
Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* as an Epic of Misery

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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

Paper

Mulk Raj Anand is a novelist with a social purpose and a mission who uses his art for dissecting and exploring the varied socio-economic and cultural ailments of human life with a studied deliberate attempt towards the Indian society. In his novel, *Coolie*, Anand explores and expresses the socio-economic disparity with its exploitative and miserable consequences in terms of an orphaned Munoo. In *The Road*, he exposes the

miserable tale of tribulation of an untouchable, Bikhu within the socio-economic context of Indian society. Similarly, *Untouchable* is a powerful illustration of different experiences socio-human encounters in the life and career of an untouchable boy, Bakha, cast within the framework of a series of episodic events on a single autumn day from dawn to dusk.

It is here that Anand tries to give a dispassionate and impersonal account of the socio-economic inequality and psycho-analytical diagnosis and socio-historical perspectives. Anand, by exposing the multifarious and deep rooted socio-economic malady, endeavour to cry a halt to this century old inhuman operation.

The novel, *untouchable*, is a masterpiece of artistic candour where Bakha-both as an individual and a representative, symbolizes the strong currents of change which is beautifully traced and explored within a sociological framework of cast-ridden, unjust and feudalistic Indian society. Here, Anand does not behave either as a romantic dreamer, or an

entertainer like Charles Dickens, or an escapist writing art for art's sake, rather he is a humanist with a mission aimed at making the life of downtrodden, the underdogs, serfs, peasants, coolies and untouchables better and lovable. That is why, M.K. Naik rightly calls Anand as 'a crusader in the cause of humanity who, in an ostensibly reformist zeal, highlights the evil of untouchability with its attendant ailments like poverty, exploitation, oppression and sufferings.

Bakha, being a superb boy, born in a traditionally orthodox caste ridden Indian society, is also gifted with an aspiring mind and modern outlook represented through his accepting the caste off breaches and pair of boots from the Tommies coupled with his munching of jalabis and smoking cigarette in the market. Bakha's dissatisfaction and anger against the expectative ethnocentricity of the upper caste Hindus is conspicuously intensified when the English soldier and the missionary, colonel Hutchinson, treats him as an equal human being polluted by the pseudo-pretended seduction of the higher caste Hindus who do not mix up with the people like Bakha, but they are ready to molest both in literal and metaphorical sense of terms, a beautiful but untouchable girl like Sohini as is

shown by the constipated behavior of Pandit Kalinath of town of Bulashah at the well as well as in the temple.

The sociological impact of the novel is reflected through centuries old rigid cast stratification system which makes Bakha a carrier of dung and pollution defiling and spoiling everything he runs into or touches upon. That is why, the bread loaves are thrown into his bowl from a distance by the house-wives; when a child is injured during the hockey match and Bakha takes him to his house where the mother of child accuses Bakha of defiling and polluting her house instead of appreciating his humane gesture.

However, this simmering discontent and spirit of revolt is explored by the novelist more at the level of mind and soul than at the socio-economic planes of the society which, finally, is translated in the form of three solutions suggested in the novel-first, in the form of conversation to Roman Catholicism represented in the form of Colonel Hutchinson, the second through a change of heart expressed in the form of mahatma Gandhi's concept of Swaraj, and the third being flush system represented by the idea of machine of the poet-journalist, Iqbal Nath Sarshar.

In this way, Mulk Raj Anand makes a superb psycho-analytical study of the mind, heart and soul of Bakha to give a reformist hue and missionary view to his epic of miseries called Untouchable cast within an artistic framework of stream of consciousness technique which makes the hero of the novel, Bakha, a tiger, but in a cage.

In this way, being a propagandist, the chief purpose of the novelist is to arouse the social conceals of the people against the social and moral degeneration coupled with the spiritual deliauchery obtaining in the human society of the time. So, like Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Hucklebury Finn*, and Victor Hugo's *Gavroche*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* is also a novel with purpose where the theme of exploitation, communal conflicts and Feudalism are

discussed within the framework of episodic structure and satirical tone. The total thematic vision of Mulk Raj Anand as a novelist comprises socialistic and humanism, has been compressed within the character and personality of an untouchable boy, Bakha, who stalks along through almost all the major socio-geographical events and stratified layers of society.

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