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**CLASS AND CASTE OPPRESSION IN PREM CHAND'S *GODAN* AND MULKRAJ ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE***

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The caste system and the untouchable beliefs and practices in India have its origin in centuries old historical evidences of Aryans invading India in 1500 BC and setting up a system of elitism (the rulers' and subjugated and subservient (the ruled) and thus evolved a segregated and classified system grown slowly into what we see now as rigid caste system embedded deeply in the Indian society for centuries, the elite and powerful, the group with vested interests claimed and enjoyed the privileges of being in an upper class, received respect, benefits and a social status without doing anything or working for it but by virtue of birth and lineage.

In 1934, Premchand spoke unequivocally for an egalitarian system in the context of the position of the lower class, untouchable and of poor peasants. He says that the welfare of society and the nation lies in removing discrimination and also the blood-sucking domination of some sections, because, as have been said earlier, the first condition of nationality is that the varna organization, the distinction between high and low, and religious hypocrisy should be rooted out.

Premchand exhibits class and caste oppression prevalent in Indian society before independence in his classic novel *Godan* (1936). It exhibits the lot of poor and oppressed peasants exploited by the upper castes and also by Zamindars, moneylenders, darogahs etc. Some critics have, infact, drawn symbolic parallelisms between the vicissitudes of life that Premchand had to go through and the hard and cruel realities of the life of peasant Hori, the hero of this epic of rural India. The various strata of village society, their daily vagaries, their attitudes, all put together, bring to life the entire village culture in *Godan*. His portrayal of the village, therefore, has much to say about the oppression of Zamindari system with its parasitical landlords and their numerous aids preying on the peasant.

Premchand in *Godan* portrays the oppression meted out to lower class peasants and to untouchables also. The plight of the typical peasant vis-à-vis the mahajans, is movingly told by Premchand in the tragic tale of Hori's life in *Godan*. To buy bullocks he has borrowed from Mangaru, to sow potatoes from Datadin, and to give his brothers their share of the family property from Dulari. Far from clearing the principal amounts, he is not even able to keep up the payment of interest on the three loans. The inevitable result, though protracted in its painful unfolding over the whole of Hori's working life, is the loss of everything, movable or immovable, that he could call his own. So crushing and efficient is the system of oppression.

The mukhiya or village headman and panches also occupies a place in this system of exploitation and oppression. Poor peasants like Hori are oppressed and exploited by the system of panchayat and panches when they fined him for giving shelter to Jhunja, beloved of Gobar.

In *Godan*, we find caste oppression in the form of Matadin-Selia relationship. On one side, the untouchables or lower caste people have been scorned or insulted by the high castes, on the other side, has been the means for satisfaction of sex. *Ghaswali* (1929) is about a zamindar who castes covetous eyes on Muliya, a chamarin grass cutter. Her poverty and low caste status combine to place her at the mercy of the upper caste and the rich : "What use does beauty in the low castes have apart from being a toy for the upper caste people ?"

In Anand's novel *Untouchable*, the focal point is the evil of class and caste oppression. It was written under the inspiration of Gandhi. It is a scathing attack on caste-ridden Hindu society. Anand's childhood friend, an untouchable lad, Ukka was in his mind as he dealt with the travails of casteism. These social groups or castes are distinguished from one another by the existence of special rights for some groups and disabilities for the others. And there exists too a definite scheme of social precedence with the Brahmin at the top. The novel is an indictment of the Hindu Orthodoxy which dwarfs the natural growth of the potentialities of youngman born as a sweeper, as an outcaste. It draws our attention to the politics of caste Hindus to express the untouchables and underdogs. The novel covers the events of a single day in the life of a low caste boy Bakha, in the town of Bulashah. The eighteen year old boy is one of the sons of Lakha, the Jamadar of the sweepers of the town. He is ill-treated by the high caste Hindus because he is an untouchable. His sister, Sohini is molested by Pt. Kali Nath reversely accuses the girl for polluting him merely by touching him. There are many incidents in the novel causing instability in society. Throughout the novel, there is a great concern for an ideal classless society in India.

*Untouchable* recorded a days events in Bakha's life, which served as a microcosm of the entire life of a sweeper. The author depicted the sense of utter hopelessness and degradation of their lives. It is a vituperative commentary on the decadence of Hindu society. Anand knew that India, the emerging republic, from colonial rule could become powerful nation only, if caste system is uprooted from the very psyche of the people.

Munshi Premchand wrote about the defeated peasantry with acute poignancy, was directly the predecessor of Anand. He was the author who had insight in the problems of farmers, clerks, untouchables and such people, who stand on the bottom range of the social ladder. His peasants are towers of strengths, like Hori, but they are crushed under the steam roller of society. Thus influence of Premchand can be traced through out the entire works of Anand.

In *Untouchable*, in his sensitive portrayal of an individual, Mulk Raj Anand displays his penetrating thought and humane attitude for understanding the grim realities of the social life in India. It is a revolutionary novel in the sense that it has an outcaste as its chief protagonist. Anand's turning to the evil of the caste system even at the very start of his writing career in understanding because it answers his need to create in readers an urgent awareness of the dehumanizing social evil. It is significant that this Indian novel in English first appeared at a time when social reformers in India were engaged in an earnest effort to remove casteism and untouchability.

Thus both Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand succeed in presenting the implorable conditions of peasants and untouchables and underdogs in the Indian society. Premchand shows how the peasants have been hegemonised by zamindars and money lenders. Likewise, Mulk Raj Anand has shown the Indian caste-ridden society through the story of a sweeper boy, Bakha. Anand presents the miserable condition of untouchables in Indian society. He showed how they are excluded from the main stream merely because of low caste, how they are deprived of their legal and social rights by the high caste .

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