

# Narratives of Social Change: A Study of Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable"

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**Abstract:** *Change is fundamental to society. Since age the process of change has troubled man. However serious and violent it may reveal, it is really difficult to understand the motivations behind social changes. Colonization and slavery are issues that concern everyone at all times. It therefore becomes more interesting to study them. The social changes in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable are recurrent and gripping. Exploring these winds of change historically, religiously, socially, culturally and politically through characters, conflicts and plots of Chinua Achebe and Mulk Raj Anand, this paper examines the various perspectives of change. This paper attempts to find these inequalities, faults in the existing social and political institutions within the post-colonial readings merged as a strong force in the narratives of Chinua Achebe and Mulk Raj Anand. Addressing these serious societal problems which are prerequisites for peace Achebe and Mulk Raj Anand handle different categories namely the relationship between the onset of conflict, crime, theft, damage, violence and conflict environments. They understand that until there are changes made to these basic social structures, social conflicts will not end. Identifying these community problems, this paper reveals critically and systematically the various components of social change and the aspirations and concerns of civil society.*

**Keywords:** Transformation, Colonization, Perspectives of Change, Social Conflic, Relevance of Achebe and Mulk Raj Anands writings in the modern times

"Life imitates art..." and "literature always anticipates life"..... Art and literature are the greatest expressions of life. They are the key words to any culture and society has always been impacted by art and literature which help shape its changing culture. Capturing change and doing research on the transformations within a society in recent times has become a focus of interest. The two novels taken for study namely Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" and Mulk Raj Anand's "Untouchable" are explicit examples that try to capture the changing lives of societies in transformation.

Change is fundamental to society. Since age the process of change has troubled man. However serious and violent it may reveal, it is really difficult to understand the motivations behind social changes. Colonization and slavery are issues that concern everyone at all times. It therefore becomes more interesting to study them. The social changes in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable are recurrent and gripping. Exploring these winds of change historically, religiously, socially, culturally and politically through characters, conflicts and plots of Chinua Achebe and Mulk Raj Anand, this paper examines the various perspectives of change.

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre. The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world".

Achebe was the first Nigerian writer to successfully to transform the European novel form into African literature in an Achebe novel. Bruce king notes, "European character study is subordinated to the portrayal of communal life. European economy of form is replaced by an aesthetic appropriate to the rhythms of traditional tribal life. Nigeria

since 1950 has witnessed "the flourishing of a new literature which has drawn sustenance from both traditional oral literature and from the present and rapidly changing society" writes Margaret Laurence in her book in her long drums and cannons Nigerian dramatists and novelists.

Rejecting the European view "that art should be accountable to no one and to justify itself to nobody" in his book of essays, "Morning yet on Creation Day", Achebe has embraced instead the idea at the heart of the African oral tradition that "art is and always was at the services of man. Our ancestors created their myths and told their stories for human purpose. "Raised by the Christian parents in the Igbo town of ogidi in south eastern Nigeria. Achebe was fascinated with world religions and traditional African cultures and began writing stories as a university student. After graduation he worked for the Nigerian broadcasting service and soon moved to the metropolis of lagos.. Achebe writes his novels in English and has defended the use of English a "language of colonizers" in African literature. In 1975, his literature "darkness" became the focus of controversy for its criticism of joseph Conrad as "a bloody racist". Achebe is best known for its first novel. "Things fall apart" which is the most widely read book in modern African literature. "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like any one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart".

Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart is a powerful novel about the social changes that occur when the white man first arrived on the African continent. In attempting to understand

the behavior of individuals and groups in different settings, the novel depicts the effects of marginalization and compartmentalization. Africa as a result of colonization and slavery is in need for evolution. Evolution is the solution to colonization. While the colonizers destroyed the poor masses of Nigeria via inhuman policies, Novel became a global medium of national awareness. As a literary genre it invokes an apocalyptic genre of slave narrative on the racial problems faced by the native Africans. Embracing the ideology of social correctness, this Ibo writer critically examines the historical reality of colonization. Literature enriches our understanding of colonial issues. Achebe feels that Literature should reach a broader audience/ readership and bring about one society.

Things Fall Apart published in 1928 is about the impact of western man on the African society. In a lucid and memorable narrative, Chinua Achebe foregrounds the impositions of western society on the native communities. Here the native African is judged by the western standard of living. Chinua Achebe's attempt in this novel has been to uncover not only the social and economic life of African community but also to see how the community is interpreted by the other. (Other here is the Western thinking) Roger Richard Rorty, postmodern thinker and philosopher labels these communities as "interpretative communities". The immediate questions that arise are how does this other see the native community in which he or 'she does not have any access before? How does the other interpret the belief system, knowledge and societal structures of the native community? Is an impartial interpretation possible? And what entails the interpretation that this of other carry about these native communities Chinua Achebe, with a precise analytical critical eye, examines the above questions in relation to the community he presenting in his novel" Things Fall Apart.

It appears that Chinua Achebe (Things Fall Apart) and Mulk Raj Anand (Untouchable) encompass a literary relationship in understanding the changing social structure. The process of change comes overtly from social and political institutions. To a large extent social structure and institutions shape the behavior of individual and society. These structural changes trap people in a particular social situation and leads to inequality of power and denial of basic human rights.

Unjust structural forces result in discrimination, inadequate opportunities to education and employment, sometimes even basic human needs go unmet. Examples of this sort of hostility and its effects on minority and working-class communities can be seen in the novels; Things Fall Apart and Untouchable. They share the same concern of marginalization and compartmentalization as established standard by the other. Nietzsche and later philosophers describe this fact as only an interpretation. Michael Foucault, twentieth century postmodern philosopher calls it a "tool of power" that is created by a section of people. Any attempt to posit a system of belief as encompassing the universal has come under severe attack in the late 70s critically by Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravathy Spivak. They see that the whole of western metaphysics has caught up in the web of binary

opposition in which one category maintained its status as superior to the other.

Examples of West over East, male over female as other, inferior or primitive have come under severe criticism in the last 70s. Following the same line of criticism, post-colonial writers have examined the native or local knowledge systems i.e. found western influences on African literature. Edward said in his monumental and path breaking work "Orientation" has already exposed how the works of the native/local communities were interpreted and translated to the advantage of the hegemony of the western belief system. The aim of the writings after 70s has been to deconstruct the binary opposition in the texts and to examine the unquestioned hierarchical structures, either social or economic constructed in various texts.

Great literature has fundamental impact on the development of culture. According to Chinua Achebe and Mulk Raj Anand, slavery and minority can be replaced by a formidable ideologue which both wished to accomplish.

Mulk Raj Anand the Indian Novelist and the short-story writer was the first writer to incorporate Punjabi and Hindustani expressions into English in his portrayal of the poor in India. Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable reflects the growing identity, awareness and consciousness of the minority during the colonial period. Anand has taken a great risk, both professionally and socially, in writing about the untouchable class, a minority that has been underrepresented in much of the Indian-English literature produced before Independence. My research paper analyzes the nature of literary representation of the emerging consciousness of marginalization. It focuses on the treatment of caste oppression, and minority/ underrepresented sensibility with special reference to Untouchable.

For Anand literature should be an interpretation of the truth of people's lives. Speaking about the real test of the novelist, Mulk Raj Anand once said, "It may lie in the transformation of words into prophesy. Because, what is writer if he is not the fiery voice of the people, who through his own torments, urges and exaltations, by realizing the pains, frustrations and aspirations of others, and by cultivating his incipient powers of expression, transmutes in art all feeling, all thought, all experience thus becoming the seer of a new vision in any given situation (qotd. in Dhawan, 14).

There is no question that Mulk Raj Anand has fashioned the novel Untouchable which is indeed, the "fiery voice" of those people who form the Untouchable caste. Anand has ventured to address this specific question through Untouchable to alleviate the exploitation of the untouchable class in India? He addresses this question through the dramatization of Bakha, the novel's central character and a member of India's lowest caste. Bakha's birth in low-caste affects his spirit. As the story progresses Bakha struggles to reconcile with that realization. At one point in the novel, sweeping the courtyard of a Hindu temple Bakha is overpowered by his curiosity to see what lies within. He is divided between desire and his inner force to peer into the temple.

A murderer might have advanced like that, one confident in his consummate mastery of the art of killing. But he soon lost his grace in the low stoop which the dead weight of years of habitual bending cast on him. ....After he had mounted the first two steps, he stood completed; demoralized with fear and retreated... (Anand 58).

His stooping posture, the long years of degradation and physical deformity withdraw him from the forbidden temple steps", "recalling to his demeanor the "humble, oppressed under-dog that he was by birth." (58). When Bakha finally summons courage to climb the temple steps he is severely chastised for "polluting" the temple with his presence.

Untouchable is more than a straightforward narrative. It gives an insight into the struggle to come to terms with oppression and reminds the reader that society redefines us for what we become and how we view ourselves. In Bakha's case, the struggle is not only with the social group but that he must overcome his inability in the society to be a part of it.

Mulk Raj was a novelist fighter who had been involved in India's freedom movement. Like most Indians of his generation he threw himself into Gandhi's non-cooperation movement against the British for which he received 11 stripes on his back and was briefly jailed. The experience had a deep impact on the young Anand and he concluded that notions of 'Empire' and 'Freedom' were complete opposites:

It is a story based on the life of the downtrodden, despised and oppressed section of Indian society, the outcastes – those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. This story is based on a single day in the life of Bakha, a latrine cleaner and sweeper boy. We follow him round on his daily chores cleaning up the shift of the rich and powerful, who despise him because of strict social rules governing ideas of purity and pollution. When he walks down the streets he has to signal an alarm with his voice as he approaches so that the 'pure' are forewarned to avoid even allowing his shadow to be cast upon them. On one occasion he does 'pollute' a caste Hindu and is chased, abused and attacked all day long for this defilement. (Interview with Anand, 8 March 2004.)

There is a comprehensive classificatory scheme of the 'varna' system in the classical Hindu Vedic literature that underlies the concepts of caste which continues to exert a powerful and pervasive influence over Indian life. Within the greater scheme of Hindu society, Bakha endures enormously and appropriates himself within his own culture in search for an identity. He attempts to adopt the "fashun" of the Tommies, (and becomes) "possessed with an overwhelming desire to live their life". The novel ends in the hope that some sort of resolution, or at the very least, some emergence of social change will occur.

Anand had always been disgusted with and opposed religious sectarianism, communalism and caste society. With the publications of *Untouchable*, Anand had firmly associated himself with that brand of writers who saw 'political, social and human causes as genuine impulses for the novel and poetry'. London in 1925 was the center of the

English-speaking intellectual world and Anand had hoped to meet with life-minded individuals who shared us anti-colonial liberal views. Beyond the orientalist conceptions of the 'natives' he attempted to depict the complex, often contradictory and mostly confrontational impact of colonial rule in India.

James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* impressed Anand greatly and became his model to *Untouchable*, published in 1935, 50 years earlier Anand had pioneered the writing of Indian literature to demonstrate his keen desire for political change and social transformation. They remained with him throughout his life. The best tribute that readers of this journal could pay Mulk Raj Anand would be to read his novels and be inspired by the dedication and commitment he had.

Broadly speaking since the 1970s the writings on minority classes have been pointed out to be a unique genre modern Indian literature. As the subject of change is pervasive, this paper limits to the concepts of change and its implementation with special reference to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. There is a major expansion of research happening on contemporary African and Indian writers, There are very few major findings between Chinua Ache be and Indian born Mulk Raj Anand. The two novels share a concern of marginalization and compartmentalization. These writers focus on the changing phenomena of African and Indian Society. With the impact of colonialism and imperialism the writers explore change as thematic undercurrents in a society.

In this manner this change of focus reflects the postmodernist's tendency to experiment new styles and narrative procedures. The great point attained through narrative experimentation is that man's thinking can be traced to change. History is a series of unreconciled change and man's existence is filled with social changes/transformations and reform.

Wandering between two words one- dead, the other powerless to be born, with nowhere to rest my head, like these, on earth I wait forlorn (85-90).

What else is Bakha but a wandering figure of oppression? He is clearly disenchanted by the confines that the class-system has imposed on him and attempts to appropriate himself amongst the ruling English-class. This produces in effect, a state of double alienation. As a result, he is both rejected from his own culture and repelled by the other. Bakha, therefore, exists on the periphery of both worlds. But as Forster suggests and what I believe Anand seems to conclude is that "on the surface of the earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand" (*Untouchable*, viii).

This paper finds these inequalities, faults in the existing social and political institutions within the post-colonial readings merged as a strong force in the narratives of Chinua Achebe and Mulk Raj Anand. Addressing these serious societal problems which are prerequisites for peace Achebe and Mulk Raj Anand handle different categories namely the relationship between the onset of conflict, crime, theft, damage, violence and conflict environments. They

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