in getting education for their children is a costly affair and a testing time not only for the Dalit parents who have no resource at hand but for their children also due to various reasons. In the recruitment process for different posts in the University, he performed his duty towards society (without taking undue favour of his post) and expedited the recruiting process in the general administration of the University. Because the need for education and job is everyone's priority in any community, the urgency of getting livelihood must be taken with utmost priority. The writer describes that the SCs are the most affected sections in the current situation in case of falling of vacant seats either in the general or for the reserved categories at any level in government sectors. Jaidia states:

Let me be very frank about it... If in my endeavour to secure the constitutional rights for my people who have been trampled downed in this country in general and in this University particularly, I think that to uplift my brethren was not a sin and will also not harm the interest of the University in any way. During my tenure as Vice-Chancellor whatever decisions, University had taken were as per rules and Acts of the University. (240)

The upper castes' criticism of Dalit officers keep them on tenterhook and intend to involve them in any brawl without issues but to prove their point. In the interest of the University, when the writer takes tough decisions (including the cancellation of Syndicate membership of Prof. Kapoor and Prof. Singhvi), he is strongly opposed by the upper caste people in the University. Jaidia also took appropriate steps on the politics involved over the common issues like installation of JNV Vyas Statue, furlough in the name of study leave without any research outcome (that cost a lot to the University). His immediate and adequate response to sort out the situation not only saved his time and energy but also proved his acumen to manage the University affairs efficiently. He says,

The name of 'University of Jodhpur' constituted and incorporated by Jodhpur University Act, 1962 (Rajasthan Act 17 of 1962) was changed to 'Jai Narayan Vyas University, Jodhpur' in March 1992. In view of the sacrifices made by Shri J.N Vyas and the role played by him in transforming the mental attitude of Bhangis, Chamars, Meghwals and other untouchable castes towards the national movement and the way he initiated the socio-religious reform movement... The state government was kind enough to sanction a sum of Rs. 3.35 lacs to install the statue... I took keen interest in the finalization of the statue and its installation... The ceremony to unveil the statue was fixed for August 9, 1997 to coincide with the commemoration of the Quit India Movement. However, a few employees of the University were opposed to its installation. (191-192)

The writer also describes the nexus of the politicians with the so-called educationists who grind their axes on different occasions like getting nominated in the syndicate of the university. Jaidia describes how the posts of SCs and STs even for the lower division clerks do not get filled and many a times they are treated as not found suitable. The huge backlog of vacant posts of the SCs neither gets attention of the authorities nor any representation in mainstream literary discourse. Hence, the writer describes new issues of Bhangis not only in context of Rajasthani culture but also in the larger perspective of Indian society. The coercive narrative of

Bhangis' sufferings is also a wilful diversion (being made by the mainstream writers) keeping them in a social flux. Bhangis' literary coercion weakens their analytical endeavour to understand the underlying reasons of socio-cultural exploitation even after more than seven decades of the country's independence. Jaidia describes the harsh realities of Bhangis' socio-economic status that become evident in the pitiable conditions of his family:

I was the true child of an untouchable bustee, where there was no drainage, no light, and no water only marshy land, where I lived among amongst the public latrines and the stinking dung scattered all around where the day was like dark night and the nights pitch-dark. I had wallowed in its mire, bathed in its marshes, played among its rubbish heaps and my listless lazy manner was the result of my surroundings. (Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor 7-8)

Dalits/ Bhangis lateral entry to avail benefits of corrective provisions for the SCs and rigidity of the erstwhile feudal lord families are crucial for multi-layering exploitation. The erstwhile feudal lords' hostile attitudes towards Bhangis become crucial factor of their exploitation in the Rajasthani society. Hence, Bhangis' multifarious sufferings are the outcome of their lack of awareness to seek proportionate accommodation in SC reservation as well as due to the erstwhile feudal families' attitudinal indifference that deprives them of many opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Caste discrimination against Dalits has been century's long roots in Indian society, especially in the orthodox people not only in rural area but also in so-called urban societies even in the present times. Therefore, literary depiction of Untouchables sufferings in the meta-literary narrative neither get a considerably space to in depiction of social reality nor a wider perspective of caste discrimination against Dalits even in the present times of Indian society. Despite the fact, Mulk Raj Anand wrote on the issues of Untouchables and their sufferings in the rigidity of Hindu caste system. Although Anand has been very sensitive writer who depicted the major concerns of the poor and the marginal people yet the crux of Untouchables' suffering is not deconstructed in the means and modes of his literary explorations as Dalit writers did thereafter. Dalit writers describe the issues of working class in metro-cities, acquisition of agricultural lands from the farmers (influencing their socio-economic fabrications), shifting gender dynamics, impact of politics and technology yet they never show sensitivity towards the caste discrimination. Due to these factors, the socially deprived sections like Bhangis also get influenced in the

phase of socio- economic transformation but their major issues do not get representation in the mainstream literary endeavour. How can the integral part of a society (in a state like Rajasthan or the other) remain uninfluenced when the big change is taking place not only in India but also in the world due to the policies like Liberalization, Globalization, Privatization, and Urbanisation? Jaidia describes, "Our livelihood came from the work we did in the city, cleaning the market, disposing of dead animals, and above all looking after the rich Hindu and Muslim households. As regards the dead animals, we had to be more vigilant in some way as vultures are, because, there is no difference between vultures and sweepers in this respect" (3). The reality of Bhangi life and their workplaces either in the villages or in the cities get no substantial improvement in the socio-economic circumstances. Moreover, due to hasty initiatives like privatization, Bhangis' are the ones who are suffering the most due to their unskilled standpoints. Bhangis' backwardness, if somewhere gets described, is either discussed in the contexts of the other untouchable castes or within the restricted social domains where their issues get presented in the conventional style by the mainstream writers. Like all Dalit writers, Jaidia decodes the graded inequality of the Hindu caste system that prohibits any possibility of inter-changeability within fourfold hierarchical order rather that divides the Untouchables further in sub-castes. Therefore, rigidity of Hindu caste rules with regard to the Untouchables' orthodox occupations still continues to haunt their socio-cultural world and fractures their consolidation even in getting benefits of scheduled castes reservations. Bhangis' demands for exclusive reservation within the SC reservation (like certain untouchable castes) bring forth their internal bickering that has weakened their consolidation against their oppressors. Hence, Jaidia deconstructs the underlying issues of Dalits who generally fall into web of the meta-narrative approach that creates an environment of justifying the caste system and Dalits' social status quo therein that intends to keep continue their subjugation and weakens their tough stand against the oppressive caste system.

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