



Research Paper

Social Problems And Caste Exploitation in Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses social problems and caste exploitation in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. Caste exploitation has been prevalent in India throughout the ages. Lower caste people are looked down upon and ill treated. Anand creates the protagonist Bakha and narrates one day event of his life. Through the particular *Untouchable* Bakha, the novelist has focussed attention on the miserable plight of lower caste peoples generally.

Keywords: Bakha, Caste exploitation, Mulk Raj Anand, Social problems, *Untouchable*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bakha' the original title of the novel, was almost double its present length. Anand narrated the story to the Mahatma during his three months stay at Sabarmati ashram. Anand tells us that on the advice of Gandhi, he cut down more than a hundred pages especially those passages in which Bakha seemed to be dreaming, thinking and brooding like a 'Bloomsbury intellectual'. After incorporating these suggestions of Gandhiji, Mulk Raj Anand finally published the novel with its present title *Untouchable*. The absence of 'the' definite article before the title makes this novel a symbolic saga of the miserable lives of the thousands of untouchables in India who belong to outcaste Hindu society and sufferer of social injustice. That is why even eighty years later after its publication *Untouchable* still touches the hearts of its readers. In the novel *Untouchable*, he mainly deals with the evil of untouchability. The opening paragraph of the novel shows a division between untouchables and other communities living in the town. The outcastes' colony 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 washermen, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. (Anand 9) Anand believes in the dignity and equality of all human beings. He is deeply hurt by the way untouchables are treated by the so called "twice born." The miserable life of the untouchable is reflected through Bakha. The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform of only well in the town of Bulandshahr called the caste well. Sometimes they had to wait for hours for the generosity of some caste Hindu to get their pitchers filled with water.

Mulk Raj Anand had deep influence of Gandhi. He started his literary career as novelist with his first novel *Untouchable*. This novel attained name and fame all over the world and it is considered as one of his best novels. He focuses on the poor and downtrodden and thus brings their problems to the surface. The novel begins with an autumn morning in the life of Bakha. The sun has not risen yet because it is quite early. He is in bed, half awake, "covered by a worn out greasy blanket, on a faded blue carpet which was spread on the floor, in a corner of the cave-like, dingy, dark, one roomed mud house." (Anand 10) *Untouchable* is the story of one day in the life of Bakha, an outcaste sweeper. Touching sweeper Bakha would make a Hindu polluted so he must announce his coming by calling out Poosh, Poosh sweeper is coming. Twice he forgets to cry and suffers thereby. He happens to touch the Lala in the bazaar who curses him for polluting him. Bakha is not only scolded but also slapped by this Hindu merchant.

He starts abusing him:

Dirty dog! Son of a bitch! offspring of a pig!' he shouted, his temper spluttering on his tongue and obstructing his speech, and the sense behind it, in its mad rush outwards. 'I . . . I'll have to go-o-o . . . and get washed-d-d . . . I . . . I was going to business and now . . . now, on account of you, I'll be late.'

(Anand 51)

People have no sympathy for Bakha. It is only Mohammadan tongawala who shows sympathy towards him and saves the situation. He wonders why the Sahibs and Muslims don't mind touching them. The cruel and orthodox nature of the Hindus depicts that these are the probable reasons for conversion of a large number of low caste Hindus to Christianity. Another incident of humiliation is when Bakha goes to temple to sweep courtyard. Driven by his curiosity to know more about the caged snake god, he mounts the temple steps leading to the holy place inside the temple. He hears a loud cry, "polluted, polluted, polluted!" (Anand 67) The crowd takes up the call of the priest, thinking that the presence of the untouchable has defiled the holy place. Bakha discovers that the priest is only trying to camouflage his indecency to Bakha's sister, Sohini. Sohini tells him altogether a different story. The priest not only tries to molest Bakha's sister but also attracted the sympathy of the crowd by accusing her and her brother of having polluted him and the premises of temple.

Bakha feels completely helpless and much troubled at heart. At a moment he feels a wild desire to retaliate when the thought of the pandit Kalinath's action comes to him but realising his helplessness, he wishes that his sister were not beautiful. The third humiliation of Bakha is heart rending. When he goes to the silversmith colony to collect food for the family a housewife becomes furious when she sees Bakha on the threshold of the house and scolds him, "perish and die" as he has defiled her house. Bakha begs his apology and asks for some food that is thrown at him as if to a street dog. The way Bakha collects his chapatti thrown by a woman who belongs to upper caste Hindu society is heart-shaking. Bakha returns home with only two chapattis and is in dilemma whether to explain the situation to his father. His father accuses and calls him good for nothing scoundrel. He is hoping that his younger son Rakha might bring something good to eat from military barracks. He now takes a flashback of degrading incidents that spoilt his day. When his younger brother comes home with some food, they all start eating from the same basket. Suddenly Bakha stops eating when something sticky touches his hand and his mind feels uneasy that it might be mixed up with somebody saliva. He tells a lie to his father that he had been invited on the marriage ceremony of Ram Charan's sister whom he once desired to marry. But Gulabo, Ram Charan's mother thought it below their dignity as they belonged to washermen caste and considered themselves superior to Bakha even among the outcastes. The great catastrophe of touching occurs in the morning and poisons his whole day as the novel is based on one day's action.

Trauma and humiliation seem to ceaseless and endless for Bakha who represent outcaste Hindus subjected to untold miseries.

Bakha meets Havildar Charat Singh who is a broad minded person who not only offers him tea but also presents him the hockey stick. Bakha is filled with deep gratitude for Charat Singh for his kindness and leaves the barrack in a happy mood. On the way Bakha meets the military Babu's two sons who want to play hockey. In a match the younger son gets hurt as a stone from Bakha's friend, Ram Charan's hand hit him badly on the head. Bakha gathers him in his strong arms and rushes to his home. Bakha expects that his mother would appreciate him for this kind and humanitarian act but he is surprised to see the manner in which she reciprocates his good deed. Instead of thanking him, she accuses him of defiling her house by coming there. Bakha is dejected and dismayed. He hands over the child and retreats. Bakha's protest against caste exploitation cannot bring any revolution to eradicate this social problem. He is an individual. He does not have favour of his own community.

II. CONCLUSION

The novel *Untouchable* does have a conclusive open endedness offering three probable solutions to the removal of social problems and caste exploitation like conversion to Christianity, the introduction of the flush system and Gandhi's appeal to the Harijans to give up the bad habits and join the mainstream of India slowly but surely. It can be concluded that this research paper portrays a real image of social injustice and caste exploitation of the lower caste Hindus. This paper depicts that agony and exploitation of Bakha is the story and sufferings of thousands of untouchables in India. The paper explores that all should show their seriousness concerning this burning issue of whole Indian society. Caste system and inequalities of birth must be destroyed from Hindu society.

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