

Jane eyre and untouchable comparative essay



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Narrative techniques are a powerful tool that authors use to impart their themes and messages on their audience. *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, is the story of Jane Eyre, a girl growing up in 19th century England, and her battle to find a balance between passion and reason. *Untouchable*, by Mulk Raj Anand, is the story of a day in the life of Bakha, a lower caste teenager in the British Raj who is just beginning to realize the inescapability of his social position. Both Brontë and Anand use narrative techniques to reveal progression in their stories and characters, but for very different reasons. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë uses narrative techniques to reveal Jane's progression towards a balance between passion and reason and a resolute identity and independence. In *Untouchable*, Anand uses narrative techniques to reveal the helplessness and inescapability of Bakha's position, thus showing the importance for others to advocate for those who cannot stand up for themselves. While their purposes differ, and thus some of their use of narrative techniques, there are also similarities in their techniques that reveal the skill of both authors in revealing purpose through narrative technique.

Initially, in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë uses narrative techniques to show Jane's struggle to deal with her uncontrollable passion. Brontë's use of first person allows an intimate access into Jane's emotions, however, because Jane is narrating from the present about the past, her hindsight analysis allows us to see how overcome with passion she truly was, and that she needed to develop a balance between this passion, and reason. Just as this intense emotion can be seen at Gateshead, the same intensity can be seen at Lowood Institution, where Jane is inundated with reason, and all of her

emotions are either subdued or removed from her daily life. First person narration allows us to understand Jane's inner working as she becomes increasingly reasonable, but narrator Jane's ability to critique this mindset full of reason and imbalance reveals the development Jane needs to take to reach independence and identity. Furthermore, narrator Jane also addresses the reader directly, with phrases such as " dear reader," to get the reader to further sympathize with her, and understand her struggle. This occurs when Mrs. Reed calls her a liar, and Jane pleads with the reader to understand how much she wanted to explode at Mrs. Reed with all of her fury, but ultimately kept it in. By doing this, her struggle with controlling her passion is made evident, as the reader is drawn to understand how overcome with emotion Jane is at Gateshead. To the same extent, she uses rhetorical questions to gain sympathy from the reader, as she does in the same scene, and by doing so, forces the reader to think the same things narrator Jane thinks, and analyze just as narrator Jane does. This cements the early stages of Jane's development in the reader's head, by getting them to analyze early Jane's state of imbalance, as the reader is taken through her emotional, perplexing journey along with her. Addresses to the reader are more frequent at Lowood, as she directly addresses the reader, asking them to create a picture of Miss Temple based on her description. This forces the reader to put more attention on visualizing a character than normal, and because the reader creates this image based on Jane's favorable description of Miss Temple, the reader then adopts her positive judgments, thus truly giving the reader Jane's perspective. Additionally, she addresses the reader to tell them her growing friendship with Helen Burns, even though she says that feeling these emotions may be " defective." Through this narration, Brontë shows

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the extremes of emotion or reason that Jane experiences initially in the novel.

Initially, in *Untouchable*, Anand uses narrative techniques to reveal the universality of the caste system, as well as begin to force the reader to sympathize with untouchables. Unlike Brontë, Anand uses third person omniscient, getting in multiple character's heads, but mostly sticking with Bakha's. Third person narration allows for a bigger picture analysis of the plight of untouchables, but, because of the bigger picture, it allows the reader to understand just how many individuals the caste system destroys, as Bakha is but an example for millions of others like him. Because *Untouchable* is a book about a group of people, third person is more appropriate, while *Jane Eyre* is a book about one character's development, thus first person is more appropriate. Furthermore, because he uses third person, Anand is able to enter other characters, such as Sohini, and thus is able to show how expansive this degrading system is, and that no untouchable can escape it, no matter who they are. In addition, including the story of Sohini compounds the plight of untouchables with the plight of women, showing the insufferable way of life female untouchables must live, drawing even more sympathy with the reader. Lastly, through his use of first person, he is able to show how naïve Bakha is, unable to sense the degradation, at least initially, that his job entails. He is often degraded and condescended towards, but never is able to understand the implications of this, again getting sympathy from the reader for his inability to realize the intense shame he has to live through everyday. However, this naivety does not last forever.

As Jane's development progresses and she enters the adult world, she struggles to deal with choices that would allow her to succumb to total reason or total passion. While at Thornfield, she addresses the reader numerous times, calling the reader "romantic" in an exclamatory remark, and frequently when she deliberates over dramas and conflicts in her head with Mr. Rochester, whether about Miss Ingram, or her impending marriage with Mr. Rochester. Through this, the reader is led to understand her struggle to resist totally succumbing to her passions, and how emotional Mr. Rochester and Thornfield has made her. Also, her questioning, with the reader, of her path moving forward shows the hindsight of narrator Jane, as she hints that marrying Rochester and succumbing to her emotions at this point would not allow Jane to reach a true identity or independence. Furthermore, with the reader drawn in on every feeling or emotion, and Jane falling deeply in love, the goings on of Jane's mind become quite romantic and childish, and almost comical, with the narrator trying to show how intense and extreme her emotion is at this moment, almost critiquing it, and urging the reader to see that Jane needs more reason and balance in her life. The same, but reverse, can be seen at Moor's head, where Jane pleads with the reader to understand her internal dilemmas with choosing St John, and succumbing to reason. Narrator Jane, just as before, narrates the past in such an extremely reasonable way to highlight how imbalanced Jane is, again revealing Jane's need to find a balance between passion and reason. Rhetorical questions again play a role at this stage in Jane's development because the reader gets to experience Jane's doubts and struggles between her passion and reason first hand, making this a very successful technique that allows for a unique empathy with Jane. Lastly, the first person narration

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and judgment of women in each of these locations also show some development in Jane. When given access to Jane's judgments of Miss Ingram, they appear quite jealous and negative, as the reader understands she has feelings for Rochester and feels inferior to Ingram. However, when observing Miss Rosamund Oliver, she imparts no such jealousy, a combination of her growing self worth and identity, as well as the notion that she does not have an emotional connection with St. John, or maybe she would feel a similar jealousy of that to Miss Ingram. Thus, through narration techniques, Brontë again reveals an imbalance in Jane between passion and reason, and her need to find this balance in order for her to fully progress and gain an identity.

As Bakha's development progresses, Anand's narration techniques reveal his increasing awareness of his social position, but also his inability to do anything about it. After Bakha is run into by a high-caste, and gets chastised and shamed, he repeats, and even shouts, the word "untouchable," repeating the fact that he, indeed, is an untouchable, an undesirable in Hindu society. Anand uses this repetition to highlight Bakha's realization that he is the lowest of the low, and as long as he is an untouchable, he will be forced to take this shame every day of his life. Bakha's naivety and innocence over his social position has been brutally shattered, and Anand uses this repetition to further this. Additionally, similar to Jane Eyre, when Bakha is at the temple and witnessing his sister being assaulted and abused, a limited narration is used, to get one character's perspective on events happening outside of their own experience. Anand here, despite already showing he has no issue switching perspective, stays with Bakha's

perspective, even though it is Sohini that is enduring a traumatic experience. He does this to show Bakha's reaction, which is full of a ruthless anger and hatred. These are new emotions for Bakha, and because the reader is taken through this indirect experience in Bakha's head, the impact of this event on Bakha and his development becomes apparent. His hatred towards the caste system is growing as the injustices and shames of his life become clearer to him. Brontë uses this technique in the same way, though through first person, to show a clear progression in Jane's mind and development, just as Anand does here with Bakha. However, towards the end of this second progression in Bakha's development, Anand employs yet another narration/perspective shift. As Bakha comes home dejected and complains to his father about the injustices he has had to endure, his father criticizes him and urges him to accept his place. Though tough and cruel outwardly, Anand goes inside Lakha's head, and reveals that Bakha's father feels a pity for him, and seems to remember having some of the same feelings Bakha has. Through this, not only does the reader gain a sense of empathy and appreciation for Lakha, but Anand also shows the generational struggle of the caste system, once again highlighting its universality and seemingly hopeless inescapability. This goes to Anand's greater purpose for revealing Bakha's progression: to show that people need to be a voice for those who suffer extreme injustice and have no voice of their own.

Brontë's narrative techniques at the end of Jane Eyre show Jane's full progression and development of an identity, through a balance between passion and reason. When Jane returns to Rochester, she addresses the reader quite infrequently, and does so only to maintain attention, whereas

previously, she did so to allow the reader access to her emotions. Jane has reached her identity and found a balance, and thus does not need or ask for sympathy from the reader any longer. Furthermore, narrator Jane has now progressed into the Jane of the story, and rhetorical questions become less prominent, because, again, Jane does not require the reader's sympathy, as she is completely independent and resolute in her identity. Additionally, the narration of the story is not as critical or analytical of Jane's actions in the final scenes, because Jane no longer questions or worries about her actions or choices, as she has found a true balance between passion and reason, and found a way to live with her passions for Rochester, but do so on an even playing field, not dependent on him, and able to live her own independent life. Lastly, Brontë chooses to tell the story of Jane throughout her entire life, where narrator Jane chooses important events in her life that drive her progression and tell the full story of her development. This gives the reader an idea of what was important to Jane, and if it is included in the story, then the event must be significant to her development, thus primes the reader to notice changes in Jane. Thus, narration techniques, which have remained constant throughout, take the reader on Jane's physical and emotional journey, and reveal the resolute identity, independence, and balance that Jane comes to at the end of the novel.

Anand's narration techniques at the end of his novel show Bakha's progression and development; his dissatisfaction with the caste system, but also his inability to understand the complexities of his plight, thus highlighting the need for stories such as Anand's that speak for those who cannot. The major technique that Anand uses in his finale, when Bakha

listens to Gandhi's speech and discussion from those who witnessed it, is a transition to almost a third person limited narration. The reader experiences both Gandhi's speech and the following discussions through Bakha's eyes, both with his interpretation, as well as his inability to understand what is being said. During Gandhi's speech, Bakha is unable to connect or really understand any of it, except for the parts that address untouchables, and even then, when Gandhi is critical of untouchables, Bakha is hurt and critical in response. Thus, the reader experiences Gandhi's speech through Bakha's perspective, and understands his pain, but more so, his ultimate inability to escape his social class, as he lacks the understanding to realize he truly has no power to ascend from his low social class. This is furthered by the discussions he overhears later, where a writer and a high caste debate over the political and economic future of India. Almost the entire discussion is way over Bakha's head, and the only part he understands is the part that addresses injustice. Bakha lacks the education to understand the complexity of India's social issues, and thus will never have the power to escape his social class, or even understand how it is done. This omniscient judgment by Anand and his ability to look at the grand scheme is similar to narrator Jane's ability to look at the bigger picture and critique the Jane of the story. Lastly, different from Jane Eyre, Anand chooses to write *Untouchable* only recounting one day in Bakha's life. This technique highlights the cyclical nature of Bakha's day and the oppression and shame he must endure, empowering the reader to take a stand due to the immense amount of injustice Bakha is forced to suffer in only a single day. By highlighting Bakha's powerlessness, and also his unfounded, sad hope, Anand is showing

the necessity for other, educated men to advocate for the powerless untouchables, and use their social position to influence change.

Both Charlotte Brontë and Mulk Raj Anand use narrative techniques to further their purposes and reveal progression in their characters. The techniques they use are similar in some ways and different in other ways, but both are effective in their respective purposes. Brontë uses her narration techniques to reveal Jane's imbalance between passion and reason, and her need to find this balance in order to progress and develop her own resolute identity. Anand uses his narration techniques to reveal Bakha's loss of naivety and recognition of his social class; by highlighting his powerlessness to change his position, Anand shows the importance of speaking for all of the nameless untouchables who cannot. Both authors use their narrative techniques appropriately and skillfully, and to great effect.