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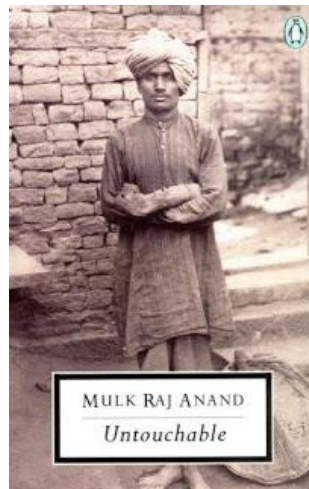
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A Comparative Study of Characters: Walker's Grange Copeland and Mulk Raj Anand's Bakha

Suma Lalit Podnolanna, M.A., M.Phil.



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Abstract

This article compares the character of Bakha from *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand, an Indian English writer with the character of Grange Copeland from Alice Walker's novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Though the place and incidents which inspired the writing of the two novels are different, the experiences are similar. Caste system discussed by Anand and racism talked about by Walker are very much similar experiences of two different societies. Bakha feels sad for going through the insults and coldness of the upper caste people; in addition to this, he is poor, uneducated, and treated abominably for being born as an untouchable. Like Bakha, Grange Copeland also has undergone the insults and seen the hypocrisy of the whites. Both characters are victims of social injustice and oppression.

Key Words:

Mulk Raj Anand, Alice Walker, Untouchable, caste system, racism, exploitation of lower caste, kindness of Blacks, rudeness, upper class.

Alice Walker and Mulk Raj Anand



Courtesy: www.indianetzone.com

Alice Walker is an African American woman writer. Walker was born on February 9, 1944, in Eatonton, Georgia. She was the eighth daughter of a share cropper Willie Lee and Mennie Lou Grant Walker. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* is her first novel, published in 1970. Mulk Raj Anand is an Indian English writer. *Untouchable* is Anand's famous novel published in 1935. Both of them belong to two vastly different countries, and have witnessed

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different historical movements in life. They are part of entirely different cultures. Yet this article compares their works because there are some similarities between the two. Walker has seen the evils of racism; similarly Anand has seen the equally disgusting evil of caste system in India. There are some similarities between the two. The two stories and the characters discussed here are the products of certain similar experiences.



Alice Walker

Racism and Caste System

Racism is the discrimination committed against the people of a particular ethnic group by another group. Caste system is also the discrimination meted out to a particular group (caste) of the society. Traditionally, Indian society was divided into four groups based on the 'varnas', they are: the varna of the Brahmana, commonly identified with priestly class, the varna of Kshatriya, associated with rulers and warriors including property owners, the varna of the Vaishya, associated with commercial livelihoods (i.e. traders), the varna of the Shudra, the workers, laborers. Among these four, the Shudra was considered as the lowest caste by the Indian society. The untouchables were outside of this system; they were not included anywhere in the varna system. Their duty was of cleaning the town, roads, toilets etc. They worked for the comforts of the upper caste people.

The protagonist of Anand's novel *Untouchable* Bakha belongs to this lowest caste of society. Walker's Grange Copeland belongs to the African American community, the community which was subjected to discrimination for centuries.

The Untouchable

The Untouchable is the story of the life of eighteen year old Bakha, who lives in the pre independence era, as a Bhangi (one who cleans toilets). Bakha is not feeble, but is well-built and strong. He is energetic and has his own set of dreams. He had a variety of dreams, like that of playing Hockey and of dressing up like the Englishmen. However, his limited means and the circumstances force him to literally beg for food and get humiliated at every turn of the road. The 'dirty' nature of their work pulls down 'bhangi's to the lowest rung of the ladder of castes. They were not permitted even to take water from a community well and had to wait for hours for the mercy of the upper caste to pour some water into their pot. The food would be given to them by throwing and if they touch anybody by accident they will be punished. They have to shout out they are untouchable as they come near any upper caste people on the streets, and other places, so as to avoid being accidentally touched by the upper caste men and women, which would pollute them. The upper caste however, doesn't seem to find this untouchability present when they molest the teen girls of the Bhangi caste. It is a typical day in the life of Bakha, mixed with hunger, misery, humiliation, small pleasures, insults and setbacks. They have to bear all the humiliation and insults, since they have no right to protest or express their feelings.

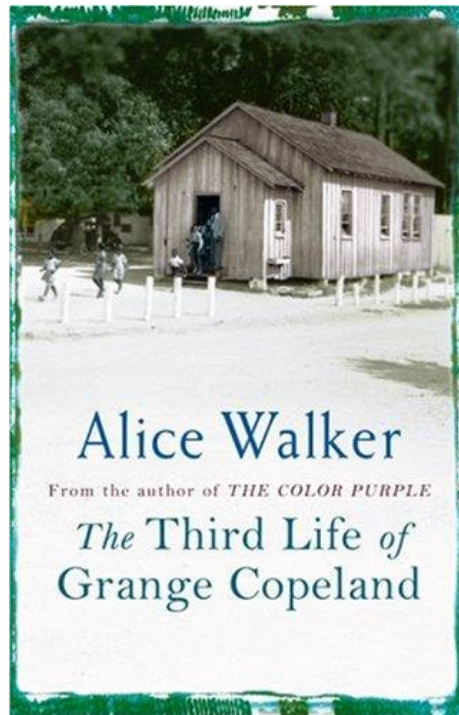
Bakha Seeking a Solution

Deprived of hope and fed up with humiliations, Bakha has a difficult day. The story presents three possible solutions in front of Bakha. First, a Christian missionary, who invites him to join Christianity so that the untouchability based on his caste can be removed. The second option he considers is the idea of sacrifice from Mahatma Gandhi, who came there to preach against the discrimination to the lower castes. The third option he considers as a solution to the entire problem is the toilet flush system, which could help remove forever, the work of carrying the night soil in pails on the top of your head and so on.

Mulk Raj Anand's Solution

Mulk Raj Anand considers that the caste system can only prevail with the job one has to perform and the easy way to remove it is to upgrade the work environment, bringing dignity to such work. We have no right to downgrade any work. The novel simply exposes the evil of caste system, and shows a way to solve the two problems still lingering India, Sanitation and casteism.

The Third Life of Grange Copeland



The Third Life of Grange Copeland is a story of three generations. Grange Copeland belongs to first generation, his son Brownfield Copeland belongs to second generation and his daughter Ruth belongs to third generation. Grange Copeland is present in the story till the end. So he is part of all these three generations. This article discusses only one episode from Grange Copeland's life in which similar to Bakha he is humiliated just because he was an African American.

Grange Looks at life

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Grange watched this white couple in the garden. The lady was pregnant and she was waiting for her lover to come. After sometime he came with a ring, but unfortunately the pregnant lady comes to know that he is married. She becomes very angry and sad, throws away the ring and money given to her. She cries for a long time, before she moves from her place. Then Grange goes to the spot from where he was hiding and takes the ring. He also takes the money. This was first time in his life he had that much of wealth in his hand, that too without stealing. But he felt sad for that white lady and calls her to give that money and ring to her. The lady acts as if nobody is calling her. Then he goes fast and stops her saying it is her ring and money. Now she acts as a typical white woman.

The white lady asked him to give those things to her. Her tone was sharp and she looked him up and down in fury. He handed money and the ring to her. But she counts the money and accuses him of stealing some money from it. She says she would like to throw the money to the pond and will not allow him to take anything from that. She started throwing the money and laughed when Grange made a futile attempt of retrieving the money. Grange swallowed. He hated her entire race while she stood before him, pregnant, having learned nothing from her own pain, helpless except before someone more weak than herself, enjoying a revenge that served all possible bonds of sympathy between them.

Looking Down Upon the Blacks

Though she was abandoned, she believes herself far above him. She shouts at him and calls him 'nigger'. Grange was so angry that words did not come out of his mouth. As he was thinking that if she touches him he will knock her down, she had come closer, and kicked him. A thousand drums pounded behind his temples. His throat was dry. He was weak due to hunger, he couldn't manage to hold on, fell on her, bearing her to the stone floor of the platform. He held her by the shoulders and helped her to stand up. She was not afraid of him instead she was standing there and calling him names.

Steady on her feet again the woman tried to jump from the platform to the grass. He was standing in front of the steps and she did not "care" to order him to move. She knew his

weakness before a single scream from her, and did not fear him as much as she despised him. She would get the police and they would get the money from him, teaching him a lesson in the meantime. Misjudging the distance and the weight of her heavy body, she fell through the ice in to the pond. Grange had been standing mute and still, but immediately he raced down the shallow steps to try to reach her from the bank. In a split second he recalled how he had laughed when his grandfather admitted helping white “masters” and “mistress” out of burning houses. Now he realized that to save and preserve life was an instinct, no matter whose life you were trying to save. He stretched out his arm and nearly touched her. She reached up and out with a small white hand that grabbed his hand. Grange drew back his dirty brown hand and looked at it. The woman struggled to climb the bank against the ice, but the ice snagged her clothes and she stuck in the deep sucking mud near the steep shore. When she had given him back his hand and he had looked at it thoughtfully, he turned away gathering the scattered money in a hurry. Finally she sank. She called him “nigger” with her last disgusted breath.

The Hypocrisy All Around

The hypocrisy of the whites presented in the above scene is much similar to the hypocrisy of the upper caste people in the *Untouchable*. Bakha did all the cleaning works for the upper class people but he was treated as an untouchable. The untouchables were not even allowed to use the roads of upper class, if they use, they had to announce loudly to inform that they are coming. They were not allowed to draw water from the well. But the same so called ‘upper class’ people don’t get polluted while molesting the girls of lower caste. Bakha once saved an injured child by assisting on time. But the child’s mother scolds and punishes him for touching and so by polluting the child. The compassionate behaviors of the African Americans and Indian lower caste people are not appreciated by the others, but treated with coldness.

Conclusion

Characters of Bakha and Grange Copeland condemn the system of Caste and Racism respectively. They highlight the problem of poverty, the pain of being ill treated, and soreness of

heart when their dreams are shattered. Both do the task of sensitizing the people against such inhuman practices.

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Suma Lalit Podnolanna, M.A., M.Phil.
Research Scholar
Dravidian University
Kuppam Full pin code
Andhra Pradesh
India

Postal Address for Correspondence:

203 B Wing, Saileela Apt.
Sector 16, Plot7, New Panvel, Navi Mumbai 410206
Raighad Dist.
Maharashtra
India
suma_adamale@rediffmail.com