

A Pathetic Story of Untouchable: A Study of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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Abstract

This study aims at the social evil untouchability which is highlighted in the Novel *Untouchable* written by MulkRaj Anand. It deals with the conditions of downtrodden people. We can relate the novel to the present condition of downtrodden people too. We also come across the plight of backward people in the study with the proper solutions given by Dr. Anand to the prevailing social evil of the society 'Untouchability'. This study not only highlights the social evil untouchability through the novel, *Untouchability* but also the techniques and the type of narration that are used by MulkRaj Anand are also discussed with abundant humor and satire.

Keywords: Untouchability, a study, society.

Introduction to the Dr. Mulka Raj Anand

Mulk Raj Anand (12 December 1905 – 28 September 2004) was an Indian writer in English, notable for his depiction of the lives of the poorer castes in traditional Indian society. One of the pioneers of Anglo-Indian fiction. He together with R. K. Narayan, Ahmad Ali and Raja Rao, was one of the first India-based writers in English to gain an international readership. Anand is admired for his novels and short stories, which have acquired the status of classics of modern Indian English literature. They are noted for their perceptive insight into the lives of the oppressed and for their analysis of impoverishment, exploitation and misfortune.

Dr. Anand was Born in Peshawar. Anand studied at Khalsa College, Amritsar, graduating with honors in 1924 before moving to England. While working in a restaurant to support him, he attended University College London as an undergraduate and later studied at Cambridge University, earning a Ph.D. in Philosophy in 1929 with a dissertation on Bertrand Russell and the English empiricists. During this time, he forged friendships with members of the Bloomsbury Group. He also spent time in Geneva, lecturing at the League of Nation's International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.

Mulk Raj Anand, the novelist, short story writer, essayist, art critic, lecturer and "bogus professor" as he calls

himself. He is the son of the traditional copper Smith who left his ancestors profession and works as a Regimental head clerk in the British Indian Army. As his father's regiment was transferred from place to place, he moved with him and acquired new experiences about many segments of Indian and European society. He had an intimate knowledge of the life of officers and soldiers in barracks. He had known and seen the numerous facts of rural life of Punjab and North West Frontier Provinces of those days. He returned to India in 1932 and after having a great time in Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram he again sailed back to England in 1933.

Mulk Raj Anand's career was set up by a family tragedy arising from the rigidity of India's caste system. His first prose about the suicide of an aunt excommunicated by her family for sharing food with a Muslim woman. And his first novel was "*Untouchable*" published in 1935. This novel is about a boy called Bakha who spent his whole day as a toilet cleaner because of his caste. And it was the movement of dividing London and India during 1930's and 1940's. *Untouchable* in (1935), *Coolie* in (1936), *Two leaves and a bud* in (1937), *The Village* in (1939), *Coolie* in (1936), *The Big Heart* in (1945), *The Road* in (1961), *The lost Child* in (1934), *Between the years and laughter* in (1934), *Indian Fairy tales* in (1946), *More Indian Fairy tales* in (1961), *The Power of Darkness* in (1959) are his famous writings.

The Conditions of the Downtrodden in the Past

Mulkraj Anand explains about the sufferings of poor and downtrodden people in his Novel *Untouchable*. He started his career as a Novelist and his first Novel was *Untouchable*, which had the deep influence of Gandhi. One of the sayings that Gandhi observes about Untouchability was "In battling against untouchability, and in dedicating myself to that battle, I have no less an ambition than to see a full regeneration of humanity"

This novel explains the problems in a real way, so that an average reader might be able to understand his novel. It depicts the sad and pathetic life of outcast people. They were not allowed into temples, hospitals, schools, playgrounds. And ladies were not allowed to work outside; they were given less preference.

In this novel Bakha was the important character, he was a protagonist in this Novel. He was a young man of 18 years old; his father was Lakha who works as a junior officer of all the Sweepers in the town. Bakha was an intelligent boy and he was sore at not being educated. When he was a child, he wanted to go to school but the doors of the schools were closed for the untouchables. It revolves around the eradication of the Caste system. It tells about a day in Bakha's life, he was a simple boy and came from the low caste who was treated as the Untouchable. He was fearless and Frank was full of self-respect. Bakha cleans and maintains neatness. And he should clean streets and bathrooms of High Caste people, he experiences a lot of abuse from many other high caste people. And that was the time where out caste people were not allowed in Temples, Functions, Schools, Hospitals, Higher Caste Areas, they lived in the outskirts of the village.

Not only Bakha but also it was the daily situations of outcast people and their problems. They are prohibited from the main colonies of the village. They should come inside the village to clean the roads, latrines and courtyards. Firstly, we have to see the effects of Untouchability. It leads to Social Discrimination. It damages the Economy. It cannot support for the development of equality. This Untouchability has brought down the opinion on Indians in the eyes of the Foreigners.

Out caste people used to live in mud walled houses in two rows. Leather workers, washerman, Barbers, Grass cutters, Sweepers, Cleaners These Were regarded as the out caste people and these Were suppressed by the other Hindu caste. Touching a Sweeper would make a Hindu as Untouchable. Higher caste people used to call them Posh. "Sweeper is coming." Bakha was not only scolded by Hindu merchants, he was slapped too. Gandhi expressed his opinion as My fight against untouchability is a fight against the impure in humanity.

The High Caste people don't show any sympathy on the out-caste people but Mohammadan shows concern towards Bakha. And Muslims and Sahibs don't mind touching Bakha. Not only Bakha faced this untouchability. Every outcast person witnessed the same action which was done to Bakha. The social conditions were very terrible at that time, through the character of Bakha Mulk Raj Anand was explaining about the problem of Casteism. They were not only weak in social conditions but also, they were weak economically and politically. They were suppressed by the other Hindu caste people. In this Novel, he tries to solve the social problems and caste system. He listens to the speech of Mahatma Gandhi. He presents three answers at the end. But however, they were treated like hell. In this Novel he expressed his pain.

Causes of Untouchability

There are three mainly causes of Untouchability. They are Racial Causes, Religious Causes, Social Causes are three main causes of untouchability.

Racial Causes: Racial Causes are the most important aspect. It is the main seed of Untouchability. When Aryans conquered India, a portion of Indigenous conquered population was incorporated into Aryans. These backward populations are regarded as Untouchables. For example: - In Assam the people of Naga tribe are prohibited because of ornaments which are made of Ivory are used by them. That is restricted due to racial differences.

Religious Causes: These religious Causes include customs, traditions, beliefs. Customs are given more importance to purity and dignity. As a result of these customs beliefs that we engaged in low occupations. So, people are not considered as Touchable. Due to their occupations and impure professions, they are considered as the Untouchable.

Social Causes: The social conditions explain about the low caste people. They were not given importance to any of the incidents that are happening around them. They were not allowed into Temples, Functions, Schools, Hospitals. And they used to draw water from the common wells.

The present conditions of downtrodden people

According to Indian constitution, the caste system was abolished in 1950. The practice of Untouchability. According to this act, A person cannot be treated by reason of birth into a particular caste. "I'm a humanist. I believe all humans should have equal rights to live, express, flourish, love and dissent, irrespective of their gender, caste, class, socio-economic strata, disabilities, political stance, religion or faith." These wonderful words said by Sayani Gupta. Even at present we can see Casteism. In every field we can observe it but compared to past the present society witnessed some relaxation in caste restrictions. However, we cannot say that social evils like the caste system were eradicated totally but we hope that time will come where the citizens of our country can earn an equal livelihood.

Dalits are the Lower caste in India. These were known as scheduled castes. With the introduction of scheduled caste and scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989, the practice of caste system became ill legal in India. Present They are coming out and getting education and given equal importance. Today 16% of the population is still struggling for social equality. These have experienced a bit of progress in their lives and equal position in Indian society. Dalits were given reservations to pass the government examinations and these people are entering into every field and proving themselves, with the

Government also supporting these backward classes. There is no caste in blood - by Edwin Arnold.

Suggestions for the removal of Untouchability. Promoting education facilities for the low caste people. Improvement of Economic factors. The Untouchables should be given importance in Agriculture and Cottage industries equally with the High Caste people Inter-caste marriages should be encouraged. All are given equal importance and should live like brothers and sisters according to our Indian constitution. After many struggles we are living in a society where Untouchability has been reduced but still a lot of people are facing Caste problems at present too. but I hope it should not be in the constitution but it should be in the minds of people.

Bakha, a young boy of 18 years old, was the son of Lakha, the junior officer of all sweepers in the town and cantonment. He was in charge of three rows of public latrines. Bakha had been working in the barracks of British Regiment for some years. English men treated him very well and they understood his situation and family background. So Bakha was happy with the treatment of English men. He started imitating the manners of English men. Not only Bakha but Chota, the leather worker's son and Ramcharan, washerman's son also imitated the Englishmen. They both were his friends. He was deeply impressed by the styles of and ways of Englishmen because while he was working in the barracks, he obtained the ways from the Englishmen.

He went to British Regimental barracks for the first time with his uncle. There he observed every moment of soldiers. He wanted to become an Englishman. A soldier presented him with a trouser to Bakha and a Hindu sepoy gave him a pair of boots. And he purchased some other items from the shop in the town. Since his childhood he avoided uniforms. In that shop he saw caps, knives, forks, buttons, old books and many other items. After a long time, he saw those items with greedy eyes but he did not have the courage to ask the prices. He had no money to buy those items. But he returned home with a broken heart because he had dreamt of himself looking like a Sahib in a good uniform.

He got some money at the British Barracks. With that money should be given to his father, and he couldn't buy all the things that he wanted. He had ten rupees which was collected from cleaning latrines and also, he had few annas left over for his enjoyment of Cigarettes. His friends Chota and Ramcharan cut jokes on him and called "Pilpali Sahib." Bakha already knew that there was nothing "English" in his life because of his poverty and also he was

an out caste. He had so much fascination for the Englishmen.

The nights were very terrible. He was suffering from a cold and it was very uncomfortable for him. His eyes became red due to the heavy cold. But his father did not care about Bakha's health, he criticizes him now and then. In the early morning his father shouted loudly and woke up Bakha and also scolded him calling "Illegally begotten." He recalled the morning after his mother's death. His mother used to be very close to Bakha. And she took care of his health while going to do his work. She used to give me a strong cup of tea. All things were remembered by Bakha. He was not satisfied with his life and there is no one to understand his problems and family situations are not good. He became physically very weak due to heavy work in the courtyard. He is a real and full-blooded sweeper boy with full attitude and strength. Bakha's mind is a battlefield of conflicting emotions.

Mulk Raj Anand was a great pioneer in portraying the problems of downtrodden. His characters can be in two groups, those who are the victims of social injustice secondly; we can see upholders of our caste. They are Priests, Landlords and Moneylenders. The first two characters are controlled by emotions. They are Bakha and Sohini. And women play a minor role in his novels. But he gives respect and responsibility to women characters even though their role was small. The Sweeper is worse than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free in some situations. But the sweeper's job is the regular duty, he cannot escape from that throughout his life. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them.

Realism in *Untouchable*: The very first novel of Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, is full of vivid realism. This agony of untouchables is brought out to light because of the terrible behavior of high caste people with sweepers, who clean their dust. Cleaning of latrines is not a very interesting topic for literature. Because a writer has the freedom to express his opinions and feelings on anything which he wants. So many subjects are there to write but, Dr. Mulk Raj Anand chooses this and to reveal the hypocrisy of High Caste People. He beautifully depicts everything about the outcasts who work Latrines, dirt, poverty, darkness in their lives. This *Untouchable* is a faithful account of an outcast as they have mirrored themselves in the novelist's mind.

A man they have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for that day. No wonder that dirt not only touches "As one of Mr. Anand's characters says, "They think we are dirty because we clean their dust." The condition of sweeper is very terrible in this society. They

were not given importance. When he touches his body but also his soul." Dr. Anand had personally observed the sufferings and terrible lives of sweepers in cantonments. He had played with the children of the sweepers attached to an Indian regiment before writing his novel. He did not have any "pollution complex".

The outcasts live in the outskirts of the town. Bulashah town, and the cantonment. The leather workers, washermen, barbers, the water carriers, and grass cutters used to live on the outskirts. There is no drainage system and no fresh water system and the colony has been spoiled by dirt. Bakha lives in that terrible area with his family. He represents the sweepers community. His day is packed with cleaning roads and latrines. He is not satisfied with his life; his heart became heavy with his problems. They were not allowed to draw water from the well. Because the high caste people think it to be polluted.

Bakha has a great desire to go to school and study well but his father refused his wish because it is only for Babu's children. The high caste won't allow their children to play or to touch the out-caste Children. Teachers too were unwilling to teach the out-caste Children. The high caste people were very cruel towards out caste people and suffered them with the pollution complex. The shopkeeper washed the coins which were given by Bakha and threw jilebis on his face. They were wrapped in dirty paper. The high caste one's keep themselves away even from the shadow of an untouchable. They had to announce their coming on the streets to enable the caste man to keep off their shadows. If they failed to announce their arrival they were mercilessly beaten and abused. They were prohibited into temples. They could not see the image of the god.

Out caste people were poor. They could not even afford money to buy anything in the house. They could not even buy medicines, hunger and disease are their friends. Anand revealed their miseries and sufferings of untouchables fairly and frankly they are the real experiences of him. He visually observed and watched the lives of people in the barracks. He does not merely state the problem of untouchability but also provides its solution. The first solution is that of Colonel Hutchinson who belongs to Christian Missionary. He talks about Christ and his sacrifices. And all are equal before God. Our God doesn't have any caste feelings-rich and poor differences. The second solution is the Gandhian solution of the problem of Untouchability. He preached the gospel of the equality of man and practiced it in his own life. The third solution is to put into the mouth of a modernist poet. The introduction of the flush system made an end to the evil of untouchability.

In Untouchability Anand also brings to light the impact of western civilization of Indian towns. The young men like Bakha were fascinated by Western styles of dress and living. They aped their British rulers. Bakha, the sweeper boy, took a fancy for the western dress and manners, got the manners of natives and tried to follow their fashion. He smoked Red Lamp cigarettes, sipped his tea hot without blowing it cold, and covered himself with a blanket as the Sahibs did playing hockey. His friends nicknamed him Pilpali Sahib.

Plot Construction in *Untouchable*: The plot of *Untouchable* is well planned. It has a successful end, it is remarkable for three incidents called Time, Place and Action. It describes a day in Bakha's life with realistic incidents. It takes place in Bulashah a cantonment town. All incidents are interlinked with each other. The novel's purpose is to draw the reader's attention to the miserable conditions of untouchables. The action takes place in a day and takes place in a small area. But the book closes with three solutions. He not only described the problems of outcastes but also, he gave three solutions. This is divided into three stages. The first stage starts with a pleasant morning in autumn. He got up and went to his daily cleaning work. After completion of work, he returned to his house.

He did not find even a drop of water to drink; his sister Sohini went to the well where we saw the incident that happened. The episode is closely connected with the main plot and reveals the novelist's purpose. That is the realistic exposition of the sad plight of untouchables. In Spite of his father's abuse and his rudeness towards his son. The fatigue of his morning task. He usually Went to his work; he was walking in the marketplace and he saw jilebis and bought them. He is enjoying his jilebis and walking on the road. Unexpectedly he touches a high caste man and he was shouted at for touching him. And he was abused in the marketplace.

In the second stage, he came to know about Kalinanth who accused her of Sohini. He became very sad after hearing about his sister's problem. And he went to coppersmith's lane. A High Caste woman threw bread from the roof of her house as if he were a dog. Bakha returned to his home and shared that terrible situation with his father. His father says that, "They think we are dirty because we clean their dirt". Their family is ready to eat the bread which Bakha bought. Bakha couldn't eat it because it was so wet. He went to play hockey there and was insulted by Babu's wife whose younger son was seriously wounded. Bakha reached home quite late in the evening, his father received him angrily. Heartbroken Bakha leaves his home

and walks towards the open place. The third stage deals with the solution of the problem of Untouchability.

Bakha meets Colonel Hutchinson who belongs to Christian Missionary, who tells Bakha that faith in Christ would make an end to untouchability. He comes to know that all men are equal before God irrespective of their caste, colour and creed. And the second solution was offered by Mahatma Gandhi. He says that all Indians are equal. He says that, "In order to restrict themselves they have to purify themselves." They have to get rid of evil habits like drinking liquor and eating Carrion. They should now cease to accept leaving from the plates of High Caste People. The third solution was put into the mouth of a modernist poet. It is very convincing. No god is needed to rescue the untouchables. The flush system and main drainage system were introduced throughout India. The closing section of the book is too valuable. Because they faced many insults, problems, accusations from the high caste people. It is a necessary climax, and has a triple effect. Bakha returns to his father and his wretched bed, thinking now of the Mahatma now of the Machine. "His Indian day is over and the next day will be like it. But on the surface of the earth, if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand." By E.MForster.

Humor and Satire in *Untouchable*: In Anand's novel, humor is simple. He does not mock the poor and the downtrodden. He treats them with sympathy and understanding. There are many incidents of bath humor and Satire in the *Untouchable*. In the very beginning of the novel, he was fascinated by Tommies. Puts on his clothes which he has begged from Tommies the figure of the Sweeper boy, Bakha taught that, I will look like a Sahib. And I shall walk like them and Chota as my companion. This is one of the humorous situations because he doesn't have proper costumes that's why it created humor.

He goes to Ramcharan's house to see his sister's marriage. Her childhood image dances before his mind's eye and he recollects those days when she used to play with him. The childhood days are full of humor. "She looked like a juggler's little monkey." Ramcharan's little sister was made to act the wife character because she wore a skirt. Bakha was chosen to play the husband role because he was wearing the gold designed cap. The rest of the boys are the relatives at the marriage party. This is one of the humorous incidents.

Bakha is fed up with his father's ill temper, who abuses and misbehaves with his children in order to impose authority on them. There is the Sting of Satire in Bakha's thoughts about his father. The description of high caste people, conscious about their superiority hurrying to the

latrines, scrubbing their brass jugs with clay and bathing to the tune of 'Ram Hare Krishna' and 'Hare Ram' is satirical.

Anand uses the combination of humor and Satire only for highlighting social evils and exposing the Hallowness of various manifestations of authority. In *Untouchable* the authority of high caste has been exposed. The main Satire is to reform society and Human beings and thus to introduce sanity and fair play in human life. Anand, the champion of underdog, he has full sympathy with and understanding for them.

Impact of Gandhi's speech on Bakha: When Gandhi started his views on untouchables to purify their lives and maintain cleanliness. And stops drinking liquor and eating Carrion. He got confused by his speech and cannot agree with him. But soon he started thinking positively about Gandhi's views. He said that, you should not accept Hindu caste people's leaving from their plates and receive from them only good grain if it is courteously offered. And Untouchables should not compromise on anything and should not lose their self-respect. At the end of the speech he argues for them to declare and should open public wells, temples, roads, hospitals, schools to the untouchables. And he gathered many people and showed what a serious matter called untouchability. These are reflected on Bakha very much and he started agreeing with him and following him.

Caste Conversion: Bakha was waiting at the railway station. He was very disappointed and frustrated with his life. He was sitting in the railway station. There he found Colonel Hutchinson, who belonged to Christian Missionary and wanted to convert Bakha into Christianity. He said to Bakha that we don't have any caste feelings. We treat everyone equally, all are equal before God, Bakha to the church. He met Colonel Hutchin's wife, who scolded his husband for bringing every day an Indian. She didn't like Indians at all. These words were listened to by Bakha and left the church. Anand portrays untouchability of a different kind.

The Solution to the Problem of Untouchability in the Novel *Untouchable*: Colonel Hutchinson talks about Jesus and his love towards humans. But he fails to tell him who is "Christ." So confused, returning from Colonel Hutchinson, Bakha sees Mahatma Gandhi giving a speech on the Cricket ground in Bulashah. Bakha already knows about the love towards out castes, Mahatma calls them as "Harijans." Bakha was deeply influenced by Gandhi's speech. Gandhi loved so much on National Day at Nellore he prayed that, "if I should be born again, I should be so, not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, but as an out caste, as an untouchable." He advises all sections of the High Caste Community to clean their own dirt. He also advises out

caste people to know about their importance in the Society. Advising them he says, "They claim to be Hindus. They read scriptures; therefore, the Hindus oppress them, they should understand that the fault does not lie in Hindu religion, but in those who profess it."

After his speech the audience went away. He stands for Caste-less society. He thinks Caste is mainly governed by profession. He says when sweepers change their profession, they will no longer remain as untouchables. And they do that soon, for the first thing we will do when we accept the machine, will be to introduce the machine which clears dung without anyone having to handle its flush system. Then the sweepers can be free from Untouchability.

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