



A CRITICAL STUDY OF MULK RAJ ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*

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ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand's debut novel, Untouchable invites possibilities and investigation of pathetic living conditions of marginalized section of Pre-Independence Indian society. The novel depicts the sufferings of the protagonist, Bakha and portrays the miseries he feels. It is through him that the novel exposes the mistreatment, exploitation and oppression of lower caste people by the higher caste. The novel effectively demonstrates how untouchables are not acknowledged in public eye and abused by other individuals of high caste. In the present paper, a critical analysis is done to explore the problems of Untouchable in class-ridden society. The paper investigates the ways to root out the social evil of caste woes. The paper exposes the evils of untouchability and the need to heal the downtrodden section of society. It presents the horrifying social malady that is destroying the nobility of man. Apparently, it must be rejected.

Keywords: Untouchable; Class-ridden society; Downtrodden; Marginalized

Introduction

Prior to choosing the title of the novel, Mulk Raj Anand discussed it with Mahatama Gandhi. He portrayed the story to Mahatma Gandhi amid his three months stay at Sabarmati ashram. Anand reveals to us that on the counsel of Gandhi, he dropped around hundred pages particularly those sections in which Bakha appeared to dream, considering and agonizing like a

“Bloomsbury intellectual”. To include the recommendations of Gandhi Ji, Mulk Raj Anand at last circulated the novel with its present title *Untouchable*. This novel is a representative adventure of the hopeless existences of huge number of untouchables in India who are considered as outcasts in Hindu society and suffer social prejudice. That is the reason even after eighty years of its publication the novel *Untouchable* still stands tall to represent the sorry state of caste-ridden society. In the novel *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand essentially manages the insidiousness of untouchability. The opening passage of the novel demonstrates a division amongst untouchables and different networks living in the town. “The ‘outcasts’ province was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate, from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, barbers, the water carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcasts from Hindu society.” (*Untouchable*, p1) Anand has faith in the pride and uniformity of every single person. He is profoundly harmed by the manner in which untouchables are dealt with. The hopeless existence of the untouchable is reflected through Bakha, the protagonist of the novel.

In this novel, the focus is laid on social dissent to pinpoint the significant blemishes in Indian culture. The novel represents the pain, agony and suffering of untouchable also known as the ‘Harijan’ in Gandhian phrasing and as ‘Dalits’ in the present day. There are four noteworthy rank divisions in the customary Hindu Society - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. In spite of the fact that this rank division was initially in light of division of work in the public arena however with the progression of time, a downside went into this framework and the standing of a man was considered from the family lineage in which the individual takes birth. This offered ascend to numerous indecencies as the work they did, was thought to be low. They are considered lowest in the social hierarchy and they needed to watch an alternate set of accepted rules, distinctive method for strolling, talking and showing up in general society.

The account of the novel is set in the town of Bulashah. The day of Bakha, the hero starts with cleaning of latrines of high standing and closures with comparative drudgery. His desire to eat desserts is pulverized and duped by the sweet seller since he belongs to low rank. The statures of authoritative opinion can be seen when the high standing Hindu slaps Bakha when he

coincidentally touches him. The low class individuals should make a point to maintain a distance from high class people. At one point when Bakha was profoundly charmed in his considerations and neglect to make the call the high class Hindu looks over against him and censures Bakha for rendering him polluted. The higher class declined to assume the fault on themselves regardless of whether they are blameworthy, Pandit Kali Nath himself welcomes Bakha's sister, Sohini to the temple and ambushes her and later points the finger at her for rendering him unclean. Neither Sohini nor Bakha could battle back against this abuse. The only time when Bakha can battle back is the point at the time when he asks for nourishment and a higher class lady offers him stale bread just relying on the prerequisite that he cleans drain for her alongside displaced person of her more youthful child, Bakha tosses the floor brush and leaves without doing the assignment. Separation was exclusively implied for Dalit class, the sadhu who came asking at higher class ladies was not mortified in the manner in which Bakha was embarrassed.

Mulk Raj Anand effectively demonstrated how untouchables are not acknowledged in the public eye and abused by other individuals of different castes; Barkha being an untouchable, was abused at different levels by different people throughout the novel including his own father who always addressed him saying 'Get up, ohe you Bakhya, you son of a pig', 'Get up and attend to the latrines or the sepoys will be angry', 'Are you up? Get up, you illegally begotten', 'You are a good-for-nothing scoundrel', 'No tea, no piece of bread, and I am dying of hunger! Put the tea on and call those sons of a pig, Bakha and Rakha, to me!'"

Bakha was ill-treated and asked by a confectioner to stay away from contamination by touch , the confectioner tosses the parcel of jalebis, similar to a cricket ball for Bakha to get: Keep to the side of the street, ohe low-position vermin!' ... 'Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cockeyed son of a bowlegged scorpion! Now I have to go and take a bath to purify myself, and it was a new dhoti and shirt I put on this morning!' Bakha stood astonished, embarrassed. He was tragically challenged. His faculties were incapacitated. Just dread grasped his spirit, dread of quietude and servility. He was accustomed to being addressed abusively. Be what so it may be, he had only occasionally been so surprised. The Lalla who is 'contaminated' keeps on assaulting and mishandle Bakha. Before long he is surrounded by men who had assembled to know what the

turmoil was about. The group of people surrounding him didn't show any sign of pity or sympathy rather Lalla is worn out on yelling at Bakha, he gives a sharp, clear slap at him as a discipline for his 'cursed impudence', and he flees, similar to a dog with the tail between his legs.' Bakha is awestruck and stunned with his social position. It shattered the inner parts of his brain. He understands that although he is a person with head and heart, flesh and blood, yet to the outer world he is an untouchable. "To Bakha, consistently appeared an unending period of misfortune and enduring. His entire aura was moved in lowliness, and in his heart there was a strange confusion". (*Untouchable*, p34) The polluted man slapped him and vanished. Bakha lost his quietude for some time however self came to him later when he understood that he was an untouchable.

Simply for sitting on doorstep of a high class person a lady shouted on Bakha saying, 'You eater of your mastersmay the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence! May you perish and die! You have defiled my house! Go! Get up, get up! You eater of your masters! Why didn't you shout if you wanted food? Is this your father's house that you come and rest here?' (*Untouchable*, p63) Even after Bakha's request of forgiveness she continued yelling, 'But, you eater of your masters! why did you sit down on my doorstep, if you had to sit down at all? You have defiled my religion! You should have sat there in the gulley! Now I will have to sprinkle holy water all over the house! You spoiler of my salt! Oh, how terrible! You sweepers have lifted your heads to the sky, nowadays!'*(Untouchable*, p63) He understands the insidiousness of the general public in which he is put, which thinks about contacting a person like him as a male word usage and contacting a grimy bull like the one he has seen quite recently then had a blessing. After the horrifying incident of touch in the market, Bakha went to clear the temple yard. He was loaded up with the dread of some obscure and strange impact on him as he entered the temple yard.

The young ladies of oppressed did not have security in the pre-independence period. They were totally smothered and abused by the high-standing Hindus. This is the heart-rending episode that is sensibly delineated by Mulk Raj Anand. In addition, it is a microcosm to economic wellbeing of the oppressed - Sohini, Bakha's sister, needed to go to the society well to get water for her drained and parched sibling. She needed to sit tight close to the well for quite a

while enduring the lecherous men. One of the Hindus, Pandit Kali Nath, drew water for her and called her to his home to clean the yard and attempted to attack her. Be that as it may, when she yelled to ensure herself, he shouted out "Polluted", "Polluted". Bakha landed at the scene just to remain a quiet witness; however his first idea was to whip him. He frantically went home and told his dad: "They think we are mere dirt, since we clean their dirt". The oppressed confronted humiliation at every single step of their life.

'Untouchable' has the genuine voice of feeling. It completely mirrors the picture of a debauched society and passes on the profound significance of life. Anand demonstrates a total comprehension of the human circumstance and a considerable separation of good qualities. He likewise composes with straightforwardness and power from his own experiences and self involvement. His own particular beloved recollections locate an emotional elucidation in the novel. Anand imparts loaded life to Bakha, following the example of one of the numerous sweepers he experienced amid those upbeat days. Infact, a significant part of the individual crisis has gone into the making of character.

In Untouchable, Sohini is mortified by Gulaboo, the washer lady. Being desirous of Sohini, she mishandle her; 'Think of it! Think of it! You Bitch! You Prostitute! Wanton! And your mother hardly dead. Think of laughing in my face, laughing at me who am old enough to be your mother. Bitch!' (*Untouchable*, p17) 'You annoy me with your silence, you illegally begotten! You eater of dung and drinker of urine! You bitch of sweeper women!' (*Untouchable*, p17) Such treatment with underestimated individuals was exceptionally regular in the early years of twentieth century India.

M. K. Naik sees that the abhorrence of untouchability is the consequence of long stretches of concealment of a class on religious grounds; the Hindu class is furnished with the sentiment of 6000 long stretches of a social and a class predominance, an inclination which declines to acknowledge the way that the Untouchable is a human being, yet demands treating him like a sub human animal, to be overlooked or harassed or misused as the event demands.(3) The way Bakha was treated in the market reflects the hypocrisy of Hindu society. The alleged temple priest Pandit Kalinath dislikes Bakha's entry into the temple premises yet he makes an

attempt to molest Sohini. He raises a caution of: “Polluted, Polluted, Polluted!” shouted the Brahmin below... get of the steps, scavenger! Of with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony. (*Untouchable*, p53) ‘Polluted, polluted, polluted’. A shout rang through the air. He was completely unnerved. His eyes were covered with darkness. He couldn’t see anything. His tongue and throat were parched. He wanted to utter a cry, a cry of fear but his voice failed him. He opened his mouth wide to speak. It was of no use. Beads of sweat covered his forehead. He tried to raise himself from the awkward attitude of prostration, but his limbs had no strength left in them. For a second he was as if dead. (*Untouchable*, p52) Also these underestimated characters are called either by their class or by indecent words. At one instance, Bakha gets to hear abuses and flapjacks tossed at him by a housewife from the house-top. Anand appears to uncover the genuine cruelty to which the untouchables are subjected; they are dealt with as sub human species amongst people and canines. The use of rough and coarse language is evident in the following lines : ‘You eater of your mastersmay the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence! May you perish and die ! You have defiled my house! Go! Get up, get up! You eater of your masters! Why didn’t you shout if you wanted food? Is this your father’s house that you come and rest here? ’ (*Untouchable*, p63) Even after Bakha’s request of forgiveness she continued yelling, ‘But, you eater of your masters ! why did you sit down on my doorstep, if you had to sit down at all? You have defiled my religion! You should have sat there in the gully! Now I will have to sprinkle holy water all over the house! You spoiler of my salt! Oh, how terrible! You sweepers have lifted your heads to the sky, nowadays!’ (*Untouchable*, p63) Finally she tosses the bread to Bakha from the highest point of her home like somebody tosses breads to dogs from distance. She says Hey Bakhiya, take this. Here is your bread descending and she flung it at him. (*Untouchable*, p. 83)

Bakha was deep hurted by the cruelty of the crowd. His pain and suffering could be understood in these lines : ‘Why are we always abused? The sentry inspector and the Sahib that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too. That’s why I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That’s why they don’t touch us, the high castes. For them I am a sweeper,

sweeper-untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable! ' (*Untouchable*, p43)

Bakha made a scathing remark on Hindu double standards. Bakha says, "Their cattle which go to graze at the brookside are so skinny and feeble. Their cows can't yield more than two seers of milk a day" whereas when the cows were taken care of by the sweepers, it yielded twelve seers of milk a day. Hindus are kind to cows but leave them on streets to eat rotten food and garbage. The situation is more intense and vulnerable for women. One can see the plight of outcaste women when they have to draw water from well. They looked for help from an upper caste person to draw water in their vessel bending and joining their palms in beggary, twisting their lips in various attitudes of servile appeal and abject humility as they remain seated. Gulabo, an upper caste girl hated Sohini, an outcaste girl and Bakha's sister for her rising beauty and left no opportunity to insult her. Gulabo abused her saying, 'You annoy me with your silence, you illegally begotten! You eater of dung and drinker of urine! You bitch of sweeper women! '

Mulk Raj Anand in *Untouchable* paves a way to end social slavery. The upper caste individuals frequently take preferred standpoint of their obliviousness and exploit the underprivileged class. The upper caste individuals regarded untouchability as contamination, sully, or debasement and dependably thought of approaches to dispose it. One can without much of a stretch comprehend the enslavement forced by the upper class individuals upon the lower class individuals. They are not permitted to enter or touch things, individuals, or place of the upper caste. Yet, it is exceptionally unexpected that when these supposed upper class individuals require untouchables for diligent work, they overlook the caste barriers and concentrate diligent work from these marginalized sections of society.

The social insidiousness Mulk Raj Anand first battered is casteism. He observes it to be the best abhorrence of Indian culture. He realizes that India, the rising republic could turn into powerful nation if caste framework is discarded. Similarly as the caste framework has been in India since time immemorial, endeavors to annul it have also been there from that time onwards. It is of great concern to cite here the perception of Swami Vivekananda regarding this matter in his renowned book *Caste, Culture and Socialism: The caste framework is against the religion of*

the Vedanta. Caste is a social custom and all our gurus have attempted to discard it. From Buddhism onwards, every group has lectured against caste system and each time it has just bolted the chains. (31) In this way, right from the time of Upanishads scholars have talked against the caste framework. Buddha lectured against it 2500 years prior. In the nineteenth century, there were four noteworthy developments with the primary objection to abrogate caste framework. Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Rama Krishna Movement and the Theosophical Movement made a decent attempt to teach the general population about the indecencies of caste framework.

In 1930s, under Gandhi's leadership, the entire country stood united not only to overthrow British rule but also to perish the evils of caste system. The popular protest embraced by Gandhi in 1932 to keep the foundation of different electorates for the untouchables was the peak of dissent against caste framework in India. In numerous colleges, the understudies took a promise not to watch the pecking order of positions in their social dealings with others. The furious young fellow in Mulk Raj Anand found the time consummately ready to display his dissent and protest against caste framework. His strategy for challenge was different than that of others. Rather than composing a tract against untouchability as proposed to him by Mahatma Gandhi, Mulk Raj Anand composed a novel *Untouchable*. Mulk Raj Anand stated his line of thinking in his paper entitled, —The Story of my Experiment with a White Lie : *Untouchable* was in its sources a ballad born of the freedom I had tried to win for truth against the age-old lies of the Hindus by which they upheld discrimination. The profound thoughts of the upper orders in ancient India about caste were often noble. Someone in the great *Mahabharata* had cried, "Caste, caste. There is no caste!" And I wanted to repeat this truth to the "dead souls" from the compassion of my self explanation in the various Hindu hells, in the hope that I would, myself come clean after I had been through sewer, as it were... (11)

To Mulk Raj Anand, casteism is a well established lie made by the upper caste and insidious people to maintain segregation. His prime worry as a social commentator is to expel caste framework as it harms social union by giving certain segments of society an out of line advantage over others for all time. Casteism is a hydra-headed abhorrence, dangerous and infectious like little pox. It is an intolerable wrongdoing. It harms and devastates the nobility of

man. Subsequently it must be rejected. Mulk Raj Anand is right in starting his vocation as a writer by introducing the shades of malice of caste framework. The books *Untouchable* (1935), *The Road* (1961) and *The Big Heart* (1945) represent Caste system as a major flaw in Indian society.

Untouchable cites reasonable depictions of the social and monetary issues endured by Indians as a result of the caste framework and British colonial rule. Anand is considered by numerous commentators to be one of India's best novelists. The estimation of his books, as per Margaret Berry, "is the witness they offer of India's horrifying endeavor to break out of huge stagnation and make a general public in which people are free and equivalent." Although Anand's initial works were blamed by a few commentators for cliché portrayal, instruction, and acting, faultfinders have noticed a restriction in later books that upgrades the enticement of his interests. Krishna Nandan Sinha has commented: "While the later books hold the enthusiasm for social equity, they sound more noteworthy passionate profundities." No one in India, had yet composed the epic of torment satisfactorily in light of the fact that the truths were excessively crude for an author. Also it was difficult to compose an epic in India while all the unpredictable issues of the new world stand unresolved. Mulk Raj Anand created a platform to expose the harsh realities faced by untouchables. His first novel 'Untouchable' was a grand success. The novel tells about the contention between two classes of society; however the contention there isn't amongst untouchables and the upper caste hindus; it is between a class of craftsmans and a class of industrialists. Although 'Untouchable' was the briefest of all his books, yet it has had the best effect on Indian perusers. The sweepers are considered as lowest in social hierarchy; infact as low as dogs. He remains in the most minimal rung even in the progressive system of the standings among the low ranks. In the expressions of E. M. Forster: "The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound forever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. Thus he is a disgusting object to call out and warn them that he is coming."

E. M. Forster in the introduction of *Untouchable* sees that: Bakha is a genuine individual, adorable, frustrated, at some point excellent, at some point feeble, and Indian by spirit. Anand with his exceptional aptitude depicts Bakha's defenseless, disappointment, uneasiness and anguish to the extent that he has progressed toward becoming epitome of his own creation. Through the character Bakha in *Untouchable*, Anand feature the state of brutality faced by them in the general public. Anand's books are a ground-breaking depiction of the social, monetary and political changes of his time. Bakha speaks to the abuse and enslavement which has been the predetermination of untouchables like him. The untouchable has a place with the scavenger, generally recognized as 'bhangi' in different Indian dialects. Because of their low social class they were supposed to clean toilets and roads for the upper class. The living conditions of the untouchables were immensely dingy and they were upheld to live in mud-walled and single-roomed sheds. There was foul smell everywhere and there was no proper drainage. Each page of the novel is soaked in Bakha's undetectable tears who quietly endure the most humiliating and unsettling long stretches of his young life in this story. From morning to night he is compelled to manage abhorrence, separation and unscrupulousness. In this manner, untouchable manages to represent offensive and objectionable abuses at social, political, monetary and sexual level. It alludes to the class discrimination inherited by birth, which makes a few social classes more privileged than others. The marginalized class stand trapped in biased class system.

Bakha discovers salvation just in nature, far from society. But even there he is bothered by the onerous powers of society. Bakha sees trust just when he tunes in to the discourse of Gandhi, the pioneer to evacuate untouchability, towards the finish of the novel. Gandhi Ji was prepared to take rebirth as an untouchable and felt no disgrace in cleaning his latrine by himself. His speech consoled many hearts: 'I was at Nellore on the National Day. I met the Untouchables there, and I prayed as I have done today. I do want to attain spiritual deliverance. I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an Untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts leveled at them, in order that I may endeavor to free myself and them from their miserable condition. Therefore I prayed that, if I should be born again, I should be so, not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudhra, but as an outcaste, as an Untouchable.

Bakha felt happy to hear Mahatma declaim, 'They are sunk in ignorance. All public wells, temples, roads, schools, sanatoriums, must be declared open to the Untouchables. And, if you all profess to love me, give me a direct proof of your love by carrying on propaganda against the observance of untouchability. Do this, but let there be no compulsion or brute force in securing this end. Peaceful persuasion is the only means.' (*Untouchable*, p140) 'I regard untouchability, 'the Mahatma was saying, 'as the greatest blot on Hinduism.'

Conclusion

Anand has projected a comprehensive vision to integrate individual and society in the novel *Untouchable*. He has undergone with an exemplary amalgam of equality which is of key value to socialism. For him individual freedom is more important to practice democracy. There is an attempt to develop a respect for work in which Bakha appears intrinsically superior to other characters in the people whereas majority of Hindus is represented as an embodiment of evil, ugliness and hypocrisy.

The novel's thrust is against caste-based exploitation, hypocrisy, cruelty (both physical and psychological) and servility. Untouchability is presented as an experience which Bakha feels with painful intensity, but struggles to understand within the limitations of his consciousness. The novel reveals the complex ways in which untouchability is hooked into related evils in the Indian society. Anand has avoided the simplifications of journalistic propaganda and written a little classic. Anand finishes up the novel with a resonating note of good faith, similar to the fantasies of people of Bakha's age, when he sees a missionary in Gandhi.

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