CHAPTER 2

Pre-Independence Dalit Literature:

Gandhian Era and Quest for Identity: Prose, Play and Poems
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Before the pre-independence era, during the Middle-Ages, untouchables were struggling to get their human identity and dignity. Their struggles were composed and sung in different devotional songs by the saint-poets of upper castes as well as the saint-poets of the down trodden communities. Their quest for human identity was earnestly presented with a humble request. Thus, it was a socio-religious movement.

Many invaders came to India, conquered India and made their unique impression on the economic, social, political, educational, literary and cultural aspects of Indian society forever. But that was the English who changed the scenario of India in all the stages of Indian life:

The Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes and the French had mainly their commercial and sometimes a political interest in India. They had not appeared on the scene as ambassadors of their culture and civilization. The Dutch, the Danes, the French and the Portuguese have left. The English also have left, but unlike the Dutch, Dane, French and Portuguese, their influence still abides in a variety of subtle, direct and indirect ways. (Maniar 3-4)
The Western civilization, through English language, made tremendous effect on the India’s life. It had influenced not only mainstream literature but had also covered political, cultural, educational, religious, and social segments of pre-independence Indian life. ‘With incredible avidity the Indians began adopting Western modes of thought, behaviour, dress and sometimes even flattered their English rulers by imitating them unintelligently and indiscriminately.’ (Maniar 4) As an outcome, the orthodox and traditional Indians had opened the doors for modern ways of Western culture. Thus, a new era of the Indian Renaissance had begun after the introduction of English education in Indian society.

For the first time, with the help of Macaulay, Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated the English education in India. Thus, during the 19th century Macaulay’s ‘Minutes’ on Education remained the landmark in the history of English education in India. As a result, a good number of Indian writers had laid foundation of Indian writing in English. But the early phase (from 1830-1880) may be called ‘The Phase of Imitation’. Because the literary personalities of the Indian Renaissance of the 19th century like Derozio, Kashiprasad Ghose etc. in their works largely imitated the English poets such as Scott, Byron and others. Indian novelists of the period had also imitated the English novelists. This imitative quality of the early Indian writers in English has been observed by P. P. Mehta and remarked:

The Indian literary renascence was quickened by the impact of English literature. Indian writers, who tried to express themselves in English were under the spell of early Victorian models, which they tried to imitate in their own writings . . . .
It is true that the early Indo-Anglian novels were but sorry imitations of the early Victorian novelists. . . (Indo-Anglian 34)

The literature of the 1930s and 1940s were chiefly presenting the moral, social, economical, and political values of Gandhi. Gandhi wanted to bring change in the life of untouchables through the means of Hindu Humanism. This effect is found on the literature of the Gandhian era. So the Gandhian literature is the literature of the sympathisers, articulated on the foundation of humanism. To accept untouchables as children of God, Gandhi used the term Harijan for untouchables. Considering Gandhian values of untouchables’ uplift movement, the writers of that era had given prime importance to the unwanted untouchable communities in their literary works. It was followed by the regional writers as well as by the Indian writers in English.

The mainstream writers had enlivened the Gandhian ideals into their literary works. R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and other upper castes Hindu literary personalities had drafted Gandhian ideology into their literary writings which are reflecting merely sympathies for the Harijans. Whenever the Harijans were chosen for interpretations into their creative writings by the non-Harijan mainstream authors, they gave only panoramic views of the situations in which the Harijans were passing through. Except Mulk Raj Anand, the untouchables’ issues were outwardly presented and touched in their works of art by the upper caste writers. They neither did wish to undergo what the untouchables were feeling nor did they want to share the untouchables’ lot.
Gandhian social reform movement based on social issues had provided literary material to the writers for their literary creations. “It is in this social situation created by Gandhian thought,” according to Rama Jha, “that Narayan, like other contemporary novelists, found his subject matter.” (Gandhian 120) Narayan’s moral approaches presented in his novels and short stories were derived from Gandhian thoughts. He had depicted, in his novels the political and social atmosphere of Indian Independent Movements, influenced by Gandhi. As remarked by Rama Jha:

In fact, his characters are very much the product of this milieu influenced by Gandhian movements. For example, Swami, the school boy hero of his first novel, has lived through the tremors of the non-cooperation and swadeshi movement of the thirties and the experience of participation in the school strike. As an undergraduate student, Chandran of The Bachelor of Arts is acutely aware of the racial exploitation of Indians by British. He initiates the ferment of ideas regarding the nature of education in India when he speaks at the Historical Society function in college. The English Teacher also, underlines complete rejection of the Western education in favour of Gandhi’s basic education. Narayan unequivocally upholds the Gandhian ideal of Non-violence in the character of Natraj in The Man-Eater of Malgudi. (47)

Narayan through his characterisation has tried to portray the milieu of his time and has shown moral values which were representation of the spirit of the decades of 1930s and 1940s:
He achieves his end through characterization but his characters derive their authenticity from the socio-political scene of the 1930s and 1940s in India. His major preoccupation as a novelist is with this social scene. Although the social problems in his novels belong to the realm of manners and conventions, his characters are viewed in the context of and in relationship to these social problems. (120)

In his depiction of social issues, like other novelists, Narayan does not seem so enthusiastic to give room to the lives and problems of the untouchables as Mulk Raj Anand has presented in *Untouchable*. Social problems presented in his novels are most of the general issues and the solutions offered to them are based on that of the Gandhian perspectives:

A closer analysis of Narayan’s novels of the 1930s and the 40s would make it clear that he is more of a moral analyst than is usually acknowledged and that the frame of reference for this moral analysis is Gandhian thought. (122)

Narayan in his first novel *Swami and Friends* narrates the effects of the Gandhian ideology. He has involved Sawami in particular and his friends in general in the political movement which narrates the pitiful condition of the Indian peasants. Gandhian ideology is presented in the actions of Swami and his friends when they take part into the Gandhian protest movement in the novel. Thus, under the great influence of Gandhi, Narayan’s work was produced:
With the lecturer they wept over the plight of the Indian peasant; resolved to boycott English goods, especially Lancashire and Manchester cloth, ... and Swaminathan was going to mete it out by wearing only Khaddar, the rough home-spun. (Narayan Swami 94)

When the great protest takes place against the British in the novel Swami and Friends, Swami and his friends have also thrown their caps as boycott of British cloths though it’s not British goods but native’s.

Another such Gandhian thought is glorified by the character, Chandran, in the novel The Bachelor of Arts. Here, Narayan presents the perspective of non-violence of Gandhi. To create strong effects on the minds of the readers, Narayan has used contradictory values than that of Gandhi. The character, Veeraswami, for example, unlike Chandran, believes in violence:

Veeraswami bristled with prejudices and violence. Imperialism was his favourite demon. He believed in smuggling arms into the country, and, on a given day, shooting all the Englishmen. (Narayan The Bachelor 46)

Unlike Veeraswami, Chandran upholds the Gandhian ideal of non-violence. So, Chandran does not approve the violent means. Likewise, in other novels of Narayan, his protagonists
are trying to find their identities in Gandhian ideology. Protagonists Krishnan, Srinivas and other are probing their selves to their quest of identity in Gandhian ideology:

Srinivas of *Mr. Sampath* has the similar quest to pursue as Krishnan in *The English Teacher*. The dimension of the search for identity and self-expressions in case of Srinivas is more philosophical. Like all Narayan’s characters he seems to be obsessed with the need for a proper vocation. If Krishnan sought his personal salvation in Gandhian experiments with basic education, Srinivas chooses to edit a thought-provoking weekly paper called the “Banner”. (Jha 138)

In Narayan’s two novels untouchables are presented, they are –*Waiting for the Mahatma* and *The Financial Expert*. In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Narayan has realistically presented Gandhian action and mission. In this novel Narayan has presented Gandhi himself as a character of the novel. He has presented Gandhian values; spoke and practiced by Gandhi. In the novel, giving the speech on his ideals Gandhi says:

> But we have a system of our own to follow: that’s ‘Ram Dhun; spinning on the *charkha* and the practice of absolute Truth and Non-violence.’ (Narayan *Waiting* 17)
The character of Sriram is an average man with the human weakness. He likes Bharati, a Gandhian follower. Because of Bharati, Sriram comes under the influence of Gandhian ideology. The impact of Gandhi over the common man is presented through the character of Sriram by the novelist:

She said: ‘Oh! He is your God, is he?’

‘Yes, he is, and I won’t hear anyone speak lightly of him.’

‘What else can I know, a poor ignorant hag like me! Do I read the newspapers? . . . How should I know about that man Gandhi?’

‘He is not a man; he is a Mahatma!’ cried Sriram.

‘What do you know any Mahatma, anyway?’ asked Granny. (Narayan Waiting 55)

Thus, he learns the values of non-violence. But as Bharati decides to go to jail, Sriram comes under the influence of Jagdish, the INA worker. Thus, he knows about the terrorist activities and violence. The novel is very much a praise of Gandhian ideology rather than caste-based discrimination of untouchables. Just like his other novels, Narayan in Waiting for the Mahatma has presented a panoramic portrayal of Harijans’ world.
The portrayal of characters and narration of the subject matter in Narayan are directly inspired by Gandhian ideology. He has not depicted the conditions of the untouchables which were beyond the level of sufferings. In this way, Narayan is basically interested in presentation of the upper castes’ Indian world. The plights of the untouchables are not so strongly presented by the writer as he has presented the Gandhian ideology. It is because, like other writers of the period, he was also under the influence of Gandhian ideology than the ages-old sufferings and filthy conditions of the untouchables:

Narayan depicts commonplace situations, sees incongruities and maladjustments and with this material builds up his novels and short stories. His themes are usually built around Indian beliefs and superstitions. His characters reflect his outlook on life and approach, which discovers the generally overlooked, subtle realities of the common and the unimportant, insignificant men we come across at every step of our life. (Singh S. 157)

Mulk Raj Anand, a humanist par excellence is one of the pioneers of Indian writing in English, has focused on dehumanized conditions of the untouchables with Gandhian empathetic visions, socialistic approach and humanism in his literary creations. He used the genre of fiction as the means for his social propagandas to lift up untouchables to the social dignity. Because he had seen the untouchables personally; and some of them were his friends with whom, in his childhood he played and enjoyed the life naturally.
Upendra Prasad Singh remarks about Anand’s creativity that it is because of ‘his sympathy for the underdog and bitter criticism of social and economic inequalities prevalent in Indian life, Anand is often considered a communist and dubbed as a social propagandist.’ *(Class 2)* Anand was well intimated with the untouchables’ world and hypocrisy and cruelties committed on untouchables by the upper castes. This is aptly observed by Farhana Khan in her critical work:

Anand’s first three novels, Untouchable, Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud are the boldest and the angriest of his books, for they contain his revolutionary idealism in extensor. Anand’s ideas about various kinds of determinism and the place of man in the contingent structure of society have made these books what they are. *(Mulkraj 57)*

As a result, untouchables’ inhuman and filthy conditions are at the centre in Anand’s fictions and short stories. The very example of such irrational and prejudiced practices of upper castes towards the untouchables are presented very passionately and touchingly in the novel *Untouchable* (1935), a landmark in Indian English fiction on Dalits. The novel presents effect of Gandhian perspectives upon the novelist:

The novel, with its opulent details, seems to have been obviously inspired by Anand’s own experiences in Sabarmati Ashram, where he had accepted
Anand, in his novels *Untouchable, The Big Heart,* and *The Road,* has attempted to highlight the caste cruelty of the upper-castes and their inhuman treatments to the untouchables. In these fictions Anand has strongly protested caste inequality. The characters like Pundit Kali Nath and Mahant Nandgiri respectively in the novels *Untouchable* and *The Village* are the Hindu priests who are orthodox Hindus. Both they believe that the untouchables must not be given entry in the temples at all otherwise their God would be defiled. According to such priests, untouchables are born to suffer at the hands of upper castes. But at the same time, Hindu priests desire to touch and molest the untouchable females:

Pundit Kali Nath of *Untouchable* and Mahant Giri of *The Village* are the temple priests who believe that untouchables should be always kept apart . . . Pundit Kali Nath of *Untouchable* who does not allow untouchables to mount up the stage of the well or the temple, tries to molest Sohani, the sweeper giri [girl]. Mahant Nandgiri in *The Village* smokes charas and drinks hemp. He keeps his beautiful women disciples close to have an occasional touch. (Singh U. 135)
The ugliest hidden passions of the Hindu priests are unmasked by Anand. Lalu, the protagonist of the novel *The Village*, is a spokesman of the novelist. Lalu, to his orthodox brother Dayal Singh, gives apt estimation of hypocrisies of the Hindu priest Mahant Nandgiri and the other priests like Nandgiri:

> And beware of a religious teacher who in greed is so gluttonous that he will suck the blood of the poorest. (Anand 39)

Anand has criticised the shallow religious practices of upper-castes to the untouchables in his novels. Anand made satire on ‘the hypocrisy and hollowness of Hindu religion for its curse of ‘pollution by touch’ which baffles all reason, sensibility and good sense’ (Singh U. 91)

Premila Paul has remarked that Anand’s ‘novels undoubtedly project a lively image of India, the details of which both reflect and imply his passionate concern with its social reality.’ (*The Novels* 1)

Anand, in *Untouchable*, presents the lowest of lowly and miserable conditions of the untouchables. Anand had attempted in this novel to highlight the caste tyranny of the upper-castes and their inhuman dealings to the untouchables. Bakha, the untouchable, is son of Lakha, is a sturdy, sensitive, ambitious, intelligent, and non conformist teen-aged sweeper who is the central figure in the novel. Through this heart touching character, on one hand, the novelist has highlighted the social injustices committed on untouchables by the upper-castes and on the other presented the sufferings and miseries of the untouchables.
The novel opens with the authentic description of ugly and unhygienic colony in a small town in Punjab where the untouchables are living. Anand has portrayed single day’s social humiliations in the life of the untouchables in the world of the Hindus through the character of Bakha. Here, Bakha passes through many inhuman, irrational, prejudices, and shocking treatments. Bakha, the representative of the untouchables, has experienced humiliation and insult which are the common experiences to all untouchables. In this novel the incident–by mistake Bakha touched upper caste Hindu at market place is the example of it. At the market place, Bakha used to sweep every day. By mistake he touches the upper caste orthodox Hindu. As a result of that he is beaten like an ugly animal. This is indeed, irrational and unjustifiable dealing to the untouchables. This incident has realised Bakha that in the world of the orthodox Hindus, he and his community are nothing but worse than filthy beasts:

It is only the Hindus and the outcastes who are not sweepers. For them I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That is the word! Untouchable! I am an untouchable! (Anand Untouchable 57)

This degrading position compels him to react in a very usual manner of the untouchables. It shows that if the untouchables have to survive in the world of Hindus which is full of irrational, tyrant, and pretentious, they have to follow inhuman codes and conducts created for them by the upper castes. Bakha’s innocent mind receives a big psychological jolt at the core. After this incident, he is afraid of the Hindus’ injustice and inhuman approaches; and becomes the victim of ‘upper-caste phobia’. Since he is beaten openly for a touch, his phobia
for upper castes does not allow Bakha to mix naturally with any upper castes. Bakha hesitates to touch his playmate Ramcharan when he offers him sweets:

‘Here is your portion,’ said Ramcharan unfolding the handkerchief which he carried.

‘Throw me one,’ said Bakha.

‘Take it,’ said Ramcharan.

But Bakha hesitated and did not hold his hands out.

‘Take it, why don’t you take it?’ Ramacharan grumbled.

‘No, give it to me, throw it.’ Bakha said. (Untouchable 105)

The young generation of upper castes is innocent and ignorant of the social evils of untouchability. But the elder people, as time passed, poisoned their minds by the evil practice of untouchability. Here, Ramacharan the representative of younger generation who doesn’t follow untouchability.

Anand’s reformative zeal to uplift Dalits to the level of human beings was the source for the creation of the novel Untouchable. Anand has realistically presented the ugliest attitudes and the worst dealings of upper-castes to Dalits in this novel:
Anand is merciless in his exposures of the evil elements in the social structure and his sociological indictment has disturbing logicality which admits no timed caveats of gradualist liberalism. Bakha’s quest for identity in a world which refused to recognize him, has been traced by the novelist with a touch of sympathy as well as a lacerating irony. Anand’s condemnation of untouchability derives its strength from his passionate involvement in, and identifications with, the problems of the socially-boycotted individuals. (Rao 138)

But, at the same time, his radical reformative zeal is utterly unable to give right solution to the problems of untouchables at the end of the novel Untouchable. The three solutions of the problem of untouchability, according to the novelist are: Manual labour is replaced by the introduction of water-closet; the untouchables should seek religious conversion; and, they should accept the ways which have been offered by Gandhian ideology. According to Farhana Khan; ‘All these solutions offered by the novelist seem to be too facile to be accepted as efficacious for they cannot, even combinatively, bring in the solace for the untouchables, though they are socially relevant.’ (Khan 68)

The novel ends with a utopian optimism which, according to critics like E. M. Forster, Balarama Gupta etc. is quite apt enough to be good. The optimistic end of the fiction is nothing but compassion to the oppressed untouchables. Thus, just like Gandhi, and other upper-castes, Anand does not come out of the Hindu attitude that is no more than sympathy for untouchables. And on other hands, as a matter of fact the untouchables do not want any
superficial compassion from anyone. But they want their human identity, human rights and human dignities which have been robbed away from them since centuries.

In addition to novels, Anand has presented the untouchables into his short-stories to highlight the miserable and unimaginable sufferings of untouchables in the world of the orthodox Hindus. In the story *The Silver Bangles*, the young and beautiful untouchable girl is portrayed to reveal that in South-India the untouchables are criticised very harshly for wearing silver ornaments. Upendra Prasad remarks on the story; ‘The poor lady is admonished that untouchables in the south are not supposed to wear silver at all. . . . The story also floods light on the pathetic condition of the untouchables in the Hindu strata of life.’ (*Class 5*) In this story the untouchable sweeper girl becomes the subject of jealousy for the upper-caste woman where the untouchable girl is used to work–cleaning. The envy of the upper-caste woman bursts out. She suffers from inferiority complex and becomes jealous of the young untouchable sweeper girl’s beauty. This untouchable girl has put on silver bangles which are given to her as a gift by her mother. The bangles have been given to her mother on her second marriage. Actually, the lady has a fear that her husband would attract to the beauty of the girl. Anand has exposed ‘the caste superiority through which the lady of the house shows to hide her inferiority.’ (*Singh U. 5*)

In 1936, Gandhi had addressed 12th ‘Gujarati Sahitya Parishad’ (Gujarati Literary Conference). His was the plea to the literary creators:
I tell our writers that instead of writing for the people of cities, let us start writing for our dumb population. I am the self appointed representative of this dumb population. On behalf of them I say, enter that sphere with enthusiasm. (Gaijan 68)

After this conference many mainstream writers from Guajarati language had presented the Gandhian thoughts in their literary writings; which are a sympathetic attitude towards untouchables. The upper-caste Hindu writers like Sundaram, Zaverchand Meghani, Umashankar Joshi, R. V. Desai, K. M. Munshi etc., in their poetry, novel, drama, and short-story have presented the Harijans with Gandhian ideology.

Zaverchand Meghani, a famous non-Dalit Gujarati poet in his poem Last Salute (Chhelli Salam) has presented the Gandhian beliefs towards the Harijans. He was a firm believer of Gandhi and Gandhian idealism. The poem is a self repentance of the poet being non-Dalit. The wrongs upper-caste Hindus had done to the Harijans since centuries were recorded in the poem:

We slew, burnt, buried under the earth,
drove them into forest by calling them demons,
built for them living hell away from us,
(thus we) kept them forever servile brutes. (Meghani 70)
The poem is nothing but a reinterpretation of the atrocities and inhuman practices done by orthodox Hindus. And for that the poet feels sorry and regrets. It is nothing but empathy and sympathy for the Harijans.

The same approaches for the untouchables are found in the poems and drama of Umashankar Joshi, another celebrated Gujarati upper-caste poet and writer. In his poems, we have the representation of the Gandhian thoughts. In his well known poem Garbage-mound (Ukarado), the poet has symbolically composed the Harijans and asked the upper-castes to uplift them from their filthy conditions. Here, the Gandhian idea is presented by the poet; the orthodox Indians would come on front, to change the inhuman conditions of the Harijans. However, the idea of Gandhi remained nothing but an imagination as no concrete work has been practiced by the orthodox Hindus. The poem ends with optimism that the garbage-mound’s smell will be transformed into fragrance. However, question remains the same, who will do that? The certain answer is that not the orthodox Hindus.

The atrocities and inhumanities faced by Dalits are reinterpreted by Umashankar Joshi in his drama Valmiki, the Untouchable of the Untouchables (Dalit na Dalit Valmiki). The writer has interpreted the illogical belief of the orthodox Hindus i.e. the upper caste Hindus are polluted by the touch and even by the shadow of untouchables. Besides, Joshi has presented the reality of Harijans’ world that untouchables are divided in their attitudes towards fellow untouchables:
Muktabai, a mang woman, in 1855, wrote about the subjugation that the poor mang and mahars, especially women, suffered at the hands of the upper castes. She also points how the mahars have internalized brahminical values and saw themselves as superior to mangs. Dalit women writers are sensitive to the differential treatment meted out to different subcastes and women within Dalit communities. (Ghosh 58)

The Harijans are having divisions among them. As a result, they will not allow Valmiki, the untouchable to drink water from their well. Water, the first requirement of the man and animal is in the background of the story. The central theme is pain, sufferings and helplessness of Harijans.

In the first act, the untouchables are trying to steal water from the pond. They have to steal water because their touch is considered as pollution. And, if they touch the well then the water will be polluted. So the Harijans are waiting for darkness to steal the water. But their bad luck is one step ahead of them. As Omkar, the old village Brahmin is an orthodox Hindu sees the Harijans stealing water. He throws stones to break their pots but the stone hits the untouchable boy Gokal and falls unconscious. The inhumanity of the orthodox Hindus is presented by Joshi in the dialogue between Kacharo, the untouchable and Omkar, an old orthodox Brahmin:
THE OLD MAN: Who are you, you who strut about as the parents of the whole world? Surely you must be having your names!

KACHARO: (In dry voice) Sire! The Untouchables!

THE OLD MAN: You faithless! I thought it might be some cattle; but you are the low caste (worse than that)

KACHARO: Sire, consider us at least the equals of animals!

THE OLD MAN: Oh who are you! You who speak so defiantly to me! Should we regard you as animals? God would have made you animals if He had minded to do so. (Joshi 88)

The orthodox thinking is quite far from any rational reasoning. Just to support his argument Omkar, the old orthodox Brahmin states that even God does not wishes Dalits to give birth as animals. He means that the untouchables are worse than animal. This is a type of psychological torture faced by Harijans every time when they encounter with the orthodox Hindus.

Out of anguish and pain, the Harijans in this play have decided to dig their own well and have dug the same. Here, the writer has unfolded another reality of untouchables that Harijans are even having divisions among them. It means that the well dug by the untouchable is not for the Valmiki, the last among the Harijans in degradation. Accordingly these untouchables could not dig their own well. So they have to steal either from the well of upper caste Hindus or from the Harijans. Stealing water from the well of the Harijans is less
dangerous. Having this thought in mind Balo and Maru go to the Dalits’ well. But suddenly they hear the loud cry for life from the well. Surprisingly, it is none other than Omkar who is loudly asking for help to save him from drowning into the well. With a little hesitation the Harijans Balo saves him. But instead of thanking for saving the life, the old orthodox Brahmin is insulting the untouchable that he has polluted him and for purgation he has to perform certain rituals.

For the development of the Dalit movement, the duration after 1930s was the most important period. Different events took place that gave new subjects to the Hindi mainstream writers to highlight the events which had been happening to the Harijans since centuries. In Hindi literature, the writer, Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936) who wrote under the pen-name Munshi Premchand is well-known for advocating the issues and the worst conditions of the Harijans in his literary creations. Pradeep Sharma has observed about Premchand’s literary works; ‘Premchand was having a wide meaning of the term ‘untouchable castes’ that include both the ‘Scheduled Castes’ and ‘the Other Backward Castes’. The term Dalit is not very often used in his literature and if at all it has been used, it does not connote the political meaning that the term had acquired.’ (Sharma P. 86)

Premchand was highly influenced by Gandhian ideology. Gandhi’s ideology was to change orthodox Hindus’ mentality to the genuine human being. Gandhian ideology has forced Premchand to compose many stories and novels on this theme. But, in the course of time, he was moved a little bit by the greatest Dalit leader, Dr Ambedkar; and, as a result, the ideas of social change had taken place in his literary works. However, being a non-Dalit
Premchand could not go away from Gandhian influences. ‘Initially, he wrote with Gandhian perspective but subsequently, got influenced by Dr. Ambedkar.’ (Sharma P. 86) Premchand has highlighted the Harijans issues and problems with a view to highlight their miserable and pathetic conditions. He has presented contemporary social problem of untouchability almost in all literary creations from Gandhian perspectives:

There is no direct novel on ‘Untouchability’ (except Karambhoomi) but there are several reflections in almost every novel on this issue. This may be said here that the ‘Untouchability’ was the social reality of his times and as a realistic, he couldn’t afford to ignore it while depicting a realistic picture of the Indian society. The way this problem has been depicted, it can be analysed with two perspectives: one, politically, it is guided by the Gandhian approach.

. . . (Sharma P. 94)

Because of Premchand’s unique art and vision to present reality of his time he is remembered as a unique writer in Hindi literature. Hindi romanticism didn’t touch him strongly. Being a realistic novelist, Premchand has given priority in his literary works and highlighted ‘the cause of peasantry, exploited and deprived sections of society.’ (Sharma P. 85) Premchand has portrayed a candid and faithful picture of north Indian rural life in general and the rural non-Dalits’ dealings towards the Dalits in particular, in his different Hindi literary works. Sharma has rightly remarked on that:
In all his stories he related to the problems of ‘Untouchability’. Premchand made an attempt to highlight the level of exploitation, which is inherent in the Caste System, and described traumatic and painful life through which the Dalit community was undergoing during these periods. At the same time, he exposed the hypocrisy of the upper castes and how they were trying to maintain their hegemony to sustain the oppressive caste system. (Sharma P. 87)

In his stories such as Mandir, Sadgati, Thakur Ka Kuan, Shuddhi, and Mantra are created under the influence of Gandhi’s Harijan movement in which he represented contemporary issues of the untouchables. The orthodoxy and cruelties of the upper-castes were realistically presented in these stories. Besides, the stories became the platform to highlight the filthy and pitiable state of the Harijans. Thus, the stories are realistic pictures of the hypocrisy of the orthodox Hindus on one hand and, on the other hand highlight the Harijans’ issues based on untouchability in drinking water, economic exploitation, temple entry and many others.

Premchand has highlighted the Harijans in his literary creations but as an upper-caste writer. Like other Hindu authors, he has compassion and empathy for the Harijans. This is the direct representation of one of the Gandhian perspectives for the untouchables. Though Premchand is moved by Dr Ambedkar’s Dalit movement, being the non-Dalit Gandhian thoughts are dominated in his literary works. In his Presidential Address to the Conference of Hindi Dalit Writers in Nagpur in 1993, October 21st and 22nd, Om Prakash Valmiki has
observed the literary creations of Premchand as Gandhian ideology. The views of Valmiki are quoted by Kanwal Bharati. Valmiki had said:

Premchand has written several important stories on Dalit consciousness like Sadgati, Thakur Ka Kuan, Dhoodh Ka Daam etc. but coming to his last phase story Kafan, he seems to be an advocate of Gandhian principles, feudal values and ‘Varna’ system. There is a paradox in his works-one, sympathy with the Dalit and other belief in the ‘Varna’ System. (Sharma P. 91)

Gandhian ideology remained dominant in political and social strata of 1930s that had greatly influenced the literary writers to reveal Gandhian principles; and Premchand was not exception in this matter. It is aptly remarked by Sharma:

. . . Gandhiji immensely influenced him as is evident from his resignation on Gandhi’s appeal, his numerous write-ups on Gandhi and his politics and other references made in different journals. This also shaped his political understanding that got manifested in his literary works where he, in most of his works, prescribed ‘transformation of hearts’ especially in the context of the upper and lower castes, making ‘Untouchability’ a ‘moral’ issue. (Sharma P. 91-92)
Premchand’s *Godan* (1936) is one of the Indian classics that represents peasantry world in Hindi literature. In this novel, Premchand has highlighted the piteous conditions of the Harijans. But this presentation of the untouchables’ life is touched with sympathy and superficiality. He could not give any specific solution of the problems of the Harijans in this novel just like his other literary creations. A critical remark about *Godan* of Harbhajan Singh has been quoted by Pradeep Sharma in his work:

*Godan* has no utopia to look forward to or fall back on. Since there is no system to be saved, the novel beings with a disequilibrium and ends at a disequilibrium. It excites a sense of profound wrong done to humanity. It makes no attempt at papering the cracks or providing a happy ending. In fact, such a piece of literary art goes beyond the text and establishes a living relationship with life. (Sharma P. 96-97)

Since the centuries, untouchables were condemned worse than filthy beasts. In the Middle-Ages the saint-poets had accepted them as human beings. But first time on the large scale these untouchables were accepted as the children of God and highlighted in the mainstream literature under the Gandhian influence. Though there are many limitations of Gandhian ways of accepting untouchables. The Hasrijans themselves had not highlighted their quest for human existence and identity. They were highlighted from the eyes of sympathisers. Thus, the mainstream literature first time had accepted and highlighted the untouchables in their literary works. Though untouchables were given place in mainstream writings, their identity as human beings was not highlighted.
By observing the gradual development of Harijan Movement, under the influence of Gandhian ideology, it is clearly found that, the wretched, inhuman, pitiable conditions of Harijans were highlighted by the mainstream writers in their different literary works, including prose, novels, and poems. These works were in all India languages including English. This literary trend, based on Gandhian ideology, had prepared the future platform for the fast development of Dalit movement in later era under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. It is also visible that Gandhian influence was found even after the independence.

Tagore, the noble laureate in Indian writing in English has highlighted untouchables’ issues and raised their human identity in his different literary works, especially poems and play Chandalika. It cannot be said that he has represented Gandhian ideology on untouchables but he has interpreted untouchables’ issues on the base of his understanding. According to him Untouchable’s issue is the humanitarian issue. He has harshly criticised practice of untouchability and untouchability based evils. He has favoured egalitarian human world through his literary creations. Even in his Geetanjali, the Nobel Prize winner work, he has highlighted the oppressed humanity and their uplift.

Tagore’s poems are unique by his artistic genius. His poems on Harijans are high appealing because of his understanding of untouchable’s issues and their struggle of human identity in the world of rejections everywhere. He was of opinion that sooner or later the era of the Harijans would begin. The prophecy of him is drafted in his poems too. He was a sympathetic towards the untouchables. He had written poetry on contemporary issues. Dalits
were forbidden to enter the temple. Tagore has written a poem *Shunned at the Temple Gates* on the issue of forbidden temple entry for *Harijans*:

> “Shunned at the, Temple gates

> by the pious,

> the outcasts, (1-3, Tagore 98)

The poet has presented sorrow of the untouchables. He has remarked that the offerings of untouchables cannot reach to the God because the Brahmins have imprisoned God in the temple. And the imprisoned God is only for the upper-caste Hindus and not for the untouchables. The poet has used mild satire on Brahmins irrational approaches:

> “I am an–outcast

> Whose offerings cannot reach

> The imprisoned God.” (22-24, Tagore 98)

Tagore has humanistic approach towards the untouchables. He also satirises the orthodox Hindus for the way they worship the God. At the same time he has appreciated the untouchables’ way of worshiping the God. This humanistic belief of Tagore has nicely been presented by him in his poem *The Great Equality*. It was published on August 5th, 1933 in
Harijan. In the poem, Tagore has even considered the orthodox Hindus as an unfortunate people of the country who has lost their humanity and became proud. Tagore opens the poem:

Proud casteman of my unfortunate country!

Throw aside your pride of caste,

Lest on your unwilling head,

Should be heaped the burning insults

That you now shower on other. (1-6, Tagore 100)

The poet has warned the orthodox Hindus that they have to give equal status to the untouchables whose identity of being human has been removed by the orthodox Hindus:

But remember, please do remember:

Someday you shall have to be

The equal of them all in ignominy. (32-34, Tagore 100)

Tagore has sharply criticised the orthodox Hindus for their inhuman attitudes towards the untouchables. He has remarked that even the orthodox Hindus have to face same ignominy which the untouchables have been experiencing since ancient time.
Tagore’s dance drama *Chandalika* (1938) is a short two act play. It exposes the intimate links between dance and dancer on the one hand and on the other hand the process of self awareness of the untouchable woman Prakrati. She understands human identity and equality, after her awareness. The play moves around the Harijan girl Prakrati, a chandal, Ananda, a Buddhist bhikshu (monk) and Prakarti’s mother.

The central character, Prakriti, is the Harijan girl, unaware of herself identity which comes to her when she comes in contact with Ananda, the Budhist bhikshu, who asks her for water to drink. Being a Harijan and ignorant girl, she hesitates because her mere touch is considered as pollution. But her belief is made up side down when Ananda states that no human being is untouchable and she must not feel or call herself untouchable. He also says her not to ‘humiliate yourself, he said, self- humiliation is a sin worse than self-murder.’ (Tagore 2) This statement of Ananda swept away her ignorance and she starts to feel herself as an equal being to others. Thus, Ananda ignites Prakriti’s quest for self awareness and identity.

This meeting with Ananda changed Prakriti thoroughly. Her thoughts become boundary-less that leads her to knowledge of herself and identity. This changed state of self, helps the protagonist to reach to the spiritual comfort. The journey of the untouchable girl from self-ignorance to self-knowledge is depicted in *Chandalika*, very grippingly and appealingly by Rabindranath Tagore.
The character of Chandalika is not the stereo-type female protagonists but dissident. As she defies the accepted norms of the orthodox Indian society and instead represents herself as confident in her choices of life that she herself devises.

Chandalika is not only an intelligent but also holds a powerful control over her decision. She forces to hear her voice of revolution to the deaf ears of the orthodox caste-based Indian society. Thus, she makes her mark on the orthodoxy of the Indian society. As a result she rejects the deeply rooted notion of untouchability of the orthodox Indian society. She even rejects to give respect to the religion which does not respect her. She says ‘I respect him who respects me. A religion that insults is a false religion.’ (Tagore 7)

Rabindranath Tagore has undoubtedly created the great literature. He has also highlighted the issue of untouchability in his literary creations. But his presentation of the untouchable world is limited to show sympathy no different from Gandhi. As an outcome, Tagore’s Chandalika and poems cannot present the hard realities of Harijan which the untouchables were facing every day. Thus, just like the Gandhian ideology, nothing but the compassion and sympathy could be found in the literature of Tagore.

Similarly, in Telugu language the upper-castes Hindu writers had presented the issues of untouchability and caste discrimination. But it was presented under the Gandhian ideology. A Colony of Malas (Malapalli) (1922), a novel by the Telugu upper-caste Hindu writer Unnava Lakshminarayana moves around the central character of Ramadas, the Harijan. The
novel revolves around the *Harijan* colony. Ramadas’s son Venkatadas ‘is presented as a member in Progressive Association.’ (Bharathi 83)

After the introduction of English educational in India, tremendous change came in Indian society. As a result, a good number of Indian writers had practiced their hands to express their thoughts through English. At this initial stage of writing, Indian mainstream writers had not produced good literature in English.

Until Gandhiji came to Indian political scenario, untouchables’ world was hardly presented the literature of mainstream writers. Under the influence of Gandhi, the upper caste literary writers had tried to present the Harijan world with the sympathy and compassion. For the mainstream upper caste writers *Harijans* were the tragic masses. So in their writings, they had presented the untouchables’ world out of pity and sympathy.

Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Rao and others had done a good job by presenting the untouchables’ identity as human beings in their literary creations. They had highlighted the issues of the *Harijan*. They failed to give equal human status to the *Harijan*. The Similar approaches we also find in the regional mainstream writers like Munshi Premchand, Umashankar Joshi and others. They had presented the *Harijan* with Gandhian ideology with no change in existed caste system. Thus, the literature of pre-independence era was an outcome of sympathy and compassion for the untouchables. The mainstream writers had first tried to give human identity and acceptance through the untouchables.
Works Cited


