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# Analysing Marginalized Family Voices in Premchand's 'Kafan' and Anand's 'Untouchable'

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## Abstract :-

The present analyses compare and contrast the phenomenon of marginalized family voices in Premchand's 'Kafan' and Anand's 'Untouchable'. The Marginalized Characters in the works of Hindi writer, Premchand's 'Kafan' and English writer, Anand's 'Untouchable' dwell on untouchables and their pitiable conditions. Many celebrated Hindi writers, including Premchand, have been discussed as writers who mirror the marginalized figures. Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, "Untouchability is the hate fullest expression of caste." The paper deals with Premchand and Mulkraj Anand's writings on the basis of humanism in the early decades of 19th Century. In Premchand's writings, Gandhian notions of the 'Hridya Privartan' was a dominant feature. It is striking that marginalized family voices are not presented as agents of change in this literature; rather their poor conditions and helplessness treat as an insurmountable obstacle; is a characteristic feature of the Hindi literature. Further, I have taken Mulkraj Anand's writings as an example to make clear the difference between objectives of the literature.

**Keywords :-** family, marginalised, humanism, varna system, untouchability, awakening, self-respect

## Introduction :-

From the second half of the nineteenth century, quite a few writers, including Bhartendu Harischandra, started writing in the Khari Boli (Hindi). At the initial stage, Hindi was used in prose while Braj was the language of poetry. In the early twentieth century, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi initiated the process of standardizing the Hindi language. Francesca Orsini shows how from the early twentieth century all aspects of literature and society were exposed to public discuss in the pages of journals. First time in Literature, caste system and marginalised characters are presented as protagonists and their plight are depicted in the work of Premchand. On the other hand, the growth of Indo-Anglican

writings flourishes and bear fruit in the early decades of the 19th century. Indian took to the language with enthusiasm, and many tried their hand at literary composition in English. Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian to write in English. Keshub Chandra Sen, Dwarka Nath Tagore and their Brahmo friends were others social reformers who used English prose effectively for communication their ideas.

While English prose for social and political purposes was written by Indian from earliest times with force, eloquence and effectiveness. It was only with the Gandhian struggle for freedom that the Indo-Anglican novels really came to its own. With the publication of Mulak Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), the novel in English may be said to have come of age. Mulak Raj Anand has raised his voice for marginalised family through his unforgettable characters and tried his best to solve the problem of caste system and untouchability.

### **Marginalized Family Voices in Premchand's Creations :-**

There is no doubt that Premchand was the first prominent and the finest story writer who, moved by the plight of marginalised, gave them a literary voice and in fact, mirrors the grave realities of rural India, where caste and gender discrimination were rampant. He created various immortal marginalized family characters trapped in caste system in India in his writings i.e. Ghisu, Madhav and Budhia in 'Kafan', Dukhi, and his wife Jhuria in 'Sadgati', Jokhu and his wife Gangi in 'Thakur Ka Kuwa', Mangal, his father Gudar and his mother Bhoongi in 'Dhudh Ka Daam', Sukhiya in 'Mandir', Silia in 'Godan'. No doubt, credit should go to Premchand for bringing these social issues in his popular writings, yet they don't make him a revolutionary writer. Scholars consider that Premchand's literature is written in a sympathetic mode. The background of a powerful nationalist drive—informed by, as we see earlier, a desire to 'lift' marginalized—behind his literature cannot be seen as altogether unproblematic.

Therefore, it would not be unfair to say that Premchand uses stereotyped image of marginalized and day-to-day idioms used against them in the Hindi heartland to strengthen the plots of his stories. Elaborating on this point, Kanwal Bharti writes that the "basis of Dalit literature is the philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar who demanded abolition of caste and Varna system. On the other hand, Premchand was a Gandhian who believed in the Varna order.... Unfortunately, Premchand was a writer of that kind whose love for the Dalit is limited to removal of untouchability only."<sup>(1)</sup> Dalit writer Omprakash Balmiki says that "Premchand wrote many stories about Dalit awareness like 'Sadgati' (The Deliverance), 'Thakur ka Kuwan' (The Well of Thakur), 'Dudh ka Dam' (Price of Milk)... He was influenced by the ideas of Gandhi. On the one hand, he has sympathy with Dalits. On the other hand, he shows his belief in the Varna system."<sup>(2)</sup>

Premchand has been praised by Sadanand Shahi and others, for his famous story 'Kafan' (The Shroud). They explain that Premchand has brought out all the sorrows of the marginalized family voices in it. But some writers do not consider it a story of marginalized family; rather they declared it an anti- marginalized and casteist story in which depiction of a special caste is important and the inhuman characterization of the all characters. In this story, the family characters are depicted as dirty, drunk and rustic.

According to the story, Ghesu and his son Madhav belong to a marginalized family and are good for nothing fellow, the kind that would suffer hunger but would not work for a living. On the day Madhav's wife Budhiya was crying with delivery pain, father and son were busy roasting potatoes. Both thereafter ate the roasted potatoes and go off to sleep. In the morning, Madhav finds that his wife had passed away and her unborn child too has died in her womb. They go to the Zamindar and to villagers to collect some money for her final rites. They collected five rupees and went to city to buy Kafan. But they do not buy the Kafan; rather they drink alcohol and eat their fill. They both begin to dance... overcome by drunkenness, they collapse.

It is beyond imagination how Ghesu's characterization is so inhuman despite of his practical wisdom, spiritual blending of mind and socialistic behaviour as he expresses these lines to his son from the story which are soaked in humanism :

***"Hey! You are really heartless. You have spent one year of marital bliss with her and now such faithlessness...when my wife died, I did not move away from her for three days. But won't your wife feel shy if I go in? She always veiled herself from me and now you ask me to go and see her uncovered body! She might be beyond herself to care for her body. In my presence she might not throw up her hands and feet freely."***<sup>(3)</sup>

The influence of Kabir on Ghesu is vividly visible in these lines how he was enlightened and elevated in his life :

***"What an evil custom! One who never gets a rag while living requires a new shroud when dead to cover the body."***

***"Shrouds are burnt away with the bodies."***

***"Yes, nothing remains. If we had these five rupees earlier, at least we could have given her some medical treatment."***<sup>(4)</sup>

Madhav in no way, a heartless creature; herepents and laments on his misbehaviour towards his demisedwife, Budhia :

***Madhav, bowing his head in reverence to the departed soul, heartily agreed with his father-***

***"Yes, she would be rewarded certainly. O God, you who are omniscient, gives her a place in Heaven. Our heart-felt blessings are with her. It was because of her that we could eat such food today, which we had never tested before in our lives."***<sup>(5)</sup>

Kanwal Bharti argues that in this story "Premchand is making a mockery of the marginalized family. Premchand is giving the message that poverty is the major problem of the marginalized. It is only poverty which has bred many evils among marginalized and inhuman persons like Ghisu and Madav. But Premchand forgets that the Varna system and unequal distribution of the resources was the major sources of the problems of marginalized. Why did he not explore this aspect behind their laziness?"<sup>(6)</sup>

Premchand has certainly shown the 'degraded' conditions of marginalized family. But, he bypassed the reasons behind it. Why exactly did the marginalized devote such obsessive attention to food even as a human being lay struggling with death in an adjacent room? It was the feudal system and the caste system which were responsible for the 'inhuman' behaviour of Ghisu and Madhav. There was no higher 'human' value invested in the untouchables; they had been normatively reduced to a poor and low status which produced no elevated 'human' concerns. Caste convinces them that there would be no change in their position, no matter how hard they worked. The social order denies them any option of social and economic upward mobility.

On the other hand, Anand is a novelist with a purpose, and his purpose is to bring a social awakening which could bring a change and betterment in the pitiable condition of the marginalized families. In this sense, Anand is a true humanist. As Anand, himself acknowledges :

***"All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short-stories, who are dear to me, because they share the reflections of the real people to whom I had known during, my childhood and youth."***

Untouchable is Anand's first novel and his most compact and artistically satisfying work. This novel describes one day in the life of 18-year-old Bakha, who is treated like dirt (well known 'Bhangi' caste in Hindu Caste System) by all Hindus just because his profession is to clean latrines. Artistically, it is the most perfect of Anand's earlier novels. The distinction of Anand's writings lies in capturing Bakha's work ethics- Bakha tackles his odious job with a conscientiousness that invests his movements with beauty.

Anand narrates such humiliation in real words and his pen picture has great quality as it is derived from the society. Anand has used real Indian words to make the novel real. After much humiliation, at noontime Bakha reaches home as he is very hungry. Here Anand writes; "Meanwhile

he began to feel hungry as if rats were running around in his bell, searching for food. He began to spit a while flocculent spittle on the dust as he hurried out of the town.”<sup>(7)</sup>

But the final outburst came out from Bakha in heart compassionate. It looks like that Anand was waiting to write the outburst of Bakha; even ‘Bakha burst out with an explosion more sudden than the manner in which he was normally wants to utter a speech’:

“They insulted me this morning; they abused me because as I was walking along a man happened to touch me. He gave me a blow. And a crowd gathered round me, abusing and--’ they think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt. That pundit in the temple tried to molest Sohini and then came shouting :

***“Polluted, polluted.” The woman of the big house in the silversmith’s gully threw the bread at me from the forth storey. I won’t go down to the town again. I have done with this job.”***<sup>(8)</sup>

For Bakha, these incidences make his blood boil. He feels a wild desire to retaliate. And yet there is a futility written on his face. He knows that he will not cross the boundaries drawn by the tradition. The incitements of touching and the attempt of the temple priest to rape his sister Sohini to surrender her chastity poisons all that happens subsequently. In this context, William Walsh comments “that ‘humanism is quality, working through coolie where Anand shows himself as one of the first Indian writers to look on the savagely neglected, despised and maltreated poor.”

Anand is a novelist with a purpose, and his purpose is to sensitize people and bring an awakening which could bring a change and betterment in the pitiable condition of the marginalized family of this country. He is a social reformist and scientific humanistic so in the novel. He projects real theme, real problem and real solution. He has concern with the marginalized family so he has raised the issue, realizes the reader to have pity and compassion for the marginalized family and finally Anand provides solution to remove untouchability. Like true humanist, he rejects God, fate, religion, past and future generally and he believes in the supremacy of man specifically. In his opinion, there are the forces, which divide men into castes and classes, so it must be eschewed. His philosophy believes in democracy, socialism, and the peaceful co-existence of all citizens. He further says that all people must have freedom- social, economic, political, intellectual and emotional- without any encroachment up on each other’s freedom.

### **Conclusion :-**

Literature has a very important and foundational role in the construction of self-respect for any human being and community. In early twentieth century, the same role was played by many Hindi and English writers, including Premchand and Anand in formulating the new marginalized family

identity and their issues by depicting marginalized characters in their writings. What the paper analyses that the marginalized Characters in Premchand's 'Kafan' and Anand's 'Untouchable' are facing inhuman treatment in so called human society. Both writers have thrown lights on the lives of the marginalized Characters and their exploitation and oppression on the hand of upper strata of society.

They discussed various issues with regard to temple entry, utility of rituals, plight conditions of the marginalized family, etc. But, Premchand did not portray the real reasons behind their exploitation and inhuman lives: the Varna system and unequal distribution of resources. He did not consider them as an agent of change rather believed in the Gandhian notion of Hridya Privartan. No doubt as a story writer, Premchand remains outstanding as he desanskritized the Hindi language. But, Mulk Raj Anand is not satisfying merely portrayal of the marginalized families. He believes that humanism really teaches us love of man with all his weaknesses, instincts and impulses. He thinks that it may be regarded a system of thought in which human interest, values and dignity are held dominant. He looks for emancipation, freedom and more importantly for self-respect. He considers that the literature written by many visionary writers can lead them their desired goal i.e. Self-Respect and Freedom.

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