

# Critical Analysis of Mulk Raj Anand's Novel Untouchable

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## ABSTRACT

Problem of untouchability is still prevalent in the society and Mulk Raj Anand through his novel *Untouchable* brings to light the sorrows and sufferings that high caste Hindus inflicted on the untouchables. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, is more compact than his other novels. The novel *Untouchable*, published in 1935, centres around a sweeper boy, Bakha. The eighteen year boy Bakha, son of Lakha, the jamadar of sweepers is a child of the twentieth century, and the impact of new influences reverberates within him.

**Keywords:** *Untouchable*; Cleanliness; Inhumanity; Sweetmeat; Polluted; Orthodox; Underdog; Plight; Outrage; Impudence

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand's commitment to reveal the deep-rooted social malice in the Indian society made him to create Bakha. He wanted to show the youth's unique sensitiveness as against the people of the upper caste who thought merely touching him is degradation. He meant symbolically to show that such small tenderness among people in private life or the catharsis of human existence.

E. M. Foster in the preface of *Untouchable* observes that: Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometime weak, and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive, we can recognize broad intelligent face, graceful torso ... as he does it nasty job or stumps out in artillery boots, in the hope of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper of cheap sweets in his hands.

Anand with his remarkable skill portrays Bakha's helpless, frustration, anxiety and agony to the degree that he has become embodiment of his own creation or in other words the creator and the creator co-mingle at one point. Through the character Bakha in *Untouchable*, Anand highlight the condition of inhumanity faced by them in the society. The untouchable covers the event of a single day in the life of the low caste boy Bakha, in the town of Bulashah.

Anand describes Bakha's morning round duties with a pain staking particularity, bringing out both the efficiency with which the boy does this essential service and callousness with which the beneficiaries receive it. He clean three rows of latrines single handed and several

times too; to bring cleanliness in the place of filth and possible disease. Bakha a not only efficient in his work but also do it with full dedication:

For although he did not know it, to him work was sort of intoxication which gave him a glowing health and plenty of easy sleep. So he worked on continuously, incessantly, with out stopping for breadth, even though the violent exertion of his limb was making him gasp.

Bakha had very strong desire to study. He often sat in the spare time and tried to feel how it felt to read. He even bought a first primer of English. But his self education did not goes beyond the alphabet. He was even ready to hire Babu's son in order to give him lessons in the evening. While going to sweep the market road and temple courtyard on the way, he buys four annas worth of cheap sweetmeat after much speculation: 'Eight annas my pocket' he said to himself, 'dare I buy some sweets. If my father comes to know that I spend all the m0!1ey on sweets', he thought and hesitated, 'but come, I have only one life to live', he said to himself, 'Let me taste of the sweets;' who knows, tomorrow I may be no more'.

Mulk Raj Anand successfully shown how untouchable are not accepted in society & ill-treated by other people of other castes; Barkha being an untouchable, to avoid pollution by touch the confectioner throws the packet of jalebis, like a cricket ball for Bakha to catch: Keep to the side of the road, ohe low-caste 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 bow-legged 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 amazed, embrassed. He was deaf and dumb. His senses were paralyzed. Only fear gripped his soul, fear of humility and servility. He was used to being spoken to roughly. But he had seldom been taken so unawares. The lalla who is 'polluted' continues to bombard abuses on Bakha. Soon he is encircled by men who had gathered to know what the uproar was all about. The crowd which presses round him, is without a shadow of pity for him. When the lalla is tired of shouting at Bakha, he gives a sharp, clear slap at him as a punishment for his 'damned impudence', and he runs away, like a dog with the tail between his legs.' Bakha recognises with a shock his social position. It illuminates the inner walls of his mind. He realizes that though he possesses like any human being, head and heart, and flesh and blood, he is in the eyes of the world an untouchable.

He realizes the wickedness of the society in which he is placed, which considers touching a human being like him as a male diction and touching a dirty bull like the one he has seen just then had a benediction. After the excruciating experience of touching in the market, Bakha went to sweep the temple courtyard. He was filled with the fear of some unknown and mysterious effect on him as he entered the courtyard of the temple.

Anand has also highlighted in the faith of Indian People in God, through Bakha, also mentioned that untouchable are not allowed to enter in the premises of temple. Bakha surveys the heap of dust and leaves which he had come to clear. He threw the bucket and the broom on the ground and was ready to begin his job. He saw a miniature 'temple' with the beautiful polished image of a snake enclosed. He was slightly afraid of the snake but his fear ceased when he saw the devotes worshipping it. He shouted his call of caution to avoid the repetition of the disaster of the morning. The orthodox crowd of worshippers was conscious of his evil presence. He was in a fyx and did not know what the worshippers were chanting "Ram, Ram, Sri, Hari, Narayan, Sri Krishna, Hey Hanuman jodha, Kali Mai". He had faint idea about some of them and did not know anything about the rest. He was obsessed with the desire I~f seeing the images

of gods and goddesses. But he had not courage to go up. He knew that "an untouchable going into a temple polluted it past purification."

As his curiosity become more and more acute, he dismissed his conflicting thoughts and moved towards the stair's looking here and there. He climbed up a few stairs but soon fear returned and he came back to the place from which he had started: "he became the humble oppressed underdog that he was by birth, afraid of every thing creeping slowly up in a curiously hesitant, cringing movement... With his broom he began to collect the litter .

Again his curiosity propelled him to go up the stairs. He strengthened himself and climbed up a few more stairs and from a safe distance he saw the spectacle of the worshippers, priest and the sanctuary which had so far been a secret, a hidden mystery to him. He was wonder struck at the sight of beautiful brass images. Bakha saw that the morning service had begun. Devout worshippers stood singing Arti in a chorus. Bakha was profoundly moved by the song. He unconsciously joined his hand in the worship of the unknown god.

Anand also exposed the double standard of society where on one hand people are polluted by the shadow of untouchable on the other hand they don't hesitate to try to molest the untouchable girl. Through the character of priest Anand described the incident where temple priest tries to molest Bakha's sister and when the revolved, she was blamed to pollute him.

'All of a sudden he heard a loud cry "polluted, polluted, polluted." He was perplexed, He knew what is meant. He saw a little man - a priest of the temple, stumbling, falling and crying, "polluted, polluted, polluted." He also saw the figure of a woman Sohini, behind the polluting priest. The crowd of devotees began to run helter-skelter. All of them were in a terrible orgy of excitement. One of them angrily shouted at Bakha and charged him of defiling their whole service. Bakha ran down the steps and went to his sister Sohini. The little priest was angrily shrieking' "you people have only been polluted from a distance. I have been defiled by contact... The crowd felt that the priest had suffered terribly. All worshippers sympathized to with him but they did not ask about the way he had been polluted. When Bakha know from Sohini that the priest tried to outrage her modesty, he felt a wild desire to retaliate. This made his blood boil.'

The real irony lies in Bakha's high resolve to take revenge being thwarted by futility written on his face, because the caste men had erected barriers of convention to protect their excesses from being questioned. The writer conceives of Bakha as a tiger, but a tiger at bay. Bakha's had much love and care for his sister Sohini. When he knows that Pandit Kali Nath tried to modest her, he is worried about her.

In the Sadhu incident, the housewife attends dotingly near a sadhu. But when Bakha asks for a piece of bread, she gives it to him after long entreaty, and that too after seasoning it with abuse and rebuke. At the Hockey match incident when Bakha saves a small boy from being crushed in a stampede in a hockey match and takes him to his home, the child's mother instead of thanking him for this admirable job, scolds him and says that it is he who must have been the root of the trouble. That is to say, fault or no fault, the untouchables had to received the abuse and rebuke of the caste men as. daily food.

In the end of the nove Mulk Raj Aanand is successful in showing that problem of untouchable can be removed. When the dusk approaches he find three solution's to his problems. He may become Christian with the help of Hutchinson, the salvation army missionary. He has been happy to hear from Hutchinson that Christ receives all men and Jessuh Messih makes no difference between the Brahmin and the Bhangi. But thy missionary's talking of 'sin' and 'confession' and his failure to clearly tell who his Christ is, confuses the mind of Bakha. He has respect for his person as well as for his nation. Perhaps he knows the difference

between the two kinds of servitude, and prefers the native to the alien. The second solution is that he may take comfort in Gandhiji's chastisement of the caste Hindus and wait till the social conscience of people is roused. Hard upon this comes the third solution. He may put his faith in the water-closet about which the positivist poet had talked: It is prosaic, straightforward, and considered in the light of what has gone before in the book, it is convincing. No god is needed to rescue the untouchables no vows of self-sacrifice and a bugation on the part of more fortunate Indians but simply and solely – the flush system. Introduce water-closets and main drainage throughout India and all this wicked rubbish about untouchability will disappear.

## 2. CONCLUSIONS

Anand concludes the novel with a note of faith and idealism. As Bakha returns his mind is raised with the hope that soon the flush system would come to the sweepers and people like him: "Can be free from stigma of untouchability and assume the dignity of status that is their right as useful members of a casteless and classless society. Bakha fervently hopes for the dawn to his nature of work and his relevance in the society without the label of an untouchable. Anand meticulously brings out the inner life of Bakha. It was growing concern for metaphoric untouchable in all cultures and walks of life.

Premila Paul remarks: The novel, indeed, presents Anand's attempt at distilling a social metaphor which takes in its sweep a whole range of postulates of Hindu culture. It is a kind of dialectical work centered on as exploration of the possibilities of achieving synthesis or spiritual restoration.

Thus in *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand's handling the problem of untouchability through Bakha shows that he hopes to have a casteless Indian society in which untouchability has no place.

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