



EXPLORING NAVARASA IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*

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Abstract: *Untouchable* is a novel published in 1935 by Mulk Raj Anand. The novel examines the caste discrimination experienced by lower castes and the ambivalent attitudes of upper-caste individuals in India. The tale illustrates the challenges encountered by a young boy named Bakha and his family, who are part of a lower caste sweeper society. In the Indian context, individuals encounter a range of emotions. These feelings can be precisely articulated by a theory known as *Navarasa*. The nine distinct *Rasa*, referred to as *Navarasa*, represent the aesthetic sensibilities or emotions of individuals. Bakha encounters a range of emotions, including revulsion, fear, wrath, and occasional moments of joy and optimism, while navigating his challenges as an Untouchable in Indian culture. The narrative intricately incorporates these feelings to underscore the difficulties and challenges encountered by Bakha as a result of his social rank, so enhancing the emotional depth of the novel's themes of caste discrimination and human dignity. This article aims to examine the emotional experiences, or *Rasa*, of the principal characters in the novel. This delineates the concept of *Navarasa* and the caste inequality experienced by the Untouchables in India. This study examines Anand's novel *Untouchable* in conjunction with Bharat Muni's notion of *Navarasa* from the *Natyashastra*.

Index Terms - *Untouchable*, *Navarasa*, Caste Discrimination, Mulk Raj Anand, Emotional Aesthetics

I. INTRODUCTION

Rasa, the fundamental element of emotional experience, is central to Indian aesthetics, enhancing art, literature, and performance with significant emotional depth. Derived from Bharata's *Natyashastra*, *Rasa* refers to the emotional essence perceived by the audience, elicited by the interaction of characters, events, and circumstances. In literature, it surpasses simple storytelling, encouraging readers to engage with the emotional range of the narrative. The nine *Rasa*—*Shringara* (love), *Hasya* (laughter), *Karuna* (compassion), *Raudra* (anger), *Veera* (heroism), *Bhayanka* (fear), *Bhibatsa* (disgust), *Adbhuta* (wonder), and *Shanta* (peace)—provide a thorough framework for examining the emotional essence of literary compositions.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* is a major work in Indian literature, renowned for its evocative depiction of social injustice and human endurance. The tale, set amongst caste-based oppression, chronicles Bakha, a young sweeper, as he traverses the harsh societal frameworks of pre-Independence India. *Untouchable* is renowned not only for its condemnation of the caste system but also for its exploration of the *Navarasa*, encapsulating the myriad emotions that characterise human lives. This research paper examines the expression of *Navarasa* in *Untouchable*, exploring how Anand's narrative elicits compassion (*Karuna*) via Bakha's struggles, provokes anger (*Raudra*) at the injustices he faces, and incorporates moments of joy (*Hasya*) and love (*Shringara*) amid his adversities. Additional *Rasa*, such as *Bhayanka* (fear), *Veera* (heroism), and *Shanta* (peace), are intricately integrated throughout the narrative, providing a comprehensive insight into the novel's emotional and thematic complexity. The study seeks to elucidate the novel's ability to engage readers emotionally while addressing wider societal and human issues through the analysis of these emotional components. This research paper enhances the comprehension of *Untouchable* as a literary work while highlighting the persistent significance of *Rasa* theory in contemporary writing, illustrating its capacity to connect classical aesthetics with modern tales.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Shrivastava and Chmiel focus on the application of *Navarasa* in classical dance forms like *Kathakali* and Bharatanatyam, examining how the nine emotional states influence narratives and performances. While their work establishes the versatility of *Rasa* theory in performance arts, its nuanced application in modern literature, especially in the context of social reform, is not addressed. Patnaik delves into the historical and psychological underpinnings of *Rasa* theory, demonstrating its relevance across artistic expressions ranging from ancient poetry to contemporary literature. However, their focus remains broad, with limited attention to individual texts like *Untouchable*. Similarly, Sinha's comparative analysis of Bharata Muni's *Rasa* theory and Longinus's notion of the sublime underscores the universal emotional resonance of literature, yet does not account for specific instances of *Navarasa* in Indian novels. Ranjan and Tyagi explore the works of Anand and Dalit women writers, examining how their narratives challenge societal injustices like poverty, caste discrimination, and gender oppression. While these analyses provide valuable sociocultural

perspectives, they do not adequately explore the interplay of emotional states as framed by *Rasa* theory. Lastly, Sreejith et al.'s innovative sentiment analysis based on *Rasa* theory highlights its relevance in understanding emotional responses in literature, yet it primarily emphasizes computational methods, leaving literary interpretation largely untouched. The investigation of *Rasa* theory and its implementation across literature, dance, and drama has been a significant area of scholarly inquiry, as evidenced by diverse studies. Scholars such as Sirohi, Pandey, and Sharma analyze Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* for its portrayal of caste-based oppression, untouchability, and the restrictive traits of Indian society. Their work also highlights moments of solace and hope through empathetic characters, though the emotional depth connected to *Navarasa* remains underexplored.

III. ANALYSIS

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* ingeniously incorporates the emotional spectrum of the nine *Rasa* into the narrative, offering a complex depiction of the protagonist, Bakha, and his struggles in a caste-ridden society. Anand adeptly elicits these feelings, not merely to underscore the socio-political reality of untouchability but also to explore the profound psychological and emotional reactions of his characters. The nine *Rasa*—*Shringara*, *Hasya*, *Karuna*, *Raudra*, *Veera*, *Bhayanka*, *Bhibatsa*, *Adbhuta*, and *Shanta*—manifest at different points in the work, constructing a complex emotional fabric that deepens readers' involvement with the narrative.

Following is an examination of Mulk Raj Anand's utilisation of the nine *Rasa* in *Untouchable*, investigating the manifestation of each emotional state in the protagonist's journey and the overarching narrative. The compassion (*Karuna*) for Bakha's suffering and the fury (*Raudra*) elicited by the injustices he faces enrich the novel's themes of oppression, humanism, and societal revolution. Mulk Raj Anand employs *Rasa* theory to present a tale of social injustice while simultaneously exploring the internal emotional landscapes of his characters, by examining these feelings within the novel's setting.

3.1 *Shringara Rasa*

This is the initial *Rasa* presented by Bharata Muni in his *Natyashastra*. This *Rasa* is primarily employed in dance and play to elicit the emotion of love in both the protagonists and the spectator. It is sometimes referred to as *Rasa Raj*. This *Rasa* includes various forms of love, such as romantic love and fraternal love.

In *Untouchable*, the *Shringara Rasa* is elicited between the protagonist Bakha and his sister Sohini. Upon returning home fatigued and famished from her morning duties, Bakha actively seeks water to quench her thirst. Observing the absence of water, her sister Sohini feels compassion for Bakha and resolves to procure water for her. Additionally, we observe the protagonist Bakha's adoration for the British way of life, manifested by his interest with their attire, cleanliness, and discipline. He aspires to lead a life akin to that of the Babus. Bakha's affection for Ramcharan's sister also illustrates the *Shringara Rasa*.

3.2 *Hasya Rasa*

This comprises two categories: *Atmasta* (self-amusement) and *Parasta* (entertaining others). It is the *Rasa* employed to convey joy or mirth. This technique elicits laughing and fosters a sense of joy and amusement, while also alleviating the audience's worries and tension.

The novel *Untouchable* evokes *Hasya Rasa* through little happenings. Pandit Kalinathi resolves to assist the lower-class individuals in drawing water from the well, believing that this endeavour may alleviate his constipation issue. The readers encounter the elicitation of *Hasya Rasa* for a brief duration. An additional occurrence in which remnants of *Hasya Rasa* can be observed is the hockey match. Bakha presents his hockey stick to his pal Chota, demonstrating how the boys engage in the game before to the ensuing conflict.

3.3 *Karuna Rasa*

Karuna generally emerges following the parting from a cherished individual or any traumatic occurrence in life. This *Rasa* is explicitly associated with the sentiments of compassion, sympathy, and pity. This attitude in Indian art forms aims to provoke a deep emotional response from the viewer.

The novel *Untouchable* elicits *Karuna Rasa* in multiple means. The absence of Bakha's mother evokes this *Rasa* in Bakha and his siblings. As Bakha leisurely wandered through the bazaar with jalebis in hand, he accidentally collided with a high-caste Hindu, provoking a vehement response towards him. The high-caste Hindu proceeded to deride Bakha, proclaiming "Polluted, polluted," and gradually a substantial crowd gathered, with everybody participating in the vitriol. The man hit Bakha, causing his turban to fall off and his jalebis to scatter on the ground. This is merely another example of the representation of *Karuna Rasa*.

3.4 *Veera Rasa*

Veera Rasa is invoked upon attaining triumph in battle. *Veera Rasa*, known as the *Rasa* of heroism, is one of the nine *Rasa* in ancient Indian aesthetics, particularly in Indian performing arts such as drama, dance, and literature. It often includes the portrayal of a hero's journey, valiant deeds, and the triumph of righteousness.

Despite the dehumanising treatment he endures, Bakha seeks to elevate his social status. His determination to enhance his life typifies *Veera Rasa*. Another occurrence of *Veera Rasa* being summoned by Bakha transpires during a hockey match when a fight ensues between the two teams, leading to the exchange of stones. A stone hit Bura Babu's younger son, resulting in bleeding. Out of respect, he opted to aid him by conveying him to Bura Babu's residence, although knowing that his presence could disrupt others present. Upon entering the house, Bura Babu's wife promptly chastised him for violating the sanctity of her home. As a result, despite Bakha's evident compassion and courage, he encounters only derision and hostility.

3.5 *Bhayanaka Rasa*

This *Rasa* embodies the quintessence of terror, dread, or horror. It aims to provoke suspense, anxiety, and tension in the spectator. This *Rasa* is often depicted through extreme situations marked by danger, uncertainty, and threatening circumstances.

The invocation of *Bhayanaka Rasa* transpires during the temple episode in the novel *Untouchable*. While Sohini was sanitising the lavatory of Pandit Kalinath's residence, he perpetrated a sexual assault by grabbing her breasts. This situation provokes fury in Sohini, leading her to try to free herself from it. Driven by curiosity, Bakha ascended many stairs to observe the temple rituals, causing the devotees to disperse in all directions. A handful of them began to denigrate Bakha. Pandit Kalinath arrived, saying, "Contaminated!" "Polluted!" Bakha noted that his sister stood behind the boisterous priest. Upon discovering the truth from Sohini, he became enraged and determined to reprimand Pandit, despite his absence.

3.6 *Adbhuta Rasa*

This is one of the nine essential *Rasa* in ancient Indian aesthetics, particularly within Indian performing arts such as drama, dance, and literature. The term *Adbhuta* signifies wonder or awe, and this *Rasa* is characterised by the sensation of astonishment or amazement. *Adbhuta Rasa* evokes feelings of astonishment, bewilderment, and curiosity. It often arises from the encounter with something extraordinary, remarkable, or unprecedented.

Bakha is enthralled by modern advancements and British culture. His amazement and curiosity at occurrences such as the flush toilet, European clothing, and the lifestyle of British soldiers exhibit *Adbhuta Rasa*. These items and practices seem extraordinary and astonishing to him, representing a domain distinctly separate from his own. Upon discovering Mahatma Gandhi's endeavours for the upliftment of Untouchables, Bakha experiences a deep sense of awe and optimism. Bakha is astounded that a figure as influential and revered as Gandhi could champion the cause of untouchability, leading him to ponder the potential for transformation within the entrenched social hierarchy he has always experienced. The *Adbhuta Rasa* highlights the contrast between Bakha's repressive circumstances and the unforeseen opportunities he encounters, leading him to reflect on the possibility of reform in his individual life and the wider community.

3.7 *Raudra Rasa*

This *Rasa* embodies intense anger, fury, or wrath. It is characterised by intense and confrontational emotional states, often including conflict. The term *Raudra* signifies fierce or angry, and this *Rasa* is associated with the emotions of rage or hatred.

In the narrative, Bakha reflects on the injustices of his life as an Untouchable. His anger intensifies as he contemplates the abuses he and others face daily, including being forced to clean latrines, enduring verbal abuse, and experiencing social ostracism. This seething anger encapsulates *Raudra Rasa*, revealing Bakha's frustration with the caste system and the confining conditions of his existence. The behaviour of his father Lakha towards him and his siblings signifies the advent of *Raudra Rasa* in Bakha. The incident of Sohini's molestation elicits both *Raudra Rasa* and *Bhayanaka Rasa*. In the tale, Bakha's anger is aimed not only at specific events but also at the systemic framework that perpetuates these injustices. His realisation that his entire tribe is condemned to a life of degradation and suffering amplifies his rage. This underlying hostility towards cultural norms that sustain untouchability illustrates *Raudra Rasa*.

3.8 *Bibhatsa Rasa*

The term *Bibhatsa* signifies disgust or revulsion, characterised by the feeling of fear or aversion provoked by something unpleasant, repulsive, or terrifying. *Bibhatsa Rasa* evokes feelings of aversion, distaste, or repulsion. It is often linked to events or depictions that are repugnant or morally troubling.

The manifestation of this *Rasa* is seen in the chapatti tale in the text. Lakha directs Bakha to procure sustenance by begging. Bakha navigates the coppersmith road in search of nourishment and, feeling weary in the afternoon, thereafter naps on the steps of a high-caste Hindu dwelling. The high-caste Hindu woman shouts upon observing Bakha lying in front of her residence and commences to mock her. Concurrently, a sadhu baba was navigating the vicinity, and she offered both sustenance and respect to him; hence, an insignificant sadhu garners far more attention than Bakha. She directs Bakha to cleanse her courtyard and then discards some bread crumbs onto the street, which land in the dust. He gathers them and swiftly returns to his residence. Furthermore, it was noted that while the family dined, Bakha abstained from eating the soggy slices of bread he had requested.

3.9 *Shanta Rasa*

The name *Shanta* signifies peaceful or tranquil, and thus *Rasa* embodies a state of tranquilly, serenity, and satisfaction. It denotes serenity, tranquilly, and internal equilibrium. It evokes a sense of tranquilly and contentment, often associated with spiritual enlightenment or profound inner peace.

Bakha reflects on the splendour of nature in an environment distant from the town's commotion. These occasions afford him ephemeral consolation and tranquilly. The natural environment contrasts with his generally dehumanising life. In these cases, *Shanta Rasa* emerges when Bakha momentarily transcends his social experience and connects with a more serene and universal essence. The influence of Gandhian philosophy at the narrative's climax implies potential for societal development and, by extension, future tranquilly. While this may not accurately represent *Shanta Rasa*, it implies a desire for serenity and tranquilly in a reformed society, devoid of untouchability and caste discrimination.

IV. CONCLUSION

Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* critically explores the social and psychological ramifications of untouchability in colonial India. The novel utilises the concept of *Navarasa* from classical Indian aesthetics to enrich its narrative and amplify its emotional

resonance. The incorporation of *Rasa* in the narrative enhances thematic complexity and facilitates a nuanced portrayal of the protagonist, Bakha, with the societal obstacles he faces. The use of *Navarasa* in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* creates a deep spectrum of emotional experiences that heighten the reader's engagement with the narrative. By blending several *Rasa*, Anand not only depicts the harsh realities of untouchability but also explores the emotional complexities of his characters.

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