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## A REFLECTION OF LIFE OUTSIDE THE MAGIC CIRCLE IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Of several good definitions of human rights in the contemporary literature, Louis Henkins' is the most comprehensive one. Human rights are rights of individuals in society. Every human being has legitimate, valid, justified claims upon his or her society to various "goods" and benefits. They are defined particular claims listed in international instruments deemed essential for individual well being, dignity and fulfillment and that reflect a common sense of justice, fairness and decency (Mohanty 76).

Human rights are ways of expressing the requirements of human dignity in a social context and of safe guarding respect for that dignity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the two International Covenants on Human Rights, and other widely accepted post war international instrument begin by affirming that concern with human rights is rooted in recognition of the inherent and equal dignity of all human beings. Dignity therefore, is the underlying concept.

The motion of human rights is old, so its content and scope are still under discussion. Most of the countries recognize the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is quite broad and includes individual rights that can further be classified as follows:

1. **Civil Rights:** Freedom from slavery and servitude, torture and inhuman punishment and arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, freedom of speech, faith, opinion and expression, right to life, security, justice, ownership and assembly.
2. **Political Rights:** Right to vote and nominate for public office. Right to form and join political parties.

**3. Social and Economic Right:** Right to education, work, food, clothing, housing and medical care.

It can be said that human rights are “invisible” and “interdependent.” “Solidarity” at all levels is needed. It should not be professed in such a way that only the strong and privileged benefit from the full enforcement of their fundamental rights. It is also worth mentioning that the onus for securing human rights is “global” as it is not something confined or limited to one’s own particular community or restrained within the various continents or national boundaries.

We must uproot the caste system and untouchability and set the society on the foundation of the two principles of one caste only and of equality. Our work has begun to bring about a real social revolution – as said Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in the conclusion of his December 25, 1927 speech at Mahad Satyagraha. Ambedkar himself called the Mahad Satyagraha the beginning of the ‘untouchable liberation movement’. Unlike his predecessors, Ambedkar himself wrote no poetry or short stories, and communicated to the masses only through his speeches. But it was Ambedkar’s spirit of revolt, his modernism, and his rationalism which provided the philosophical context of the Dalit literature. If Dalits throughout India today revere Ambedkar, it is because he gave them ‘minds’ to understand their plight and move ahead, yet the incompleteness of this democratic revolution remains stark. The painful reality remains that the renunciation of mental bondage and freedom from the forced labor of caste dharma in India is still only partial.

Before Dr. Ambedkar, the untouchables led a life of poverty, ignorance, and misery. Dr. Ambedkar’s call awakened the man in the Dalit and this common Dalit man joined the movement. How could those who had just been awakened, who had never known life as normal human beings, who had no cultural or literary legacy, have any literary consciousness? In fact, expecting it of them is unreasonable. However their traditional folk arts such as ‘tamasha’ and ‘jalsa,’ songs and ballads did give a vent to their pent up feelings.

This paper attempts to analyze the marginalized categories in the Indian subcontinent and the way Dalits are treated in the tribal communities especially in reference to Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, Namdeo Dhasal’s “I slow the Seven Houses of the Sun”, Mahasheveta

Devi's and Urmila Pawar's selected short stories. Even today a large part of our society is struggling to live with human dignity and trying to find a fondness and warmth in the midst of oppression of all kinds – millions of mute, suffering souls whose anguished cry seems to have been lost to the ears of men moving in this metaphysical wandering. A writer needs to identify himself with them and, at least, hold up a mirror to their troubled plight. His writings cannot be of any human value unless he is able to do so. At the same time, it cannot be denied that Mulk Raj Anand was the first Indian English novelist who was concerned with the fundamental rights of the oppressed and marginalized which is very well depicted in his novel *Untouchable*.

Anand's *Untouchable* can be called an ethical novel or a novel of new morality. It can also be called a novel of new awareness which may lead to a new morality. Bakha, the protagonist of the novel can be called the archetypal hero of the untouchables. As the novel proceeds, he comes face to face with the evil in the world, a world in which he is an outsider. He stands outside the magic circle of caste, creed, and religion which is represented through the character of the priest Kali Nath – a powerful figure with authority who represents all that Hindu religion means, the magic of conjuration, idolatry, at the doorstep to be admitted and accepted but he is outwardly rejected and despised, thrown out, insulted, and injured. Ultimately he becomes an articulate thinking individual after turning into an incipient rebel in quest of his identity. There is a confrontation between the monster of authority and the untouchable Bakha which Anand captures in very vivid symbolic form.

As we are aware that in India, the underdog is rather casteless or his caste is of no consequence because of his low social, economic, and religious status. This "untouchable" is almost always a dispossessed man, deprived even of the basic right to live like a human being in freedom and dignity. Though he lives in utter poverty and isolation yet the strength of his spirit cannot be broken; it remains intact, despite many years of abuse, harshness, injustice, and persecution. He has in his mind a promise for the future of humanity. Bakha provides an archetypal figure for such a bereaved but unbeaten man. Anand's daring effort of choosing the Dalit as a hero covers the terra incognita for introducing "into creative narrative . . . whole new people who have seldom entered the realms of literature of India"

(Anand 79). *Untouchable* was written by Anand after his discussion with Gandhi at the Sabarmati Ashram. He also received literary support from E.M. Forster. In his critical analysis of the novel, Forster writes:

Untouchable could only have created the character of Bakha because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been involved in indignation and self pity. Mr. Anand stands in the ideal position . . . he has just the right mixture of insight and detachment and the fact that he has come to fiction through philosophy has given him depth. (Preface)

The path breaking cultural movement of 1970's and 1980's resulted in literature of revolt. The first major voice of anger and revolt by the new generation of Dalits came with Namdeo Dhasal's *Golpitha* (1972), a collection of poetry taking its name from the red light district of Mumbai. Following Dalit panthers, in 1973, came a flood of poetry. The Dalit panthers were born out of a war of imitating words and protest actions, thus, a new force of militant and innovative poetry arose. It was followed by a set of powerful autobiographies as the young writers turned to recounting their own lives; these autobiographies have included not only the most educated and outspoken, the Mahars, but also writers from nomadic tribes, beginning castes, castes which were stigmatized and forced thievery. It was a literature which expressed grinding poverty, misery and the forced and humiliating labor represented by caste based 'duties' – in case of the Mahars this was in particular the carrying away of the dead cattle.

Unlike the Western slaves, the Indian Dalit has not arrived from a foreign country. He is racially, culturally, not different from the majority of Indians. However, he has not held the proprietary rights in this country. For centuries, he could not get an equal share in the development and progress of his cultural, religious, and social life. Despite being an heir of the country, he had not acquired legacy rights. He is of this country but this country could never be his.

Dalit literature essentially deals with the marginalized groups who are fundamentally devoid of their voice within the Indian society. It is also necessary to understand that the

mainstream literature which caters to the sophisticated set of readers or perception has repeatedly shown its reluctance to publish the pain and anguish of Dalit literature. This inevitably creates a subculture within the mainstream literature, a kind of an aperture for all the repressed Dalit sentiments which were shrugged off by an insensitive society. But the power of literature is immense as it allows the existence and proliferation of dissenting voices to construct a parallel world for self realization.

Namdeo Dhasal is one such Dalit writer who writes about the marginalized groups which are basically denuded and deprived of their identity in the Indian rural and urban society. Dhasal who has also been hailed as the 'Poet of the Underworld' is himself a Dalit, whose poetry is accompanied with the life and experiences of survival in unimaginable ways, in spite of years of abusiveness in the society. The word 'Dalit' is one of the most noticeable and perceptible word at the national level and majority of people who are classified as schedule caste deny it for uniqueness and distinctiveness. In the sixties, some stories were published in Marathi which mobilized the Dalit literature. These were written by Baburao Bagul. In this way he helped to shape the Dalit literature and after that there was no looking back. As Dilip Chitre said,

If there is anything like Dalit literature, it is something created by super imposing the idiom of social sciences upon literary criticism, which has adequate methodological and terminological resources of its own to deal more than descriptively with literary movements. (93)

Poets have often raised their voices and Namdeo Dhasal did it by impressively expressing himself in an unapologetic manner. In "Hunger", the starved miserable person expresses his desire – to take root to lead a life of self respect.

We wanted to ask of light something more than illuminated life. But the light itself let us down. The hungry man bewails that his depressed brethren have not a grain of food to eat. It deprives them of all wisdom and desire to live. Even if they kept singing till the last flicker in the soul, the light of hunger will not be extinguished and if they still remained hungry everything will turn dark.

Now we will shift the focus to the portrayal of Dalit women characters in the short stories "Bayen" and "A Childhood Tale" by Mahasweta Devi and Urmila Pawar, respectively. Siser Kumar Das in his monumental book *History of Indian Literature 1911-1956* (1995) concludes the chapter "Narratives of Suffering Caste and the Underprivileged" with the following observation: "Indian literature discovered a new potentiality in the life of the low and the lowliest, deprived and the humiliated. The hero-centric world would finally vanish yielding place to the anti-hero." The Dalit literature, however, was yet to emerge but the signs had already appeared. The poem "Violence Zad" (The Tree of Violence) by N.L. Dhasal the former leader of the Dalit panther movement, is only two decades far from the midnight of Indian Independences.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, upper caste progressives such as Rabindranath Tagore (Bangla), Prem Chand (Hindi) and Mulk Raj Anand (English) were the only ones who seemed to be writing against untouchability. The later decades showed the emergence of many lower caste authors who powerfully protested the plight of the untouchables and have been responsible for enriching the corpus of literature. This literature includes sensitive statements by certain upper caste writers like Mahasweta Devi, Vijay Tendulkar, and U.R. Ananthamurthy and other viewpoints which included a critique of untouchability practices and precepts. The upper caste criticism of untouchability has helped to utilize social opinion against casteism. On the other hand Dalit writings have led to the beginning of stone of juxtaposition to the intensity of informing most upper caste criticism of untouchability.

Urmila Pawar's "A Childhood Tale" is an excellent example of a Dalit woman's writing which reflects Dalit experiences of living. "A Childhood Tale" works at two levels. At one level, it is a simple story of an adult woman, now herself a mother coming to terms with her undesirable relationship with her mother through the act of writing. It is the story about the lives of two Dalit women, a mother and a daughter in a poor Dalit household headed by a female. The narrative is based on Urmila Pawar's own early childhood and the mother as constructed in the story is quite similar to Urmila's own mother. Both of them slide into another. What is striking about the writer's story is that what her mother expressed through

crying, Urmila expresses it through her writing. "A Childhood Tale" is an entirely first hand narration of the experiences from lived social reality to the printed world. The child protagonist in the story is a reconstruction of a Dalit woman whose personality is shaped by various social experiences. Her personality has been bruised by the devastating poverty and being graded as an "untouchable". Pawar, at the same time, is also an heir to the historical traditions which she shares with other Dalits of the sixties and seventies. The child protagonist in the story hates delivering baskets to the upper caste households. She hates her school for the same reason because there too she is reminded of her caste and nowhere is she seen free from her identity as a pollute. She hates her father and even wishes him dead – something many children feel – but at the same time weighed down by the guilt when the father actually dies. She has the same kind of emotions for her mother also, who drives her like a maniac trying to live up to the dreams of her dying father. Ultimately towards the end of the story the mother stands up to the ill treatment meted out to her daughter at the school by her teacher. It is at this moment that the child understands who actually her enemies are, a term which she has used previously for her family members. Finally the little girl goes to her school but with an altogether new enlightenment and understanding about the mother, now trying to live up to her mother's dreams.

Shifting to Mahasweta Devi's "Bayen", the focus is on the multiple social concerns and fabricates the politics of gender, caste, and superstition in complicated framework that are on the verge of breakdown. Mahasweta Devi, an activist and a writer, has stressed upon the issue of the economically marginalized and socially debarred communities of Bengal and its neighboring regions. The scheduled castes constitute seventy per cent and the tribals who constitute eight per cent of Indian population touch the nadir of Indians caste hierarchy. In "Bayen" Chandi dasi Ganga dasi – beautiful woman, devoted wife and mother, and proud descendant of a Dom community that had inherited "all the burning ghats of the world" executed the allotted task of burning the dead children, guarding their graves with passion and commitment until one day she feels that she does not have the heart to do it anymore. It was a weakness that she developed because of the birth of her own child. The writer's concerns in the story are multiple – the three aspects of lower caste life, untouchability,

gender, and superstition. According to her own words, the commitment is not to literature but to social history:

It is my conviction that a story writer should be motivated by a sense of history that would help her readers understand their own times. I have never had the capacity nor the urge to create art for art's sake since I haven't ever learnt to do anything more useful, I have gone on writing. I have found authentic documentation to be the best medium for protest against injustice and exploitation . . . To capture the continuities between past and present held together in the folk imagination, I bring legends, mythical figures, and mythical happenings into a contemporary setting and make an ironic use of these, as I do with . . . the legend of Kalu Dom in my "Bayen." (Devi, Introduction)

It is certainly a sad commentary on what the present day rural society is doing to their women. It is a subdued and humiliating tale, an unsentimental account of the horror, a perfectly regular existence which can transform a loving doting mother into a witch whose evil shadow preyed on human children.

The duty to act justifies by providing social justice and protecting human rights. It stems from the duty to keep a promise by respecting human dignity. Human rights and social justice are necessary to society. The day of irresponsible writings is over. The writers, now, are at the forefront of the battalions ushering in a new and revolutionary area of literature. A change is heralded and literary consciousness about the violation of human rights irrespective of the sect or caste, we belong to, is sought after. It is the primary duty of the literary artists to point the realistic picture of the society no matter which medium they resort to. The society at large has to be forced out of their reverie of self complacency.

" . . . the corpse of culture we are tired but are the carrying it on and on O Sun, O  
Spy, who witnesses A; That's why I slew he seven horses of your chariot."

Namdeo Dhasal

Translated from the Marathi by Dilip Chitre  
From *Golpitha*, 1972 "Man, You Should Explode"



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